

Death of Poor Old Deaf Manuel

By Cathy Gowdy



We hear about the rich and famous folks all the time in our everyday lives and this makes it easy for future genealogists to learn something about their families, but what about the “little” guy, the one who quietly worked and lived a life like yours and mine, who didn’t get into trouble with the law? It’s not so easy to find out about him.

In Marin County we have all heard of the Richardson family and the Kent family, Pacheco and Black and Burdell. Today I read the obituary of a man who died at the turn of the last century, whose surname I had never run across. The obituary appeared in the Sausalito News on March 3, 1900:

Death of Poor Old Deaf Manuel

"MANUEL TILHERAS died suddenly Tuesday last at his home in Waldo Point. He had been up and around as usual, perhaps an hour before he laid down and died, although an invalid a long time, suffering with an affection of the brain, and at times mentally irresponsible. One of the boys who drowned last week was his grandson, Manuel Fernandez, to whom the grandfather was much attached. Doubtless the boy's untimely ending hastened the old man's taking off.

He was a pioneer of our county; came, perhaps, 30 years since. He had a small farm, and was a general trader, and ran a passenger coach, taking people around to various resorts. He used to be a tavern keeper in San Francisco, where, as here, he had an extensive acquaintance among those who will generally kindly remember, "Deaf Manuel" notwithstanding an irascibility which grew with age."

Manuel was living in Marin County in 1863 when the Civil War Draft Register was compiled. He is shown as age 33, a laborer, married, living in San Rafael area, a native of Portugal.

Manuel, age 37, was apparently located in San Rafael Township in 1870 where he was farming. Living with him was Manuel Gomez, age 19, born Portugal. Error number one in the life of Manuel is the place of birth given by the census taker, i.e. Switzerland; he was Portuguese. Problem #2: his wife is not shown in the household and I haven't been able to find her.

The 1879 Marin County Great Register shows Manuel Tilheras, age 45, born Portugal, living in the Richardson precinct. He was a laborer. He states that he was naturalized in San Francisco in the 4th district court, on August 24, 1875.

The 1880 census tells us that Manuel "Tiyera" was living in Sausalito Township; a farm laborer, he was born in Portugal, and was married to Juana, age 43, a native of Chile.

We learn a little more about Manuel in 1892 and 1896. The Great Registers for those years tell us he was 5' 6" tall, had brown eyes, dark complexion, and grey hair. He was 56 years old in 1892 and 54 in 1896, but who's counting! In both cases his place of birth is given as Portugal and his date and place of naturalization were San Francisco, August 24, 1870, 12th District Court. This is discrepancy #3.

In 1900, Manuel's widow, Juana Tilheras, reports to the census that she was born in June 1835 in Chile, that she owns her home in Sausalito Township free and clear, and that she immigrated to the U.S. in 1847. She is living alone, but only two doors away from Manuel and Emma Fernandez. Emma Fernandez was born in California on April 6, 1866 and died in San Francisco on September 10, 1943. The California Death Index tells us that her father was named Tilheras and her mother's maiden name was Bossa.

Recalling Manuel's obituary, we know that he had a grandson named Manuel Fernandez. It's a sad story and must have been indeed devastating for the old man. The *Sausalito News* reported on February 24th:

All Sausalito Deeply Mourns

"Three Well Known and Respected Young Men Meet Death by Drowning

On Sunday evening, Sausalito was appalled by the rumor that three of the best known of our boys, or rather young men, had been drowned in Lake Bonita, on the Gioli Ranch, about three miles west of town.

*They were out for a somewhat prolonged hunt. Two of them – **JOE FERNANDEZ** and **VINCENT MACHADO** – went to the lake on Friday afternoon, and the third, **SIDNEY SILVEY**, who was attending school on Friday, joined his fated companions Saturday afternoon. On Saturday the party consisted of four. Victor Trouette went to the lake early in the day. He had intended to remain overnight, but feeling sick, he returned to Sausalito early in the afternoon.*

The boys belonged to Sausalito essentially. Joe and Vincent were born here, and Sidney had been here for about five years. They were well known to all the people of the town and respected. Joe Fernandez was in the employ of Silva & Peter. He left school about three years ago to assist Mr. Quadros in his store. He proved a capable clerk and very reliable. Vincent was well known to all. His easy good nature and kindness made him many friends, particularly among the boys.

Sidney, who was a stepson of Mr. John Ferguson, and who up to the time of his death, lived with Mrs. Rowson, was attending school. He was a young man of more than average ability and skill, and by his kind, gentlemanly manner, had endeared himself alike to his classmates and teachers.

Sidney Silvey was buried on Friday in the Odd Fellows' Cemetery, San Francisco. The funeral of Joe Fernandez and Vincent Machado will be held at the Catholic Church on Sunday. Both boys will be buried in the same grave in the Sausalito Cemetery."

The 1910 census of Sausalito Township, Richardson District, tells us that Juana, called Johanna on the census, was living with her daughter and son-in-law Fernandez. Her death was reported in the *Marin Journal* on June 2nd, 1910:

Death of Old Resident

"Mrs. Juana B. Tilheras, for 34 years a resident of Waldo Point died at her home on Sunday at the age of 75 years, 11 months, and 5 days. She was born in Chile and has been a resident of California for the past 56 years. Her husband preceded her to the Great Beyond by a number of years. The funeral was held from the Catholic Church at Sausalito on Tuesday and interment was in Fernwood Cemetery."

At a point later in time, a tombstone was erected in Fernwood Cemetery marking the graves of Manuel and Juana and their son-in-law. You will note that error #4 happened when the stone was carved. Juana died in 1910, not 1911. There is no marker on the grave of the two boys, Vincent and Joe.