

Tracing the origins of buildings on Suisun Rancho

By Jerry Bowen

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We left off in the last article with Samuel Martin purchasing 142 acres of the Suisun Ranch from partners, Archibald A. Ritchie and Robert H. Waterman in 1853.

Part of the purchase included six acres that may have been part of the site of the Santa Eulalia Mission and Rancheria.

Up to that time we can only assume that Samuel Martin was squatting on Suisun Rancho land. According to a plaque at the Martin Mansion (AKA Stonedene), he had arrived in 1850 and not very much is known about his activities at that time other than that he apparently was living out of the wagon in which he crossed the plains and working the land.

It's a little hard to believe that he would have lived in the wagon for the next 10 years before he built "Stonedene" Mansion and there is little or nothing to enlighten us. Did he move into one of the old Santa Eulalia Mission buildings or build a temporary home?

In a biography in the 1909 California Historical and Biographical Record about Sam Martin, it states the following:

"During the first three years (1850-53) of his occupancy of the ranch Mr. Martin cut hay and wild oats off that and the neighboring land, the oats being very prolific and growing to a prodigious height. Appreciating the unusual grazing offered by the country, which was sparsely settled and unfenced, he returned to Missouri and bought about six hundred head of cattle, which he drove across the plains. He was induced to sell a part of the cattle at the mines as he came through, but aside from a few head, which he traded to a man, whom he engaged to build a stone house (there being a fine quarry near his ranch), he stocked his ranch with the remainder."

At first, one might assume that he built a small stone home before he had the mansion constructed in 1861. But according to an article by my co-writer, Sabine Goerke Shrode, he didn't go back east to bring out the cattle until 1860. She also stated, "The same stonecutters also built another five homes, the Baldwin barn and Rockville Chapel in the area."

The Santa Eulalia Mission site had pretty much fallen into ruins because all the Suisun Indians either had died or moved to other locations after the secularization of the

missions. Only one of the tribe is known for sure to have remained, Jesus Molino. Witnesses testifying in a land court case said they had seen or visited with him. Information in his probate (# 005) is located in the Fairfield Archives.

He was described as living in either a large adobe or a small stone house with several acres nearby under cultivation, depending on whose testimony was given.

An early survey of the Suisun Rancho for A. A. Ritchie shows a structure with nearby cultivated land in approximately the same location as the small stone adobe building located on the old Mangel's Winery property. Today the structure is located in the field adjacent to the WestAmerica Bank parking lot on WestAmerica drive. Over the years the little edifice is known to have been used as a stage watering stop and a tool room for Mangel's Winery. The small building is being preserved today as a historic site in the Pony Express Business Park development being built by Headwaters Development Company.

Another stone structure is located on the six-acre site that was part of Martin's original purchase and which I believe may have been the central site of the Santa Eulalia Mission and Rancheria.

In my next column I'll review further purchases of the site and a little of the sparse history of that site. On the property is a stone building that was added to in later years.

Did those early stonecutters hired originally by Sam Martin build this stone building also?

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