

# Vallejo left a lasting impression

By Jerry Bowen

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California's settlement did not happen by accident, it took men of vision, courage and tireless energy. Among them were the earliest settlers of this State, the Californios.

Who were the Californios? In his book, "Berryessa," Eftimeos Salonites defines a Californio as "an Hispanic person born or bred in either Baja or Alta California."

Mariano Vallejo is one of the better-known Californios who figured heavily in the exploration, naming and settlement of California. In fact, I consider him to be our state's earliest American hero.

Mariano G. Vallejo was born in Monterey on the July 4, 1807, and at the age of 16, the husky and ambitious youngster joined the army. At that time, the army functioned primarily as policemen for the territory ranging from San Diego to San Francisco. Having learned a great deal about the California Territory while serving in the Army, Lt. Vallejo at age 22, was recognized for his bravery and sound judgment.

Ignoring the 200-year-old Spanish claim to Alta (upper) California by right of discovery, the Russians built Fort Ross and were making motions toward claiming more land.

There was little love lost between the Russians and the Spanish. Concern grew that the only way to retain the right of discovery and ownership of the area around San Francisco was to explore, map and settle the region. With that in mind, Lieutenant Vallejo was chosen to lead a mapping expedition around the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay.

In the early summer of 1830, Vallejo and 25 troopers left Monterey to begin their mission. Initially, they followed, to some degree, the same routes explored in 1772 by Fages and Crespi.

Keeping to the east of the small pueblo of San Jose, they followed the edge of the foothills in the direction of present day Hayward. The area was a vast plain of wild grain, trees, and wildlife beyond imagination.

After three days of hazardous travel, they camped for several days near what is now Seventh and Broadway in Oakland. Vallejo's memoirs made note of the "... many oak trees in the area and having to maintain large fires at night to keep the grizzly bears at

bay.”

Under way once again, Vallejo and his men continued on through today's Berkeley and Richmond, finally coming to a halt in the San Pablo area on a cape, which extended far out into the bay. Their provisions, depleted down to a small amount of a corn concoction called pinole, Vallejo sent a few troopers back to San Jose for additional supplies.

Upon their return, with the larder replenished and the men rested and renewed, the party continued their exploration.

The hills began to narrow on both sides as they neared the water's edge. There they encountered not only many native Indians, but also thousands of little crabs along the shoreline. Passing today's Port Costa area, the bay narrowed into two river branches, the Sacramento and San Joaquin.

In the Concord area a Cocasui blocked their passage. A Cocasui was described as a medicine man or agent for an evil devil called Pui. The heavily painted man wore a fantastic headdress and danced around the troopers in an attempt to scare them away.

Undaunted, the soldiers threw lariats over the Cocasui. He quickly calmed and became communicative when offered a gift. Vallejo learned the man was an important and influential agent of his master, the Devil, who lived in the depths of a large nearby mountain, he said.

From high ground in the area, they could see over a vast plain of tules, streams and rivers that appeared too arduous to cross to their next destination at Sonoma.

Retracing their steps, they decided to cross at what is known as Vallejo Junction across the straits from today's city of Vallejo. The crossing was made without incident during an incoming tide with the exception of losing a prized mare.

They camped for several days near the head of the bay before continuing through Napa Valley and on to Sonoma Valley. Vallejo considered Sonoma Valley the most beautiful place in the world and in later years would make it his home.

Leaving the Sonoma area they pressed on past Mission San Rafael and finally to the Straits of Yulupa, now known as the Golden Gate. The current was far too dangerous to permit passage across the strait, so Vallejo and the tired troops returned to San Jose via the same route they had traveled.

They had accomplished their mission of exploration and mapping and all that remained

was to name some of the sites.

Vallejo and the Commandante of Monterey studied the map and named the following sites:

The spot noted for its abundant oak trees became "Las Encinas" or The Oaks, known today as Oakland.

At the straits where they encountered the thousands of little crabs, they inserted the Greek word for crab, "Karkino." Today it is designated Carquinez Straits.

Remembering the mountain the medicine man claimed was home to the devil, they named it "Monte Diablo," or Mount Diablo.

Where the stream widened into a large bay, they encountered a large tribe of Indians called the "Suysuns." I guess I don't have to tell you it became known as Suisun Bay.

Where they crossed the river and landed is the present day site of the city of Vallejo.

Finally, on an island across from the town of Vallejo, the mare they had lost during the river crossing was found, still hale and hearty. They named it, "Isla de la yegua" or "The Isle of the Mare," known today as Mare Island.

Mariano Vallejo would continue to further distinguish himself in many ways. As one of the supporters of American takeover, he helped create the California Constitution, served as a U.S. Senator, was an earnest, loving family man and much, much more.

He was truly one the most respected Californios to grace the shores of our historic State.

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