

As a boy, Vallejo attended a harsh school

By Jerry Bowen

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You can thank your lucky stars you weren't born when Mariano Vallejo entered the world of the Spanish dons in early California.

Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, the fourth son and eighth child of Sergeant Don Ignacio and Maria Antonia Lugo Vallejo was born in Monterey on July 7, 1808.

At the time, the Spanish were trying to expel Napoleon from Spain, and the Western Hemisphere's Hispanic countries were just starting their revolutionary struggles for independence from European domination.

During Mariano Vallejo's very early years at the Presidio of Monterey, the war of independence was being carried on in Mexico with varying success.

Mariano started his education when he was 7 in 1815, at the only school that Monterey had at the time. The instructor was a soldier, Miguel Geronimo Archuleta, the son of

Ignacio Archuleta who had come to California with the Anza colony in 1776 and had settled at Mission San Francisco.

The governor of California, Arrillaga, felt education was important and opened a school in Monterey in 1811. He transferred Miguel Archuleta to the Monterey Company and ordered him to teach school. Miguel was inexperienced but willing and as an instructor, the education was only elementary.

The parents of the children furnished elementary textbooks and the military paymaster provided paper for the classroom. Since paper was a valuable commodity in those days, after it was used it was returned to the military to be used in the manufacture of wadding for gun cartridges.

The main object of education was to teach Christian doctrine. This the pupils learned by repetitive routine, repeating it word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence without really understanding what they supposedly learned.

Ripalda's Christian Doctrine and Catechism was the primary subject and reading and writing were of secondary importance. Usually, the ABC's in reading and writing were begun in the second year, and from then on each pupil's progress was as slow or as

fast as his own desire to learn and the limited knowledge of the instructor.

Apparently Vallejo, being an ambitious person at an early age, had a greater capacity for learning and made the most of the meager education being taught. As the students advanced, the church recommended the books they were required to read. The pupils also were required to copy state documents as an exercise in penmanship.

As for discipline, today one would fairly compare it to a little torture chamber of horrors. Regular discipline was meted out via the liberal use of the schoolmaster's metal tipped walking cane. Serious infractions included laughing out loud, being truant, running in the street, spilling ink and failing to know their lessons.

For these "terrible" infractions a cat-o-nine-tails device with iron points attached to the punishing end of each appendage was delivered liberally by one of the bigger students to the bare back of the offending culprit who was gagged to keep him from screaming out loud. Many students carried lifelong scars from the "chastisement."

As for the school building itself; it consisted of a long, narrow, poorly lit room, with bare walls, except for a huge cross or the picture of some saint hanging near the master's head. The school was dirty and dilapidated and along the sides of the room were placed rows of roughly made benches. At one end was a rude platform upon which was a table or desk covered with a grimy black tablecloth.

Behind this table sat the old ill-tempered soldier, Miguel Archuleta, dressed in a greasy robe. As each schoolboy dragged himself into this forbidding atmosphere, he walked the length of the chamber, knelt before the cross or saint, recited a prayer aloud, and crossed himself.

After his devotions he approached the master and requested the latter's hand. Miguel would extend his hairy, unkempt paw, with a sort of grunt and the pupil kissed it. After these "formalities " the lessons of the day were given and each pupil began to memorize his assignment by repeating it aloud.

For penmanship lessons, the schoolmaster provided a copy of text and the pupil was required to put pen to paper over and over again until the sheet was filled. When the student completed his penmanship task, the teacher inspected it down to the last detail while the frightened student waited.

Should the smallest blot appear, the unfortunate scholar would be required to hold out his hand and receive a whack on the back of his hand with the cane. The student would then promise to improve next time and return to his seat.

On occasion there was relief from the dread of the regular school day. Whenever a ship arrived in Monterey Bay - which wasn't very often - it was customary to take a break from school and let the pupils go to the beach to see the ships.

According to Vallejo's memoirs written 50 years later, on one such occasion the students were responsible for the first revolt against government authority.

It was 1818, and the ship *Princesa* had just arrived in the bay. At the time, the older students were completing copies of documents to be sent to Mexico on the ship's return trip.

Before the boys were allowed to visit the ship, instructor Miguel Archuleta warned them to carefully put away the copies of the documents they were working on and to close a hole in the door that was an entry for the pet cat.

Well, being the young folks they were, in the excitement of it all and the anticipation of meeting

Gov. Sola who was on the ship ... they forgot to do as told.

The meeting with the governor made a pleasant break for the children, but it was all over too soon and they had to return to the dreary classroom.

To their horror, chickens had entered through the cat's door and created havoc throughout. Ink was spilled everywhere and most of the manuscripts they had so tediously worked on were ruined beyond repair.

Miguel walked in as the frightened boys were attempting to restore order to the classroom. Enraged, he ordered the entire classroom into what the boys called the torture chamber, an inner apartment with its only door opening into the schoolroom.

When he ordered two of the older boys to hold the first victim while he applied the cat-o-nine-tails, they absolutely refused. Encouraged by this daring stand against Miguel, they shoved him out and barricaded themselves in the room and began making plans to seize the scurrilous instructor, lay him out on the bench and apply the whip to his back. The young rebels figured that if they applied the cat-o-nine-tails well it might serve as a reminder to lessen their tortures when again they were the victims.

When they threw the door open, the "valiant" schoolmaster took to his heels and ran for the safety of the Presidio gates where he reported the matter to the commanding officer of the post, who in turn informed the governor. Mariano Vallejo's father, Sergeant Ignacio, was appointed to investigate the matter and recommend punishment.

What a concept - inform the parents of school "misbehavior" - and especially in this case a very wise choice! Of course, Mariano must have felt even more frightened than ever when confronted by his very own father.

Since he was enjoying the unease of Miguel Archuleta, who he thoroughly disliked, the very wise Don Ignacio decided that the documents were to be recopied by the time the vessel was ready to sail on its return voyage. Then he pardoned the culprits on the ground that their excessive joy at the arrival of the

Princesa had so affected their minds for the moment as to render them irresponsible agents.

When Gen. Mariano Vallejo wrote his memoirs, he fancied himself in one of the important roles as he did in so many other stories of his life. In retrospect, many of his stories really stretched the truth almost to the breaking point, as many later historians were able to point out from actual documented records.

Who knows, perhaps in this case the facts may not have been very clear in Vallejo's mind at the time he wrote them, and he may have thought himself older than he really was. In fact, as later history proved, he was indeed a pivotal person in the history of California and our county.

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