



38 49 32 - actual latitude presented as southern boundary

Who owns Sacramento?

38 45 42 - actual latitude assigned to Sutter's Fort

In 1850 Sacramento was torn by bloodshed that started with Mayor Hardin Bigelow shot off his horse at 4th and J. The conflict claimed the lives of the sheriff and assessor as well as several other citizens. At the heart of the so-called "Squatter Riots" was the claim by Johann Augustus Sutter that he'd received a grant from the Mexican government prior to the U.S. conquest.

The 1841 grant from Governor Juan Alvarado read: "It is bounded on the north by The Three Summits (Los Tres Picos) and 39°41'45" north latitude; on the east, by the borders of the Feather River; on the south, by the parallel of 38°49'32" of north latitude; and on the west, by the river Sacramento."

Alas, the southern boundary described herein lies well north of Sacramento, which would mean that the city lay on public land subject to homesteading law. All manner of explanation has been offered to try to avoid the issue. For example, the inset map is misdated by the Sacramento History Museum display as "ca 1842." In fact the map features a handwritten notation identifying it as an exhibit to Alvarado's 1855 deposition, part of a tangle of court cases that reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1864.

As shown here, the latitudes described in the original text have nothing to do with the actual geography, and the inset map even places the two latitudes in reverse order, so desperate was its maker to somehow place the southern boundary south of Sutter's Fort.

MAPA
de los Terrenos
Para la Colonia
de
NUEVA HELVETIA
No. 1
Exhibit to deposition
of Juan B. Alvarado, March
15, 1855.
Escala de M.

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