

# San Juan Bautista Stories

As told by Ascención Solórsano (Mutsun Ohlone) to J.P. Harrington, 1930  
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## The Bells of San Juan

There were twelve bells at the mission of San Juan when I was little. Father Closa fixed the tower as it is now. In the year 1873 there was a great storm and the wind knocked down the top point of the tower and they never fixed it up again. There were four or six bells in the belfry. The largest bell was called the Queen, or the Largest Bell. It was of gold and silver, and when it was rung it was heard even as far as Santa Anna on the other side of Hollister. The sound was so mellow. And there were two bells outside the church, one at each side of the door of the church, hung on some beams that were set across some posts. The Gringos stole the Great Bell. The other bells were sent away one by one by the Fathers. I am not sure whether they were stolen or not (footnote: According to what Dona Antonia says, one little bell remained.). The bells which are there at the church now were brought from elsewhere.

All the bells that were in the mission long ago were brought from Mexico, they did not make bells here in California.

## How the Bells of San Juan Were Rung

They do not know nowadays how to ring the bells of San Juan. They just pull the rope and it seems like there is a fire. There are only two men remaining who know how to play the bells; Ambrosio Rosas and Joe Rosas. There were four Rosas brothers who used to ring the bells for Father Closa. Francisco and Joaquinito are dead. These four brothers were acolytes of Father Closa when they were boys and they rang the bells for the Father. Where the old house of Dona Claudia Marentes was in San Juan was the first school that there was. All these Rosas boys went to the school there.

When there was going to be mass, they said that the bells were being tolled, and when people died they said that the bells were being doubled. As soon as they went to notify the Father that some one had died, at once the bells were doubled.

At a funeral now every stroke of the bell costs a dollar. That is the way it is, every stroke of the bell, a dollar. If it was rung twelve times, it costs twelve dollars. And long ago, it cost nothing at a funeral. And the cemetery lot was free to the poor.