

What's in a name?

by Don Garate

Over the course of time much confusion and many questions have arisen over the surname of Juan Bautista de Anza:

1. Was he called "Anza" or "de Anza"?
2. Why was his surname one and not the other?
3. How should his surname be spelled?
4. How should it be pronounced?
5. How did he sign his name?

The answers to these questions follow.

1) The answer to the first question is very straight-forward. He was called "Anza." There are hundreds of original documents in existence, written by his contemporaries, in which they universally refer to him as "Anza." There are over fifty original documents in existence that were written by him and signed with only his surname. Without exception, when only signing his surname, he signed it "Anza." Furthermore, not one single document exists in which anybody in his day ever called him "de Anza" when referring to him by his surname. Calling him "de Anza" is an erroneous tradition that started in the twentieth century long after he was dead. To see examples of this, go to either the Spanish or English versions of Father Font's two diaries where Juan Bautista de Anza is referred to 169 times by name. Father Font only referred to him eight of those times by his full title of nobility, "Juan Bautista de Anza" ([Font Diary Example](#)). The other 161 times he referred to him by surname, calling him "**Comandante (Commander) Anza**" 17 times ([Font Diary Example](#)), "**Capitán (Captain) Anza**" 20 times, ([Font Diary Example](#)) "**Señor Anza**" 120 times, ([Font Diary Example](#)) and just plain "**Anza**" four times ([Font Diary Example](#)). Of course, Father Font was only one contemporary. There are easily over 500 instances of other contemporaries who referred to him as "Anza" and none who called him "de Anza".

2) Although the second question is more complex, why he was called "Anza" is also very straight forward. The confusion has arisen when people have tried to apply a supposed rule of Spanish name etymology, for indeed there are many Spaniards who have "de" in their surnames. However, one must go beyond rules of Spanish name etymology (if any such thing really exists) and examine history, culture, and ethnicity.

A) Anza is a Basque name and comes from a remarkably different language than Spanish. The name is toponymic (describing a place or thing) rather than patronymic like most Spanish names (showing who the person's father was). In the Basque language Anza means "pasture in the dwarf elder trees" and describes areas that are nearly ubiquitous in the foothills of the Pyrenees and Cantabrian Mountains of the Basque

Country. The name has no meaning in Spanish. Conversely, the Spanish word "de" has no meaning in Basque and is not part of the name. B) Because of universal nobility granted to the Basques by Castile in the early 1400's, from that time until the Spanish Civil War in this century, all Basques, without exception, had a "de" placed in front of their surname to show on what family their nobility was based. It was not part of their name and none ever confused it as such. In fact, like people everywhere in those early centuries, very few of the Basque people were literate and consequently never even knew that the parish priest or town official put a "de" in front of their surname when he recorded them in the parish or town registers. Anza, on the other hand, and others who had received formal education, knew very well why they included the "de" in their signature. It showed that he had the right to own land, be a presidial captain or governor of New Mexico, and lead a group of the king's subjects to a new home in faraway California. However, he nor anybody else ever confused his formal title of nobility with his surname. They were very different and distinct.

3) How the surname should be spelled is derived strictly from preference. Our subject always spelled it "Anza," and with the exception of his niece, Mar'a Rosa, he is the only one of his family who did. His godfather, aunts and uncles, various other relatives, and most contemporaries, including Father's Font and Garc_s, spelled it "Ansa." Members of the family who still live in the vicinity of Hernani, Gipuzkoa, Spain, the hometown of his father and three generations of grandfathers, spell the name "Ansa." His father always spelled the name "Anssa." The usage of double "ss" and "tt" was something that developed in the late 1600's and continued as a fad for about the first third of the 1700's. So, "Anssa" was a common spelling, but so was "Anttonio," the name of Anza's grandfather. The earliest known signatures of his grandfather (beginning in 1689) have a double "ss" but as time passed they evolved into one "s" signatures ending in 1735. In the middle of that time span there was a mixing of the two signatures and once in 1709, Antonio signed his name "Ansa" on a document in the morning and "Anssa" on another in the afternoon. Like rules for Spanish name etymology, rules for spelling were virtually non-existent in those years. Since our subject, for whatever reasons, spelled his name "Anza" it is not only fitting that we do the same, but it cuts down on a lot of confusion if we just standardize the spelling to his way of thinking -- confusion that has even crept into scholarly literature. (See for example, Dr. Bolton's translation of Father Font's expanded diary at [February 6, 1776](#))

4) Standardization of spelling aside, however, any confusion about pronunciation has come about because our subject spelled the name with a "z". It is not pronounced with a harsh "z" sound, but rather a soft "s," and the "a" is pronounced as in father. Thus, the proper pronunciation is **ä'n - sa**.

5) Anza, like other citizens of colonial Spain, regardless of ethnic background, had more than one way of signing his name:

A) **Official Title**. When signing an official military document, he signed with his full, official title of nobility, **Juan Bautista de Anza**, followed by his rubric. By far the majority of documents still in existence (several hundred) that carry his signature are this type of document. But again, this was a title, not to be confused with his name, much like

Dr. John Q. Smith, Ph.D. Because of his formal title, no one would ever be confused into thinking that Dr. Smith's surname was "Smith Ph.D."

B) **Surname.** Just over fifty known documents signed by our subject carry only his surname, **Anza**, and his rubric. These documents are usually explanatory writings that accompany a document with his full title signature. Usually, his name is signed that way because of new information that came to light, for whatever reason, before the original official document got mailed. Thus, he would add some extra bit of information to a document he had already signed with his title and then just sign "Anza" to the new information so the reader would know it was being added by him.

C) **Given Name.** His friends and family called him Juan, and unofficial letters written to such intimate acquaintances carried this particular signature with his rubric. There are only two of his signatures of this type that are known to still exist today.

D) **Rubric.** All citizens of colonial Spain, regardless of ethnic background or language, had a rubric. It was a well thought-out and practiced squiggly mark that was as unique as the person's signature. And it accompanied every signature that was executed. In fact, much like we would initial something today, Spaniards would apply their rubric. There was even a verb in the old Spanish that described the process -- "rubricar." Thus, rather than initialing something, these people "rubricated" it. Most of the dozens of rubrics that Anza made without his signature were executed while he was governor of New Mexico. On an official document that he had just signed with his full title signature, he would scribble a little note to his scribe telling how many copies he wanted made of the document and to whom it was to be sent. Then, he would "rubric" the note.

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