

## Who built an adobe next to Suisun Valley oak tree?

By Nancy Dingler

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Local artist Daphne Nixon stumbled upon an old adobe building tucked under a giant, ancient oak tree on a recent foray in Suisun Valley.

This “rediscovery” of the adobe sparked a campaign to find out who built it and when.

Nixon, who paints historic sites, contacted Jerry Bowen of the Vacaville Heritage Council, hoping he might know who built the adobe. Bowen pulled out several antique maps of the area, looking for information about the building.

Unfortunately, there is, at this point, no definitive answer.

Speculation runs from the possibility that Catholic missionary Joseph Sadic Alemany, California’s first Arch Bishop, built it to possibly Suisun native construction.

According to the Catholic Church records, Alemany established a mission at Suisun in 1861. He sent Father Peter Deyaert, resident pastor of John the Baptist Church in Napa, to be in charge of the Suisun mission.

Did Alemany or Deyaert have the adobe built? 1861 seems to be a little late, but the records are fuzzy.

It is known the residents of Suisun opened their homes and parlors for the celebration of the Mass. Could Deyaert have used the adobe as a home base?

Or was the adobe a stage depot? There is a deep water well which would have been needed for a thirsty team of horses.

There were three local stage lines that ran for years under the able guidance of Milt Cutler. One line ran from the town of Monticello, which has since disappeared under Lake Berryessa. The second line ran from Vacaville and the third from Benicia, all terminating in Suisun.

We can find out when the adobe was built. It was constructed under the shade of a young oak tree. Some time during a violent storm the tree was toppled onto the

building, saving the tree from being completely uprooted and killed.

The tree has grown into a very old and stately heritage oak tree, which is what has saved the adobe from the bulldozer. The building and the oak have a symbiotic relationship.

The adobe supported the tree and now the tree is slowly growing around and through parts of the building. It would be interesting to find out exactly the age of the tree and possibly the age of the adobe.

Because of the adobe is so close to Rockville and the old home grounds of Yulyul, the Suisun's home camp, it might be the home of the christianized Chief Molina.

Could it have been Chief Solano's home? Not according to the Martin family, who homesteaded the site while Chief Solano was absent from the area more than 10 years, right after the Bear Flag Rebellion. The Martin family has long claimed they built their first homestead over the foundations of Chief Solano's adobe. If the Martin records are accurate, then it could not be Chief Solano's home.

Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, with the help of Chief Solano of the Suisuns, established ownership over a vast area of Northern California through land grants from the Mexican government before President Polk's war against Mexico, which resulted in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Years before, as a reward to his friend Chief Solano, Vallejo petitioned Mexico for a land grant that spanned the area where Yulyul once stood.

Lt. Jose Antonio Sanchez took Solano captive in a bloody raid in 1817, under orders of Spanish Gov. Jose Arguello. Yulyul was burned to the ground and a large number of the leaders died in the fire.

Solano was among the captives who were baptized at the mission in San Francisco. He grew up in the mission system and learned the ways of Europeans, their dress and way of living. He learned to read, write and cipher.

In William Heath Davis' book, "Seventy-Five Years In California", he described Solano "who stood over six feet, who possessed a very good intellect."

"This chief has received some education from the mission padres and appreciates the advance of civilization. He was companionable and pleasant in his manner and deportment, and was much respected by everyone who knew him. . .

"I knew this chief, who was a fine, intelligent and shrewd man. He often came over to San Francisco to purchase goods from Nathan Spear, whose agent I then was. He

owned 600 cattle, numerous horse and sheep and was quite a noted breeder. He was punctual in meeting his obligations and owing to this and to his affability and intelligence, was highly esteemed by us all.”

Solano built an adobe, abandoning the Patwin-Suisun reed construction. Other natives followed suit. Could this be an early adobe constructed by a Suisun? If as speculated, the building dates to the late 1830s to early 1840s, it could be one of the very earliest structures in the county.

Jose Armijo came to the area in 1839, established a ranch on the Rancho Tolenas grant he purchased from Vallejo. Except for the Armijo name on the local high school, all vestiges of the Armijo rancho have disappeared into the dust of time.

The Vaca and Pena families were lured to the area by Vallejo and settled in the Lagoon Valley area south of Vacaville in 1841.

The Pena adobe still stands, thanks to the ongoing efforts of local historians.

Sonoma has saved Vallejo's home. Sacramento takes pride in Sutter's Fort. Red Bluff has preserved William Brown Ide's adobe. As some of these early structures start to disappear, citizens come forward to save them, bless them all.

There is just something so satisfying and awe-inspiring to be able to touch a wall that was created with sweat and labor over two centuries ago.

Development is taking place near the site of this adobe and it is my understanding it will be saved. For those of us who value the achievements of those who have gone before us, it is with relief and gratitude we thank everyone involved for saving this wonderful historic artifact.

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