

Sink may be clue to Solano's oldest building

By Jerry Bowen

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In the last installment of this series we took a brief look at the building located on what I speculated was the property where the Santa Eulalia Mission once stood.

Now, I'm happy to say that I'm virtually certain that all the speculating was right, thanks to no less than The Reporter's opinion page editor, Karen Nolan.

I had been wondering whether the lower, stone-built section of the Canavascini Winery building might have been standing at the time of the active mission period from 1825 to 1838. I also said, "Inside one of the rooms there is an unusual 'sink' sculptured from the wall's stonework with a hole that drained the contents onto the floor."

Karen obviously was excited about what she wrote in her e-mail to me, and after I read it I almost fell over. I believe she had identified the best clue as to the building's original purpose and it has been right there, visible to anyone who had an idea about what the purpose of the sink was.

Karen said it was a sacrarium. She said "When I covered the building of St. Joseph's (and also Mt. Carmel) churches, I learned about the special room with the sink connected directly to the ground."

Thank goodness she told me what a sacrarium was because I am not of the Catholic persuasion.

In short, "In ecclesiastical usage the term was given to a shallow stone basin, the French cuvette, placed near the altar in a church, with drains to take away the water used in the ablutions at the Mass. A sacrarium is a special basin that is connected by a pipe directly to the ground. Sacrariums are found inside Roman Catholic Church buildings. The purpose of the sacrarium is to dispose of water used sacramentally, and particles of the consecrated Eucharist by returning these particles directly to the earth from which it came.

"The presence of the sacrarium shows our reverent care for holy things. When materials designated for a sacred purpose have completed their service, we honor them even in their disposal. By returning our sacred substances to the earth beneath the church building, we honor them, the ground over which we worship, and the God who created them and consecrated them to nourish our faith."

The "sink" may be the best clue we have that identifies the smaller of two rooms in the stone section of the building as quite likely the Santa Eulalia Mission Church built in 1824-25 by Father Altimira as a sub-mission to the Sonoma Mission.

The other, much larger room, was most likely the main room where services were held if we are right. Not only is there an excellent chance it is the Mission, but also it would now be the oldest standing structure in Solano County at about 182 years old and it's in very good condition.

If I appear to be cautiously optimistic, I am. Only when people who are considered experts in the matter have studied the area can we actually say it is one hundred percent what we think it is.

We are looking for someone now.

We must also thank the Pienovi family, Ronald and Gordene, and their son Mike who lives on the property, their daughter Julia and her husband Matthew Forristall, all who have an avid interest in the local history. They have been completely open to the intrusion of their lives by members of the Vacaville Heritage Council and the Reel History Video crew many times over in a spirit of cooperation that has been beyond all expectations.

Developers have been trying for quite a while to buy the property, but thanks to the Pienovis, it isn't going to happen.

As Mike commented one day, "I intend to live here until I die and I hope my kids one day will also feel the same."

Now that it is out in the open about what a jewel Solano County, and specifically Suisun Valley may have, we will close this part of the story of what I consider the most significant mile of recorded history of Solano County History and more specifically along Suisun Valley Road.

But there is yet a little more to tell and I'll continue with that in my next column.

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