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*Peralta Family Business:
Letters from Rancho San Antonio (California) in the 1850s*

Shelfmark

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).
University Archives and Special Collections.
Local History Collection 28-4 (San Antonio Letters).
July 8, 1853, to October 10, 1854.
Four letters (numbered 1 to 4 below).

Introduction

The four Spanish nineteenth-century letters edited and translated below are part of the “Local History Collection” that is held in CSUF’s University Archives and Special Collections. They are well preserved and written in cursive, in black ink (that in some cases is very faint) on bluish-gray stationary.

All four letters are authored by Antonio Maria Peralta (1809-1879) of Rancho San Antonio (today: San Leandro), California, and addressed to his lawyer and distant relative, Diego Forbes. Letter 2 is co-authored by Antonio’s older brother Ignacio, while Antonio’s son Fernando served as the carrier for letters 2 and 4. The correspondence between Antonio Peralta and Diego Forbes reveals conflict among the Peralta siblings regarding the will of their patriarch, the late Luis Maria Peralta (d. 1851). The California Land Act of 1851 had required residents of the new State of California (1850) to prove their land titles in court, and because the Rancho San Antonio land grant had been made by the Spanish Crown (1820), the Peraltas found it difficult to prove their rights and lost some of their holdings. Thus, the nine siblings quarreled over what was left of their inheritance. As the four letters below reveal, Antonio and Ignacio formed one party in this conflict; their sisters Josefa/Chepita, Guadalupe, and Bernarda (= Teodora?) another; a settlement had already been reached with their sister Trinidad, while their sister Luisa had been left out; and their brothers Domingo and Vicente apparently adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

The letters in this collection are amazing primary sources for the history of the Peralta family who helped build an entire society around Rancho San Antonio, resulting in the growth that eventually made the East San Francisco Bay area one of the largest commercial areas in the state. Through the Peralta’s Mexican ancestry, the letters aid our understanding of the consequences of the Mexican-American War (1846-1948) and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which endangered the Peraltas’ rights to their own land and resulted in the family conflict showcased below.

The editions of the Spanish letters are presented in cursive. The original paragraphs have been preserved. Abbreviations have been spelled out, using square brackets for abbreviated parts. The symbol [-] in a word indicates that the word begins at the end of the line and continues at the beginning of the next line; in some cases, the original letters contain hyphens which have been retained. The symbol [|] in a word indicates that the word, in modern Spanish, would be divided into two words; it is used here with caution and only to facilitate reading. The symbol ‡ used in letter 2 is a currency symbol, presumably indicating pesos or dollars. In letter 2 (the longest), page breaks are indicated by a numeral in square brackets, for example [3]. The English translations offered below are presented in roman (i.e., non-cursive). They attempt to reflect the style of nineteenth-century California Spanish and thus stay as close to the wording and syntax of the original letters as possible. Wherever text has been added to clarify the translations, it has been inserted in square brackets.

*Edition: Letter 1, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, July 8, 1853*

Front:

Se[no]r. D[o]n. Diego Forbez
S[a]n. Ant[oni]o. Julio 8 del 1853.

Muy Se[no]r. mio de todo mi apresio

se[]rremitima a U[sted]. el poder firmado el que despues de aber echo rreflecciones sobre el contenido de d[ic]ho poder, emos sido de pareser desir a U[sted]. el q[ue]. por ninguna manera com[-]benga transacion alguna, las ermanas q[ue]. se consideran con derecho de tener sus-bienes a qui q[ue]. los traigan, aun sin embargo de no certar en el testamento – digo a Josefa y Guadalupe porque al me[-]tirles trasacion a trueque de plata seria la rruina de nuestras familias, en lo de mas puede rregir el poder, presendiendo de tener transasacion de otra manera

le[]deseo a U[sted]. la mejor felicida en union de su s[eno]ra. esposa p[ar]a. que disponga del afecto de su[]serbidor q[ue]. S[u]. M[ano]. B[esa].

Ant[oni]o. M[ari]a. Peralta

Back: [modern hand, pencil] A M Peralta, rel[ative]. to power of attorney, July 8/53

*Translation: Letter 1, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, July 8, 1853*

Front:

[To] Mr. Don Diego Forbes
San Antonio, July 8, 1853

My much, by all of me, esteemed Sir,

[Hereby] is remitted to you the power of signature which, after reflecting over the contents of said power, we have seen fit to tell you that [you should] in no way agree to any deal [with] the sisters who consider themselves with the right to retain their goods to whom they bring them, even though [this is] not certified

in the testament - I speak of Josefa and Guadalupe, because [if] you put [to] them a deal in exchange for money [that] would be the ruin of our families. In what more the power can apply, [we are] reserving [the right] of having a deal in another manner.

I wish [to] you the most joy in the union with your lady wife, so that you may have the affection of your servant, who kisses your hand,

Antonio Maria Peralta

Back: [modern hand, pencil] Antonio Maria Peralta, relative to power of attorney, July 8, 1853

Sr. Sr. Diego Forbes
 Sr. Ant.º Julio 8 de 1853.

Muy Sr. mio de todo mi aprecio
 Remitiendo a c. el poder firmado el que
 despues de abez echo reflexiones sobre el
 contenido de dho poder, eno modo de pensar
 decir a c. el qf. por ninguna manera con
 tenga transacion alguna, las sumas qf.
 se consideran con derecho de tener sus
 bienes a qui qf. los traigan, aun sin en
 bargo de no cortar en el testamento —
 digo a Josefa y Guadalupe porque al me
 viles transacion a trueque de plata seria
 la ruina de nuestras familias, en lo
 de mas puede valer el poder, presumiendo
 de tener transacion de otra manera

Deseo a c. la mejor felicitad
 en union de su Sra. esposa p.º qn
 disponga del afecto de su servidor qf. S.º.º.
 B.

Antonio Maria Peralta

Figure (above): Letter 1, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes, Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, July 8, 1853, front.

Edition: Letter 2, Antonio Maria Peralta and Ignacio Peralta to Diego Forbes, Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, October 14, 1853

[1] S[eno]r. D[o]n. Diego Forbes

S[a]n. Antonio Oct[ubre]. 14 de 1853.

Nuestro apreciable amigo y S[eno]r.

Hace algunos dias que tenemos pensado pa-sar ante U[sted]. tanto para hacerle una Visitita, como para comunicarle al--go de negocios de las hermanas; mas como mi Esposa desde su parto se ha visto sumamente enferma y en cama, no he podido decidirme con Ign[aci]o. á hacer el viaje, pero desengañado hoy que el tiempo se acorta y no puedo desprenderme de mi enferma, hemos arreglado dirigirle la precente por medio de un propio fiandola à la pluma (no en todo) parte de nuestros asuntos por ser asi conveniente a nuestros intereses y el genial pacifico de que somos adoptados y que nunca nos ha sido agradable ninguna clase de cuestion áunque sepamos triunfar de ella par-tiendo del primer principio que debemos respetar la ultima suplicacion de nuestro padre que al fin de su muerte ha estampado diciendo "nos mantengamos los hermanos en una pacifica tranquilidad y quietu" cuyas Espresiones recordamos los que suscribimos en el fondo de nuestros corazones, mas cuando estas nos son tan repetidas en su testamento.

No crea U[sted]. S[eno]r. mio que á hora ni nunca acessemos un mal resultado en contra nuestra respecto del mal ha dado asunto que las hermanas quieren entablar por herencias que dicen pueden pertentuerles, pero ya sea asi, ó vien lo contrario, queremos por medio de sus respetos hacer una formal transacion con las partes que se les crean acreedoras à este d[e]r[ech]o.: este convenio solo aparecerá por parte de los que firmamos y p[or] el d[e]r[ech]o. que á nuestros intereses les puedan

[2] *corresponder en sercenacion, tanto p[or] la parte paterna como materna, haciendo en caso de arreglo la escritura correspondiente de venta que dichos herederos otorgaran a favor nuestro cuyos gastos serán partibles á como me--jor U[sted]. lo dispuciere, dirisiendo en una palabra todo el asunto U[sted]. Los puntos para el arreglo de transacion son los siguientes.*

Damos para el proccimo Enero de 1854. la suma (⌘16000) en en moneda husual y corriente, ó de no ser asi, dos mil varas castellanas de terreno entre la linia de Ign[aci]o. y mia; quiere decir mil varas por cada uno, siendo estas de ancho de Norte à Sur; y largo de los Esteros ó inmediatos à ellos hasta pegar à las lomas, lo cual tanto uno como otro será repartibles entre las partes reclamantes para que asi no desen en quieta y pacifica pocecion; sus pararse U[sted]. en el trato en poco mas ó menos de lo que ofrecemos; en concepto que si fuere para el precente asunto necesaria nuestra preciencia, abandonare todo y nos pondre--mos en camino hasta donde U[sted]. nos llame, p[or] lo menos, lo harè yo si Ign[aci]o. no me acompaña; Ojala mi amigo logracemos un buen ecsito en el asunto nunca tendríamos como corresponder este sin tamaño servicio.

Ninguna persona como U[sted]. puede mejor hacer convenir à las partes à un sin embargo que sabemos que ya han vendido en d[e]r[ech]o. al abogado à quien le dieron primeramente su poder, y que les dio este cuarenta y tantos mil p[eso]s. p[or] el á tres de ellas, Chepita, Guadalupe y Bernarda, dejando el de Luisa p[or] fuera sujeta al resultado que dé el asunto; pero si esto es asi, con ma--nera puede U[sted]. saberlo de ellas, en concepto que segun el mismo accor nos ha dicho, tienen las dos primeros recibidos en

cuenta dos mil pesos. Nada cremos en verdad, ni por temor tampoco ha-cemos la propuesta, unicam[en]te. p[o]r lo que dejamos d[erec]ho; y nos quiten de andar en vueltas, pues és arreglan con nosotros bajo los

[3] puntos propuestos, ya sea que reciban el dinero, ó terreno les queda en d[e]r[ech]o. á salvo para repetir contra Domingo y Visente, haciendoles la reflexion que ya trinidad no tiene ningun d[e]r[ech]o. ni nada le puede corresponder à ella p[o]r. ya habermelo pasado a mi como U[sted]. muy bien lo sabe y de que me creo ya asegurado de ello; de suerte en que solo cuatro disfrutará del reparto del interes q[ue]. ofrecemos.

Al tiempo de hablar U[sted]. con ellas de las que tiene U[sted]. inmediatas, creo no le negaran manifestar si han vendido ó no al abogado, pero si esto es asi, seria muy bueno convenir con el, y entonses decaeríamos pasare U[sted]. al punto donde este se hay a (S[a]n. J[a]c[int]o.) cuyos gastos de viaje serian de nuestra cuenta; y de alguna manera arreglara bajo los mismos puntos, ó ya sea que este S[eno]r. si ellas propucieren otros que nos comunicaria para ver si estos heran admicibles segun nuestro estado de recursos.

No seria por demas nos comunicare á continuacion lo ocurrido pues mi hijo Fernando que es el portador lo podrá U[sted]. demorar el tiempo que á U[sted]. le pareciere, ya para manifestamos el recultado de la propuesta, ya tambien decirnos si encunetra U[sted.] un emba-raso en ello; y si es asi esperamos el sano y acostumbrado consejo de U[sted]. para ver aqui lo que determinamos.

En fin todos los medios posibles pondrà U[sted]. para el caso del arreglo, dejando à la consideracion de U[sted]. las primeras propuestas que les haga y que estas sean ofreciendoles por grados hasta tocar el ultimo extremo p[o]r. que no serà bueno de un golpe ofrecerles todo, p[o]r. que entonses quedrian subirse a un grado mayor.

Tocante al asunto, es cuanto p[o]r. à hora nos ocurre, mas sobre otros puntos que p[o]r. mi parte tengo que comunicarle, será mas despues que en nuestra vista los deberé de arre-

[4] glar, siendo asi que tambien me son interesantes ponerlos eno su conocimiento para saber que debo hacer, pues siempre necesita uno de quien mas sabe los consejos.

Ponganos U[sted]. á las plantas de su apreciable S[eno]ra. y familia, y U[sted]. reciba nuestros sinceros afectos que siempre le profesan sus amigos Q[ue]. B[esa]. S[u]. M[ano].

Ant[oni]o. M[ari]a. Peralta / Ign[aci]o. Peralta

Hemos visto a nuestro hermano Vicente para ver si queria acompañarnos en el arreglo, y me ha contestado lo que U[sted]. vera p[o]r. la adjunta q[ue]. original se acompañó, y no obstante me puse en camino para hablarla personalmente, y me dijo que nada ofreina y que p[o]r. su parte se llebare el asunto delante, pero p[o]r. nuestra parte queremos trancifir à un prescindiendo del nuestro d[e]r[ech]o. mas cuando no pensamos se nos arruine p[o]r. la oferta q[ue]. hacemos - Vale

Last page, on right: [19th-c. hand] A. M. Peralta & Ign[aci]o. Peralta Oct. 14. 1853

Translation: Letter 2, Antonio Maria Peralta and Ignacio Peralta to Diego Forbes, Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, October 14, 1853

[1] [To] Mr. Don Diego Forbes

San Antonio, October 14, 1853

Our esteemed friend and Sir,

For a few days now, we have thought [about] passing before you to pay [you] a visit to communicate something about our business with the sisters. Moreover, as my wife, since she gave birth, has been completely ill and bed-ridden, I have not been able to decide to travel with Ignacio, but disillusioned now that time is running out and I cannot leave the side of my sick one, we have arranged to direct to you the present [letter] by means of proper trust in the pen (not in total), part of our affairs to be convenient to our interests and the peaceful spirit by which we are adopted, and that we may never have been agreeable to any kind of matter, even though we know how to triumph from it, starting from the first principle that we must respect the last request of our father who, toward the end of his passing [i.e., death], insisted, saying "Let us keep the siblings in a peaceful tranquility and quiet." These expressions we remember, to these we subscribe in the depth of our hearts, even more so when these sayings are repeated to us in his testament.

Do not believe, my Sir, that at any time or ever have we reached a bad result against our respect in this bad affair that our sisters want to enter into over the inheritances that they say may pertain to them. But be that as it may, or to the contrary, we want, by means of your respects, make a formal transaction pertaining to those parts to which they believe to have a claim: this agreement only appears for the part of that for which we sign and for the right that our interests may

[2] correspond accordingly, both for the paternal part as well as the maternal [one], doing in case of an arrangement the corresponding deed of sale that said heirs shall grant in our favor, whose expenditures will be dividable as best as you can arrange it; in a word: directing the whole thing to you. The points for the arrangement of the transaction are the following.

We give for the next January of 1854 the sum of (₧16,000) in the usual and current coin, or if that cannot be, two thousand Castilian rods of land between Ignacio's [property] line and mine, which means one thousand rods from each one of us, being similarly wide from North to South; and along the estuaries or immediately bordering them all the way to the hills, which both one and the other shall be distributed among the claiming parties so as to not disturb the quiet and peaceful possession. You stand in the deal [to represent] a little more or less than what we offer. In concept [i.e., the idea being] that if our presence in the present matter is necessary, I will leave everything, and we will set out on the road to where you call us, at least I will, if Ignacio does not accompany me. Hopefully, my friend, we will achieve a good outcome in this affair. We never would have been able to respond without your service.

No other person like you could better convene all the parties without problems, since we know that they have already sold the right to the lawyer to whom they gave their power first, and that he gave them forty-something thousand pesos for the three of them, Chepita, Guadalupe, and Bernarda, leaving Luisa out, which has resulted in our current state. But since this is so, by some

way you can know about them, in concept, according to what he told us before, the first two have received two thousand pesos. We believe nothing [of this] is true, nor do we make this proposal out of fear, only for what we deem right, and [so] we stop going in circles, because once they arrange with us under the proposed points,

[3] whether they receive the money or the land, all they have left under right is to repeat this action against Domingo and Vicente, making them the reflection of what Trinidad did, who has no rights nor anything pertaining to her, since she has already passed it to me, as you know well, and of which, I believe, [you are] assured; by luck, only four will enjoy the distribution of the interest that we offer.

At the time of your speaking with them, the ones present with you, I believe, may not deny saying whether or not they have sold to the lawyer, but if this is the case, it would be very good to convene with him, and then we would decide that you will meet at that point where this [i.e., he] is (San Jacinto), [and] his trip expenses would be on our account, and by some manner arrange under the same points, or that this Sir [i.e., the lawyer], if they propose otherwise, would communicate these [i.e., their proposals] to us to see if any of these will be admissible, given our state of resources.

[If] it would not be too much to communicate to us then what has occurred, my son Fernando, who is the [letter] carrier, may wait for you to have the time you need, so that we may know the result of the proposal, and tell us also if you find an obstacle in it, and if so, we will await your sound and customary advice to see what we shall determine.

In the end, all possible means will be put to you [i.e., at your disposal] for the case of the arrangement, leaving to your considerations the first proposals that you make and that these are offered [to them] gradually until touching the last extreme, because it would not be good to offer them everything in one stroke, because then they would be able to attain a greater share.

Regarding this affair, that is how much now happens to us. More about other points, that for my part I have to communicate to you, will be [said] later, which I will have to settle during our visit,

[4] since [there are] other [things] that are of also interest to me that I want to put to your knowledge, so that I may know what I should do, because one always needs one who knows more advice.

You, set us at the feet of your esteemed lady and family, and receive our sincere affections that your friends always profess, who kiss your hand,

Antonio Maria Peralta / Ignacio Peralta

We have visited with our brother Vicente to see if he wants to accompany us in this matter, and he has answered me in what you shall see in the attachment that accompanies the [i.e., our] original letter, and nevertheless I set myself on the road to talk [to him] personally, and he told me he would offer nothing, and that for his part the matter will move forward, but for our part we want to

transact [or deal] regardless of our right, [and even] more so when we do not think to ruin ourselves by the offer we have made. Farewell.

Last page, on right: [19th-c. hand] Antonio Maria Peralta and Ignacio Peralta, October 14, 1853

*Edition: Letter 3, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, May 29, 1854*

Se[no]r. D[o]n. Diego Forbes
S[a]n. Ant[oni]o. Mayo 29 de 1853.

Mi buen amigo,

los abaluaadores andan por aqui y Camallo le tengo pasado a U[sted]. todo lo q[ue]. tengo esto me ase darle a U[sted]. con[] asimiento p[ar]a. q[ue]. U[sted]. mediga si lla arreglo este negocio o les digo q[ue]. se entiendan con U[sted]. de[] lo q[ue]. espero me conteste con el portader del modo que[] lo hecho aser

el S[en]or. palaruelos a benido y me a d[ic]ho q[ue]. ba a reglarse con U[sted]. respeto a la mina de carbon y me suplica q[ue]. lede lla carta de rrecomendacion p[ar]a. U[sted]. p[ar]a. q[ue]. U[sted]. no sele[] rriege en darle otro papel como el quierr[-]llo le boi a dar la rrecomendacion p[ar]a. con U[sted]. pero en ese caso no[] tiene q[ue]. aser a pre[-]sio de tal cosa U[sted]. aga lo q[ue]. combenga

espresiones a mi prima y familia y U[sted]. mande a s[u]. aff[ectisi]mo q[ue]. b[esa]. S[u]. M[ano].

Ant[oni]o. M[ari]a. Peralta

P.D. [posdata] Por la diligensia ha escribi a U[sted]. y no me a contestado. Vale.

Back: [19th-c. hand] Antonio M[ari]a. Peralta, May 29th/54

*Translation: Letter 3, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, May 29, 1854*

[To] Mr. Don Diego Forbes
San Antonio, May 29, 1854

My good friend,

the evaluators are around here and [at] Camallo. I have passed on to you everything I have. This is what I want to give [to] you, with the assignment that you will tell me whether I should arrange this business, or [whether] I should tell them to come to an understanding with you. What I hope is that you will answer me via [the letter] carrier in what manner this is meant to be [done].

Mr. Palaruelos has come and told me that he is going to make arrangements with you with regard to the coal mine, and he has asked me that I give him a letter of recommendation for you, so that you do not forget to give him another document [just] as he wants. I will give him the recommendation for you, but in this case it does not have to be done at the price of such a thing. You [feel free to] do what is most convenient.

Expressions [i.e., good wishes] to my [female] cousin and family and you, sent to you from a most affectionate, who kisses your hand,

Antonio Maria Peralta

P.S.: For [the sake of] diligence, I have written to you, and you have not answered me. Farewell.

Back: [19th-c. hand] Antonio Maria Peralta, May 29, 1854

*Edition: Letter 4, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, October 10, 1854*

Front:

S[a]n. Ant[oni]o. O[ctu]bre. 10 de 1854

Se[no]r. D[o]n. Diego Forbes

Mi amigo y Se[no]r. mio,

Mando ami hijo Fernando p[ar]a. que traiga el dinero p[ar]a. el pago de la contribucion segun U[sted]. me dise en la rulla en cargandole U[sted] como la ade aser p[ar]a. q[ue]. el no se equiboque, Saludeme a mi prima y familia y U[sted]. resiba las de su affectisimo. amigo q[ue]. B[esa]. S[u]. M[ano].

Ant[oni]o. M[ari]a. Peralta

Back: [19th-c. hand] Antonio M[ari]a. Peralta, relative to Sasces, Oct[u]bre. 10/54

*Translation: Letter 4, Antonio Maria Peralta to Diego Forbes,
Rancho San Antonio/Peralta (today: San Leandro), California, October 10, 1854*

Front:

San Antonio, October 10, 1854

[To] Mr. Don Diego Forbes

My friend and my Sir,

I send my son Fernando so that he can bring the money for the payment of the contribution, according to what you tell me in the roll [or list], asking how you would like to proceed, so that he does not get confused. Greet [for] me my [female] cousin and the family, and may you receive these [letters and/or greetings] from your most affectionate friend, who kisses your hand,

Antonio Maria Peralta

Back: [19th-c. hand] Antonio Maria Peralta, relative to Sasces, October 10, 1854

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