

Infamous Vallejos played big role in 1846 rebellion

By Jerry Bowen

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Monuments have been built to them and writers have both praised and denounced their actions. They have been variously described as rebels, heroes, traitors and patriots. Some historians and writers might be said to be biased depending on your point of view, and so it is even today.

As always, there is more than one side to any story. In this case it's the Bear Flag Rebellion, which more or less expedited events that led to California's acquisition by the United States at the same time France and England were considering a takeover.

Napoleon Primo Vallejo, born Dec. 8, 1850, gathered the stories of his family and late in life began writing a biography of his father, Gen. Mariano G. Vallejo. Although he was not successful in publishing it, the San Francisco Chronicle's special section, Safety Valve, did print some of his writings in the early 1920s.

While gathering material for the work, he wrote to his older brother, Platon, asking him to suggest some appropriate books of history to read and to give an opinion of some of the historical works about California.

Platon was anything but complimentary of those histories, especially the Bear Flag Rebellion. At age 5, he was old enough to remember the event and unwittingly had a small part in the fabrication of the original Bear Flag. While he was watching one of the rebels paint symbols on the flag, a breeze began to ruffle the cloth. The man called to the boy and said, "Hi, sonny, put your foot on it," which he did. In later years Platon said it was the one thing in life in which he took no pride.

After assembling all the facts he could, Napoleon began writing his tome, titled, "Refutation of the Maligners and Traducers of Gen. M.G. Vallejo."

In the chapter "Los Osos" (The Bears), Napoleon's account agrees with many of the other published histories of the rebellion but brought to light some of the personal accounts of the Vallejo family.

It was no secret Gen. Vallejo favored the American takeover of California. He even put it in writing in a statement April 2, 1848, saying, "My opinion is made up that we must persevere in throwing off the galling yoke of Mexico ... We have indeed taken the first step by electing our own governor but another remains to be taken, and that is

annexation to the United States.” Because of this, the Vallejos were completely unprepared for the invasion of their homes by a group of Americans.

Mariano Vallejo, his wife, their eight children and the servants were asleep at home in the Sonoma Plaza compound on that morning of June 14, 1846, when the raid started.

Napoleon wrote, “Imagine the terror, the violent fear that must have agitated the whole family in body and mind when they woke, still in bed, to find themselves surrounded in the house by a lot of men ...” He went on to say: “Among these Bear Flag people there were some very good men, and there were men also that were not as good as they might have been, all they needed was fixing.”

Later, during the uprising, the Bear Flag leaders decided to take the prisoners to Fort Sutter, a three-day trip, for safekeeping.

Sgt. Cayetano Juarez, who had escaped from the Sonoma compound during the invasion, made his way to the home of Salvador Vallejo (Mariano's brother) located on the road to Sutter's Fort in Napa County. He warned Salvador's wife, Doa Luz Vallejo, that the Bear Flag rebels might be on their way to her home.

According to Napoleon's account, Doa Luz Vallejo attempted to hide their valuables, including \$10,000 in doubloons and a solid-gold chocolate service which weighed nearly 150 ounces. The service was prized more than money because her husband, Salvador, had hammered it out of gold using talents learned in his youth. But it was no use; the intruders found the valuables during a struggle with Doa Luz. The fate of the stolen loot is unknown.

In the meantime, Sgt. Juarez gathered a squad and hurried ahead of the rebels and their prisoners, concealing themselves in one of the passes near Green Valley. When the rebels camped for the night, Salvador, disguised as an Indian squaw, approached Gen. Vallejo, telling him that he was ready to ambush the band. Gen. Vallejo said he would have none of it and ordered Juarez on his life not to make a move.

Obedying the general's order, Juarez and his men lay down their arms and wept as the solemn procession passed near them on their way to Sutter's Fort.

California was in effect a republic for 23 days from June 14, 1846, to July 7, 1846, until the American flag was raised over Monterey and Sonoma and California became a United States territory.

Mariano Vallejo went on to distinguish himself as an American citizen. More than likely he had some regrets later, when squatters inhabited his lands and the processing of the

original land grants were fouled with politics and greed ... but that's another story.

Napoleon died in 1923 at the age of 73, never to see his book published.

Recommended reading, all available in the reference section the Vacaville Library:

"The Vallejos of California" by Madie Brown Emparan.

"Men of the California Bear Flag Revolt and their Heritage" by Barbara R. Warner

"Berryessa, The Rape of the Mexican Land Grant, Rancho Canada de Capay" by Eftimeos Salonites

Note: Sgt. Juarez Cayetano's home, built in 1840, is the old adobe building located in Napa at the corner of Silverado Trail and Soscol Avenue. Today it serves as a restaurant and bar.

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