

Legion seeks plaque for

By Don Keller
Staff Writer

Throughout California he was known as the Black Knight of the Zayante, the man whom the state paid a \$1,000 reward for killing that legendary bandit, Joaquin Murieta.

But to the record-keepers at Santa Clara City Cemetery, he is known simply as Capt. Harry Love, commander of the California Rangers.

The 1868 grave site, burial plot Block 50, Lot No. 1, is unmarked. But it has long arrested the historical appetite of Santa Clara American Legion Post 419.

Post historian Henry Calloway has researched the possible existence of a next-of-kin to Love.

Post Commander Robert Dunlap reported that "personal in-depth discussions with the area's recognized historians, Clyde Arbuckle, Austen Warburton, Ralph Rambo and Teron Fox, has revealed they are certain no kin of Love exist today."

Now the Legion post wants to erect an historical plaque, to guarantee Love's strange place in history will not be forgotten. The city's Historical Landmarks Commission is recommending to the City Council that the post be allowed to install the monument, at its own expense of several hundred dollars. The plaque would say:

CAPTAIN HARRY LOVE 1804-1868

With his company of California Rangers, Captain Love in 1853 was commissioned by the State of California to apprehend the notorious desperado, Joaquin Murieta. Captain Love claimed capture and execution of this statewide elusive bandit near Cantua Canyon, now Fresno County, on July 25, 1853. In gratitude, the Captain was handsomely rewarded by the state.

Not mentioned is that Love himself was a murderer. He killed his wife in a fit of jealous rage, and tried to shoot her German bodyguard, as well. Instead, the guard shot Love at pointblank range in the shoulder.

Love died during the operation for amputation of his arm. That was 15 years after he had exterminated Murieta and notched a place in the history books.

Calloway said the Legion is not interested in his morals or how he treated his wife. The point is that he accomplished his mission and collected his reward and that he was a resident of Santa Clara the last five years of his life, in the home of his wife on Grant Street.

Calloway said that numerous California state and community plaques mention Love and Murieta exploits.

State Historical Landmark No. 344 on Highway 33 in Fresno County states "Arroyo de Cantua, headquarters of notorious bandit Joaquin Murieta who was killed here July 25, 1853, by a posse of state rangers led by Captain Harry Love. Terrorized mining camps and stage operations during his career."

Love was reputed to have been an ex-Texas marshal, scout, Indian fighter, El Paso express rider and a former captain of spies appointed by General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War.

But no marker attests to the last resting place of this lusty contributor to California history, says the Legion in support of its proposal.

The shadowy trail through California history leading up to the Legion's entry actually began during the Gold Rush. Joaquin, believed born in Sonora, Mexico, in 1832, had set up a small placer mine along the Stanislaus River.

He had brought with him his young wife. Their new life together ended abruptly when a gang beat Murieta unconscious, raped his wife and killed her.

His grief turned to seething rage after his half-brother was hung by a drunken mob a few months later and Joaquin was tied to a tree, horse-whipped and left for dead.

Records show he got his vengeance in the following months, killing 18 of the 20 men involved.

A reign of terror followed, with Murieta's band of equally hate-filled Mexicans robbing and murdering. Mexicans hailed him as the Robin Hood of the West, for he often stole from the rich "gringo" and gave the loot to poor Mexicans.

On May 17, 1853, Governor John Bigler signed the bill that set the brief man-hunting episode into motion. It stipulated a \$1,000 reward payable within 90 days for the elusive Murieta.

"For an instant posse," reported Calloway, "Love recruited 20 rousing, hell-for-leather toughs he labeled 'The California Rangers.' The pay was good; \$150 a month."

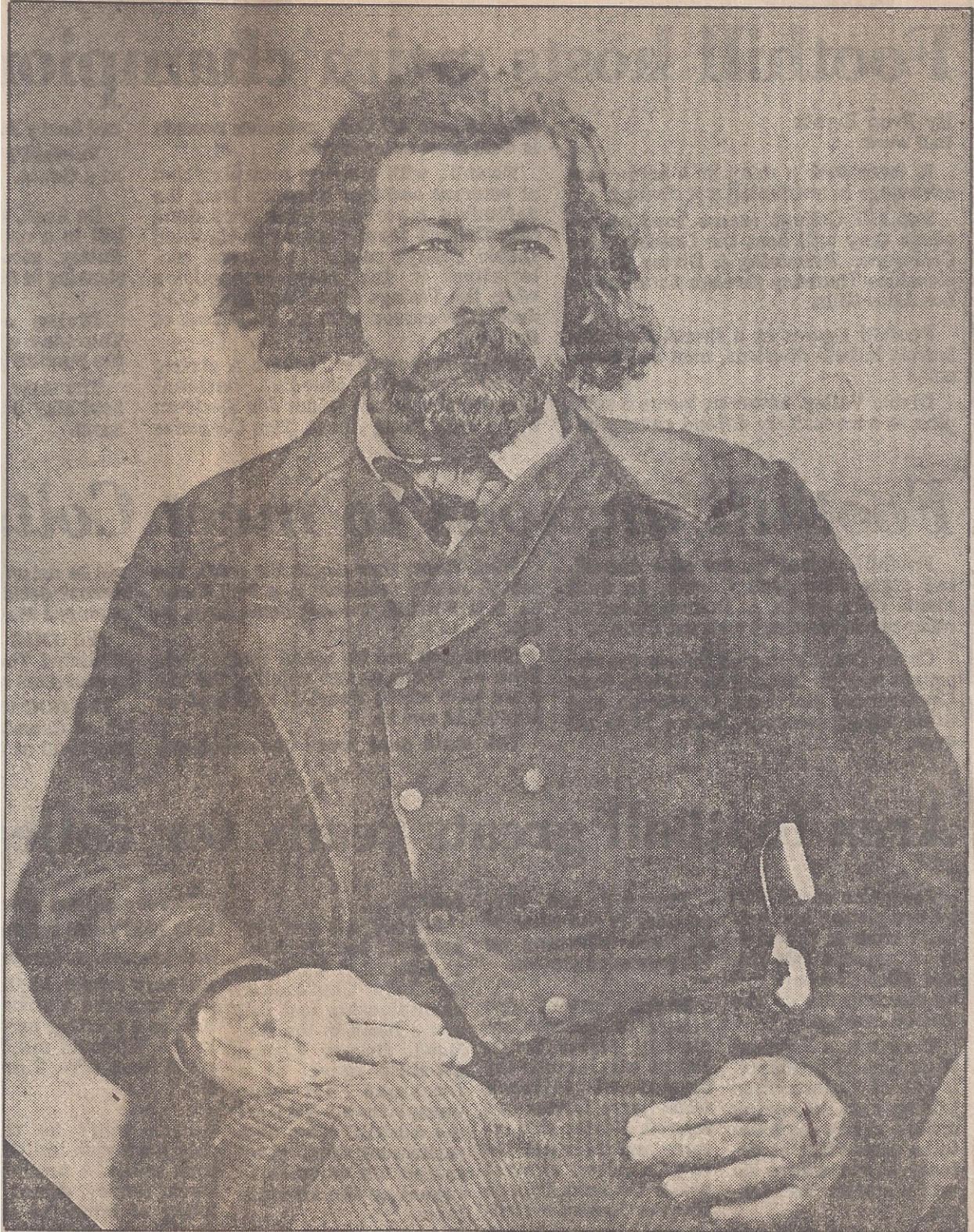
It took Love just a little over two months to track down the outlaw band. To make sure he had evidence, Love ordered Murieta's head chopped off, along with the hand of an accomplice, Three-Finger Jack.

The grisly evidence was on display around the state until destroyed in the San Francisco Museum during the 1906 fire and earthquake.

Murieta was only 21 when he died. He was so feared by some and respected by others he got credit for crimes throughout the state, crimes so distant he could not have been involved.

Murieta's place in history is assured. Whether Love's place becomes as well etched in memory the passage of time will tell.

man who got Murieta



Capt. Harry Love, the Black Knight of the Zayante