

Rockville park - site of massacre in 1810

By Nancy Dingle

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The year was 1810 when Spain's appointed governor to California ordered a young lieutenant, Gabriel Moraga, to lead an expedition north of the Carquinez Strait. Gov. Sola wanted to learn more about the northern territory and what exploitative value it had, if any.

The Spanish soldiers had a reputation, that preceded them, with the Native Americans as they worked their way through the Americas, conquering and converting.

Upon arrival to the southern banks of the Carquinez Strait, Moraga put his men to work building rafts of tule reeds to help in crossing with their horses, the most narrow section. As the soldiers, their horses, and rafts swam the deep channel, they were spotted by members of the Patwin tribe of Suisuns.

A runner was dispatched to Chief Malica, chief of the Suisuns, encamped at Yulyul. Yulyul was the permanent camp and home to the tribe's chief.

Malica gathered a large force to repel the feared and hated Spanish. As Moraga's troops made their way up the northern bank, urging their horses on, the Suisuns began their attack with poisoned arrows and spears. The Spanish fired back, scattering the Suisuns, who up 'til then had not seen or heard of gunpowder, let alone horses.

Malica quelled his warriors' fears and the Suisuns began a running attack against the better-armed and horse-mounted Spanish. This went on for three days. The Spanish kept advancing while the Suisuns continued their assault as they retreated toward Yulyul.

When Lt. Moraga and his embattled soldiers arrived at Yulyul, their blood was up after three days of killing. No mercy was shown toward Malica, his braves, women or children. The revered chief and remaining braves took up a defensive position in one of their huts. Moraga's men set it ablaze, killing all those inside. During the confusion, many of the Suisuns fled into the hills. Those who survived the major onslaught or were unable to flee, became slaves.

In Moraga's report to the governor, he claimed that he tried to save the chief and his warriors, pleading with them to come out of the hut and surrender. Instead, he states that they all committed suicide, rather than surrender.

Yulyul was never the same again. The Suisun population never recovered to what it had been. It was in this raid that an 11-year-old boy and his friends were taken captive. The boys had been out hunting, when they spotted the smoke rising from Yulyul and hurriedly returned home to find the Spanish in charge and the village burned down.

What happened to the boys' families is not known. One can assume they were killed, since no mention was made in any record by Solano. Even at 11 years old, Sina, as he was called by his parents, was very tall for his age. As a captive, he was taken to Mission San Francisco in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) by Moraga, where he was baptized as Francisco Solano.

Years later, Solano would return to his people as a mission convert, able to read, write and keep accounts. As he obtained manhood, he stood at 6 feet, 7 inches. The Spanish missionaries had taken advantage of this tall young man to put him in charge of other neophytes. The Suisuns saw the advantage of his great height, as well, and recognized Solano as their new chieftain.

The site of the Suisuns' old village at Yulyul was homesteaded by the Martin family. They built a fine stone house at the eastern edge of the property, near a frequented byway. It was to the Martin house that Solano, around 1860, returned. He had been absent from the area for about 10 years.

After a lengthy visit with his family and his friend, Mariano Vallejo at Sonoma, he elected to return to Yulyul. The Martin family later told Vallejo that his friend arrived at their house with pneumonia and died shortly thereafter. They claimed to have buried him out near the road, under a Buckeye tree. The Martins said the great chief was buried under a cairn of stones, however, the site was lost in the "daily" farming activity.

The Martin house became known as Stonedene and is located, to this day, across

Cordelia Road from Solano Community College. The actual site of Yulyul, with its petroglyphs and acorn grinding rocks, can be found at Rockville Park.

It was near the site of the Martin house and the Buckeye tree that the statue to Chief Solano was erected in 1934. The actual gravesite is shrouded in mystery. However, the ancient site of Yulyul still remains.

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