

Romualdo Pacheco

1831–1899

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 1877–1878; 1879–1883
REPUBLICAN FROM CALIFORNIA

Born in California while it was still Mexican territory, Romualdo Pacheco was the privileged stepson of a prominent merchant and landowner on the Pacific frontier. An avid outdoorsman who won fame for his prowess as a hunter, and a member of elite society in San Francisco and Santa Barbara, Pacheco defended the rights of landowners and promoted industry in his growing state. “Romualdo Pacheco ... was indisputably the most illustrious Californio of his time,” noted a contemporary. “[He was] a magnificent physical specimen whose brain matched his brawn.”¹

José Antonio Romualdo Pacheco, Jr., was born October 31, 1831, in Santa Barbara, California. His mother, Ramona Carillo, belonged to a prominent Mexican family.² Pacheco’s father, a native of Guanajuato, Mexico, and a captain in the Mexican army, had arrived in California in 1825. He was killed outside Los Angeles five weeks after his namesake’s birth, while protecting Mexican governor Manuel Victoria in the waning days of Mexico’s war for independence from Spain. Pacheco’s mother subsequently married John Wilson, a Scottish sea captain. The couple’s wealth afforded Romualdo and his older brother, Mariano, a comfortable childhood. In 1838 the two boys sailed to Hawaii on their stepfather’s ship, the *Don Quixote*, to attend Oahu Charity School in Honolulu, an English-language institution run by missionaries and family friends. Pacheco became fluent in English and French and, after returning to California in 1843, he had to re-learn Spanish.³ Pacheco went to work on his stepfather’s shipping fleet, learning navigation skills and studying with a private tutor. In 1846, during the Mexican-American War, while Pacheco was transporting cargo up the California coast on a vessel flying the Mexican flag, the U.S.S. *Cyane* stopped and searched his ship near Monterey. Permitted to continue his journey, Pacheco

was stopped again near the coast of San Francisco, where he was allegedly imprisoned briefly by the U.S. military.⁴ Pacheco was a wealthy businessman and rancher by 1848 when he accepted U.S. citizenship, which he was granted by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.⁵ He subsequently worked on his parents’ estates north of Los Angeles, in San Luis Obispo County, becoming an expert horseman, and dabbled a year later in the mining business during the California Gold Rush.

Pacheco eventually answered the familial call to political service when California became a state in 1850. Profoundly interested in protecting the rights of Southern California landowners, his stepfather, John Wilson, was San Luis Obispo County’s first treasurer and served on the county’s first board of supervisors in 1852. After California joined the Union in 1850, Pacheco’s brother, Mariano, was elected to the state legislature and served a single term before poor health forced him to retire in 1853.⁶ Carrying on the family tradition, Pacheco entered the political arena, serving as a superior court judge for San Luis Obispo County from 1853 to 1857 and then as a state senator until 1862. Initially a Democrat, Pacheco ran for re-election as a Union Party candidate in 1861 because of his deep disdain for slavery and his disapproval of the secession crisis; Pacheco was one of the first prominent Hispanic Americans to speak out against African-American slavery.⁷ In 1863 Pacheco joined the Republican Party, and California Governor Leland Stanford appointed him to fill a vacancy for state treasurer; he won election for a full term later that year. Also in 1863, Governor Stanford commissioned Pacheco as a brigadier general in the California state militia to command Hispanic troops in the First Brigade of California’s “Native Cavalry.”⁸ Maintaining ties to his father’s birthplace, Pacheco became a key contact for Mexican President Benito Juárez, connecting his





emissaries with prominent Californians who supported his war against France in 1864.⁹ In 1863 Pacheco married Mary Catherine McIntire, a Kentucky playwright who became one of California's first published female authors.¹⁰ The couple had a daughter, Maybella Ramona, and a son, Romualdo, who died at age seven.

In 1867 Pacheco lost a re-election bid for state treasurer; however, he returned to the state senate in 1869. At the Republican state convention in 1871, Pacheco was nominated for lieutenant governor under the winning ticket headed by Newton Booth. When Booth accepted an appointment to the U.S. Senate, Pacheco became governor of California in 1875, serving from February to December. The first Hispanic American and the first native Californian to serve as governor, Pacheco focused on building new government facilities and services and on mediating between Spanish-speaking Californians of Mexican descent and settlers from the Eastern United States and elsewhere.¹¹ His experience as a rancher made him an expert with a lasso, and he was acclaimed as the only California governor known to have lassoed a grizzly bear.¹² Pacheco withdrew his name from nomination for a full term as governor in 1875 when he realized he had little chance of winning in the fractious GOP state convention. He ran unsuccessfully as an Independent candidate for lieutenant governor.

In 1876 Pacheco entered a race for a U.S. House seat representing a large southern portion of the state that was mostly on the frontier, stretching from the peninsula just south of San Francisco to Mono County and the Nevada border in the east, and nearly 500 miles south to the Mexican border.¹³ He received the Republican nomination at the district convention on August 10, 1876. Facing Democratic incumbent Peter D. Wigginton, Pacheco campaigned on the development of California ports, emphasizing his maritime experience. The San Luis Obispo *Tribune* reported that in a meeting in that city on Christmas Day 1875, Pacheco was “greeted with loud applause [as] he proceeded to give some of his experiences as a sailor on the Pacific Coast.... From experience he knew that the matter of protecting our

harbor was perfectly feasible.”¹⁴ Wigginton enjoyed more support from the newspapers in the district, including the endorsement of the *Tribune*, but Pacheco's heritage appealed to the district's majority-Hispanic, or “native-Californian,” population.¹⁵ Pacheco initially won the election by a single ballot—19,104 votes to Wigginton's 19,103—but the incumbent contested Pacheco's narrow victory.¹⁶ Upon investigation, the California secretary of state observed that two votes for Wigginton that were cast in Monterey County were missing from the total certified by the county's board of elections; he accused the tally clerk of changing the final count after the board adjourned and refused to certify Pacheco's election. Pacheco petitioned his case all the way to the California supreme court after the clerk testified that he had altered the vote count to correct a clerical error, based on evidence found in board members' notes.¹⁷ The court upheld Pacheco's election, ordering the secretary of state to issue the certificate of election. Carrying this document and the endorsement of the state's Democratic governor, Pacheco traveled to Washington.

Convening on October 15, 1877, the Democratic-controlled 45th Congress (1877–1879) attempted to block Pacheco's swearing-in based on Wigginton's contest, then pending before the Committee on Elections. With the support of a resolution adopted by voice vote and sponsored by House Republican Floor Leader James Garfield of Ohio, Pacheco took the oath of office on October 17, 1877.¹⁸ The first Hispanic Member with full voting rights, Pacheco was unable to pursue many of his legislative initiatives in his first term. The Committee on Elections—made up of a majority of Democrats—upheld Wigginton's contest on January 31, 1878.¹⁹ Though the committee's majority agreed with the California supreme court's decision regarding the votes cast in Monterey County, ballot irregularities elsewhere in the district reversed Pacheco's razor-thin victory. State law permitted precinct judges to challenge ballots having any extraneous “impression, device, color, or thing.”²⁰ Judges rejected several ballots for both Pacheco and Wigginton because of this law, and because several voters were not residents of the state or district. After examining more than two dozen



individual ballots, the committee ruled that Wigginton had prevailed by four votes. The full House concurred on February 7, 1878, by a party-line vote of 136 to 125, unseating Pacheco.²¹

After Wigginton returned to his San Francisco law practice at the end of the 45th Congress, Pacheco again ran for a House seat in 1878. In his next two elections, Pacheco faced accusations from popular Democratic newspapers in the district that he was too attached to the national Republican Party and distanced from his constituents by his wealth.²² The editors denounced Pacheco for ignoring his constituents and failing to grant them plum federal patronage jobs. “He has always received their passionate aid and has enjoyed the dignity and emoluments of public office through their votes,” charged Santa Barbara’s Spanish-language Democratic newspaper *La gaceta*, “but none of their class has ever been appointed to any position or favored for their influence!”²³ Yet his electoral victories were often determined by “the Spanish vote,” and he successfully campaigned in both English and Spanish. In September 1879 he defeated Democrat Wallace Leach and James Ayers, a third-party Workingmen’s candidate, taking 40 percent, with 15,391 votes. In 1880 he won re-election, defeating Leach by only 191 votes and winning with 46 percent and 17,768 votes. Workingmen’s candidate J. F. Godfrey siphoned off 9 percent, with a little more than 3,000 votes.

Republicans assigned Pacheco to three standing committees over the course of his career: Public Lands, Private Land Claims, and Public Expenditures.²⁴ Though they were not considered particularly desirable, these assignments reflected Pacheco’s preference for working within an intimate committee setting rather than making lengthy floor speeches.²⁵ He focused his legislative efforts, balancing the rights of landowners in California with a venture to protect and expand the harbors and railroads that were the economic lifelines for his remote Western district. Pacheco attempted to improve the harbor in the Wilmington section of Los Angeles by requesting an amendment allocating money in a rivers and harbors appropriation bill. Citing the lack of safe ports for riding

out storms along more than 500 miles of California coast, Pacheco also stressed the region’s importance as the endpoint for the Southern Pacific Railroad. “I would state from my own personal knowledge of the great wealth and importance of Southern California, its rapidly increasing commerce, and the importance of having that point a secure harbor for shipping,” Pacheco argued. The House rejected the amendment by a narrow 78 to 74 vote.²⁶ The Democratic majority in the 45th and 46th Congresses (1877–1881) meant that Pacheco was typically defeated; of the 50 bills he introduced, only two—both private bills introduced on behalf of individuals—became law. Yet, noting his interest in protecting Western landowners, the GOP leadership made him chairman of the Committee on Private Land Claims in the 47th Congress (1881–1883) when the Republicans regained a majority. Pacheco was the first Hispanic Member to chair a full committee.

Pacheco broke his silence on national issues in a debate on the House Floor over a bill restricting Chinese immigration, on February 23, 1882. Addressing the nearly 50 percent increase in Asian residents in California from 1870 to 1880, Pacheco threw his support behind stemming the flow of Asian immigration.²⁷ “The subject [of Asian immigration] is of such vital importance to this country, and especially to the Pacific coast,” Pacheco declared, “that I should fail [in] my duty did I not earnestly advocate its passage and state my reasons for doing so.”²⁸ Espousing the anti-Chinese rhetoric that had been popular among wealthy Californians for decades—which was taking hold nationally in an era of increasing tensions among working-class laborers—Pacheco argued that Chinese immigrants in California, primarily single men brought to work railroad and mining operations, were taking white laborers’ jobs and degrading the moral character of California’s cities.²⁹ “It is necessary to see with our own eyes the insidious encroachments of the Mongolian upon every branch of labor, every avenue of industry,” Pacheco noted. “They are taking in our factories and workshops, at the plow, beside the loom, yea in our very kitchens and laundries, the place of the white laborer.”³⁰ Pacheco described Chinese culture as “unchanged, unchangeable, fixed, as immovable as the



decrees of fate.” “His ancestors have also bequeathed him the most hideous immoralities,” he said. “The imagination shrinks back appalled at the thought of the morals of a hundred thousand men without families,” Pacheco added, appealing to 19th-century attitudes toward large populations of single men.³¹ Drawing a parallel between Chinese immigration in California and the African slave trade earlier in the century, Pacheco appealed for Eastern support by invoking California’s sacrifices during the Civil War: “When our great civil war broke out and ravaged and desolated the land, though the Pacific States were far removed from the scene of strife, were they slow to offer their aid?... [Californians] ask merely that the evil already done to them shall be restricted to its present proportions.”³² The Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended the immigration of all Chinese laborers and denied citizenship to Asian immigrants, passed the House on March 23 by a vote of 167 to 66 (with 59 Members not voting).³³ Pacheco joined half the GOP Members (60 of the affirmative votes) and all seven Representatives from Western states in approving the measure.³⁴

Pacheco did not run for re-election in 1882, but returned to California as one of its most prominent residents. After working as a partner in a San Francisco stock brokerage, he was appointed as an envoy to the Central American republics by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890. In July 1891 Harrison named him minister plenipotentiary to Honduras and Guatemala; however, he lost the patronage post upon the election of Democratic President Grover Cleveland in 1893. Pacheco retired to the home of his brother-in-law, Henry R. Miller, in Oakland, California, where he died of Bright’s disease on January 23, 1899. His obituary in the *Los Angeles Times* said, “We have public men who might well copy in some measure the pose of mind, the calm dignity, the graceful honesty and gentle manliness of Romualdo Pacheco.”³⁵

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, “Romualdo Pacheco,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

Conmy, Peter Thomas. *Romualdo Pacheco: Distinguished Californian of the Mexican and American Periods* (San Francisco: Grand Parlor, Native Sons of the Golden West, 1957).

Genini, Ronald, and Richard Hitchman. *Romualdo Pacheco: A California in Two Eras* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1985).

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

Only a few scattered letters relating to Pacheco exist. See Pacheco’s entry in the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* for more details, <http://bioguide.congress.gov>.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in Ronald Genini and Richard Hitchman, *Romualdo Pacheco: A California in Two Eras* (San Francisco: The Book Club of California, 1985): vii. The authors do not provide the source of the quotation.
- 2 Most scholars agree on this date, but Peter Conmy notes that Pacheco’s baptismal record lists his birthday as September 20, 1831. Peter Thomas Conmy, *Romualdo Pacheco: Distinguished Californian of the Mexican and American Periods* (San Francisco: Grand Parlor, Native Sons of the Golden West, 1957): 4–5. A romanticized account of Pacheco’s parents’ courtship can be found in Winifred Davidson, “Romualdo’s Ramona,” 21 June 1931, *Los Angeles Times*: K11.
- 3 Conmy, *Romualdo Pacheco*: 5.
- 4 All Pacheco’s major biographers note that the U.S. Navy stopped Pacheco’s ship, but only Carmen E. Enciso and Tracy North mention his brief imprisonment. Enciso and North, *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–1995* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995): 94.
- 5 Leonard Schlup, “Pacheco, Romualdo” *American National Biography* 16 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 882–883 (hereinafter referred to as *ANB*).
- 6 Genini and Hitchman, *Romualdo Pacheco*: 48–49.
- 7 Enciso and North, *Hispanic Americans in Congress*: 94.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Schlup, “Pacheco, Romualdo,” *ANB*; Conmy, *Romualdo Pacheco*: 11–12.
- 11 Schlup, “Pacheco, Romualdo,” *ANB*.
- 12 For accounts of Pacheco’s exploits as an outdoorsman, see, for example, “Gleanings from the Mails,” 15 March 1875, *New York Times*: 2; “Pacheco’s Prowess,” 13 April 1878, *San Francisco Chronicle*: 1; T. C. Crawford, “Pacheco as a Hunter,” 8 December 1890, *Chicago Daily Tribune*: 6.



- 13 Stanley B. Parsons et al., *United States Congressional Districts, 1843–1883* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 151–152.
- 14 Quoted in Genini and Hitchman, *Romualdo Pacheco*: 148.
- 15 “The Pacific States,” 9 September 1876, *New York Times*: 2; Genini and Hitchman, *Romualdo Pacheco*: 148–149.
- 16 Michael J. Dubin et al., *U.S. Congressional Elections, 1788–1997* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1998): 236.
- 17 Chester H. Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901): 322–323.
- 18 *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 1st sess. (17 October 1877): 91–93.
- 19 See House Committee on Elections, *Case of Wigginton vs. Pacheco*, 45th Cong., 1st sess., 31 January 1878, H. Rep. 118.
- 20 Rowell, *A Historical and Legal Digest of All the Contested Election Cases*: 323.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 323–324. One Democrat, Clarkson Potter of New York, voted in Pacheco’s favor *Congressional Record*, House, 45th Cong., 2nd sess. (7 February 1878): 836–837. See also “Democratic Unscrupulousness,” 8 February 1878, *New York Times*: 1.
- 22 Dubin et al., *U.S. Congressional Elections, 1788–1997*: 248, 250; See, for example, “Notas Políticas,” *La gaceta* (Santa Barbara, CA), 9 October 1880: 2; “Notas Políticas,” *La gaceta* (Santa Barbara, CA), 23 October 1880: 2; [Untitled article], *La gaceta* (Santa Barbara, CA), 23 October 1880: 2. Translated by Translations International, Inc. (February 2010).
- 23 “Él siempre ha recibido la ardiente ayuda de éstos, y ha gozado la dignidad y emolumentos de posición oficial por sus sufragios, pero ninguno de su clase jamás ha sido nombrado á alguna posición ó favorecido por su influencia!” “Opiniones de la prensa,” *La gaceta* (Santa Barbara, CA), 16 October 1880: 2. Translated as “Opinion of the Editors,” by Translations International, Inc. (February 2010).
- 24 David T. Canon et al., *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789 to 1946*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002): 796. Pacheco also served on the Select Committee on the Death of President Garfield; see *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (9 December 1877): 64. Canon does not list Pacheco as a member of the select committee; see David T. Canon et al., *Committees in the U.S. Congress, 1789 to 1946*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2002): 301.
- 25 From the 45th to the 53rd Congresses (1877–1895), all three committees were of middling desirability; see Charles Stewart III, “Committee Hierarchies in the Modernizing House, 1875–1947,” *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (1992): 845–846.
- 26 *Congressional Record*, House, 46th Cong., 3rd sess. (15 February 1881): 1642.
- 27 The Asian population in California was 49,310 in the 1870 Census and 75,218 in the 1880 Census. However, the influx in immigration generally in California increased by a similar percentage in this decade. The Asian population was 8.5 percent of the total population in 1870, but it increased only slightly, to 8.7 percent of the total population, in 1880. See Appendix A-1 “Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States: 1790 to 1990,” in Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for Large Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States,” U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html> (accessed 3 February 2010).
- 28 *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (23 February 1882): 2210.
- 29 For more information on the national politics of Asian immigration, specifically in the debate and passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, see Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).
- 30 *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (23 February 1882): 2210.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 2211.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*, 2227–2228.
- 34 Gyory, *Closing the Gate*: 238. President Chester A. Arthur vetoed the original bill. The House and Senate re-adopted a similar bill that temporarily excluded Chinese immigration. Arthur signed the bill into law on May 6, 1882. Pacheco supported the new measure; see *Congressional Record*, House, 47th Cong., 1st sess. (17 April 1882): 2973–2974.
- 35 “Romualdo Pacheco,” 26 January 1899, *Los Angeles Times*: 8.