

## Part 2-Spanish Troops Marched In

By Jerry Bowen

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When I ended my last column I said, "Second-Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga with seventeen soldiers and an auxiliary force of Christian Indians of unknown size attacked the Suisun force of 120 fighting men on May 22, 1810 near Rockville." Here again is a misconception of history perhaps read out of context. It wasn't at Rockville. It was at or near today's Suisun City.

In Randall Milliken's Ethnographic and Ethno-historic Context for the Archaeological Investigation of the Suisun Plain, Solano County, California, he referred to a report by Ordaz about fifty-five Spanish soldiers who crossed the Suisun Plain in October of 1821, on their way north to explore the Sacramento Valley.

A Spanish exploratory expedition of fifty-five Spanish soldiers crossed the Suisun Plain in October of 1821, on their way north to explore the Sacramento Valley. They had crossed Carquinez Strait in the present Vallejo area on October 21. The following morning they headed eastward along the later route of Interstate 80. They found no native peoples living on the Suisun Plain. Diarist Bias Ordaz wrote:

"taking the road to the east, guided toward the Suisun, in which proximity was found a running aguaje ( spring) at the foot of a hill. It became the spring or Pool of San Blas, where we halted. Following a short stay, we continued the march over the Plain of the Suisun until 5:30 in the afternoon, (stopping because a site was found adaptable for passing the night."

The Pool of San Blas was almost certainly the aguaje shown on a later land case map in the gap in the ridge just northeast of Cordelia and south of Rockville. Lieutenant Arg'ello's brief diary gives further information regarding the final stopping place.

After traveling for seven hours at a normal pace, I made a stop at the place called Suizun (a destroyed rancheria of that name). Here I determined to spend the night.

Randall Milliken then wrote, So the October 21, 1821 overnight stopping place was at the village site where Gabriel Moraga had attacked the Suisuns in May of 1810. It was somewhere on the plain eastward of Rockville, almost certainly the place where Father Abella had met with Suisuns in the fall of 1811. Elsewhere I have suggested that the location was probably at the present town of Suisun City.

He was right the first time; the attack was at the Suisun City area.

Friars Buenaventura Fortuny, Ramon Abella and Sergeant Jose Sanchez who visited Suisun Valley on October 28, 1811 while returning from an exploration of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta reported, We went about one league and stopped at the end of the slough of the Suisunes at half a boat's length from shore so that one could jump onto solid ground. That was where Second Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga struck them the blow. Thoroughly cowed the poor people have remained, for they are badly scared. By his description he would have been at or somewhere near today's Suisun City.

During the expedition they made contact with the Indian rancherias of the Tolenas, Malaca and Ululatos tribelets of the Suisuns.

By 1813 most of the Suisun Indians had been removed from their tribal lands to the missions at San Jose and San Francisco including 10 year-old Sina, the real name of our Chief Solano, not Sem-Yeto. I'll go into that a little more later in this series.

In 1823 a 36-year-old Spanish priest, Friar Jose Altimira was in charge of Mission Delores in San Francisco. Early in the same year he prepared a proposal to expand Mexican Settlements into the northern area of California. In April his proposal to join Mission San Rafael Archangel to Mission Delores as well as sites in the Petalumas Indian area. Friar Juan Amoros who was in charge of the San Rafael Mission opposed it.

But Friar Altimira who may be described as a little headstrong went ahead any way and began an expedition on June 25, 1823 to seek out sites in the north.

During the trip he camped to the west of present-day Sonoma at a site with many hot and cold springs now occupied by the Cline Winery on Highway 121. He liked the area but continued his search eventually entering Suisun Valley.

After camping near the Napa River in the area of the old Basalt works he continues with the following in his diary June 28, 1823 "Presently we arrived at an arroyo, which was said to be the entrance to Napa. This measures very little flowing current, of not much abundance are their waters, but we observed by measuring some places there are small permanent ponds with clear, sweet, abundant and pleasing water, sufficient to water some cattle."

"Continuing our course, we arrived about at the 6 of the afternoon at another arroyo of the same size as the grand Arroyo de Sonoma, which served the belt to the beautiful plain of the aforesaid Napa, so called by the Indians who formerly lived here."

A special site for certain the one, which was explored except we did not find as much water as was in Sonoma. Excepting this item, Napa is all as a picture, equal to Sonoma for its certain resemblance. We camped finally on the bank of the named arroyo. Came the night, we rested - and we without more happening awaited the happiness of the Sunday, the Day of St. Peter.

June 29, 1823. Which starts the sun after the dawn, the more serene and brilliant, we said mass and concluding, we gave to the arroyo the name of San Pedro for to be the honor of the day; we breakfasted and approximately at the 7 of the morning started, following the same bearing N.E. We observed that the Indians of the neighborhood, by one some distance from us, were setting prearranged fires for warning.

We observed in the plains and hills large oak groves; tramped over long, bare pieces of land much adapted for vines; and ascended a slope of a mountain which, with their hills nearby, could furnish the stone for making a new Rome. Descending then the named slope, we saw near us the famous Plain of Suisun which was the name of the Indians previously settling at this place, and with no particular exploring, arrived approximately of the one hour of the afternoon at the stream of named site.

The temperature of the Napa, and which continued until coming down off the referred slope of the mountain for the spoken of Suisun, was with small difference, believe it to be the same as in Sonoma. We observed more temperature in Suisun, good to be hotter.

When we finally arrived at this place, we camped on the bank of the arroyo which runs in its plain from north to south to its outlet in the estero, bearing to the east. This is a plain which is verdant and which measures good soil for the planting of each seeds but it is not as abundant as that which we considered in the past. It is equally well known that the soil, chiefly which is close to the arroyo, needs little or no irrigation. This in this season is green and very luxuriant; the pastures and other plants which we saw the afternoon of this day. The soil more distant is already scarce of these peculiarities and it is not proper to sow always in the same soil and do not offer much opportunity for varying. Neither is sufficient for the support of a large town. There is sufficient firewood on hand but no timber for manufacturing. There is land and pastures from north to the east for pasturing cattle, but lack of waters for which to drink.

All this was considered this afternoon, and also the excessive distance for communicating a lone mission (sic) with the Presidio of San Francisco, (we convinced ourselves that this locality was not proper for our interest.)

We were desirous to communicate to the Indians from the north the reason that we must come here and to finish with a preparation for a smooth conquest, dispatched to

the Rancherias of the Hulatos, 5 Christian Indians of the San Francisco Mision, for which they invited them to come to the place where we were plaining (camping).

Then the night came on and we went to the resting, expected that the day following some gentile Indians would arrive to visit with peace. So, with that, we will leave Friar Altimira camped in Suisun Valley near present-day Rockville and I'll continue with the story in my next column.

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