The Origin Of Names

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Most of us take names for granted—we're speaking of geographical locations. Yet behind some of these names are interesting stories—oftentimes legends—which would fill pages of type. Today we'll mention a few in the local area.

The City of Vallejo, of course, bears the name of its earliest illustrious citizen—General Mariano G. Vallejo, but an earlier inhabitant had named it "Eden." Ole Johnson from Sweden had deserted a windjammer on this coast, married the daughter of the Swedish consul in Acapulco, and finally arrived and built lodgings on Mare Island Straits in 1844. General Vallejo, in his service as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1849 and 1850, suggested the name of "Eureka" but his colleagues vetoed the idea in order to honor the General by giving this townsite the name of Vallejo. The General laid out the city, and gave the names of states to all east-west streets, and names of California counties to north-south streets.

To the present day citizen this would account for all downtown names except Branciforte street. At the time the city was laid out there was a Branciforte County in California. Subsequently that name was changed to Santa Cruz—but Vallejo retained the original wording.

MARE ISLAND'S SEVERAL NAMES

The earliest name recorded for our great naval station was the one given by Don Ayala, skipper of the Spanish sloop San Carlos, in the year 1775, and now recorded in the records in Seville, Spain, as "Isla Plana." We could never understand why Ayala called our neighbor "flat island" as it contains at least two hills over 200 feet in height. Sometime in the late 1830s it was renamed by General Vallejo who, according to legend, rescued a white mare that swam to the island after being thrown overboard in Carquinez Straits when a barge capsized. The new name was "Isla de la Yegua," or Isle of the Mare—and now Mare Island.

UP VALLEY CITIES HAVE EASTERN FLAVOR

Solano County cities are named for various reasons, but some localities are living reminders of eastern communities. Elmira and Batavia are related to New York State cities; Fairfield and Cordelia (formerly Bridgeport) go back to Connecticut. One of the up-county's early pioneers was Colonel Waterman who founded both Fairfield and

Bridgeport. Fairfield is named for his birthplace in Connecticut; Bridgeport for the birthplace of his wife. In naming the streets for Fairfield, Colonel Waterman included "Great Jones street." This is the name of a busy street in New York's Manhattan borough—but it also happened to have been the address of Colonel Waterman sweethearts, so the story goes. Mrs. Waterman; questionably miffed by this fact, demanded that` town—a whole town—be named for her. With considerable ceremony, including the breaking of a bottle of champagne on an iron hitching post in front of one of the three hotels in Bridgeport, that town became and is now "Cordelia."

One of the fastest growing areas in the county is Green Valley. Back in the 30s and 40s this was called Green Hollow, and some attribute this name to John A. Sutter of Sutter's Fort. The road (at least saddle horse trail) from Sutter's Fort to General Vallejo's properties in Sonoma County, and to Fort Ross, ran along the present Rockville road from Suisun Valley into Green Valley, over the hills back of the Country Club into Coornbsville, Napa County, thence through the State Hospital grounds to a ford across Napa River where Soscol Creek flows into Napa River. This spot was then known as Thompson's Gardens.

OUR NAPA VALLEY NEIGHBORS

The names of many valleys in the Napa-Solano area are reminders of the early Mexican grants, or of those who held these grants.

Berryessa Valley was named for Jose and Sisto Berryessa who first settled there. The creek is named for the Rancho Las Putas, title of the grant—and now called Putah Creek.

Pope Valley commemorates its first settler, Julien Pope, who arrived in 1841.

Yountville honors early pioneer George Calvert Yount who arrived in the Napa-Sonoma area in 1831, and settled on his Rancho in Napa Valley in 1836. The town was named Sebastopol by Yount—later changed on the insistence of the Post Office Department to avoid conflict with another of the same name in Sonoma County.

Beautiful Chiles Valley was settled by the family of Joseph B. Chiles, who first came across the mountains in a covered wagon train with the Kelsey families. The Kelseys were the early settlers in Calistoga, but later went to Lake County and are remembered by the name of Kelseyville.

Calistoga, incidentally, is a story all by itself—the story of the fabulous Sam Brannan. Because of its many hot springs the upper valley spot was first known as Agua Caliente, but when Brannan built a half million dollar resort there in 1860 he combined

the names of California (Cali) and Saratoga Springs, New York (stoga).

Gordon Valley, which lies partly in Solano County, and the site of Vallejo's Lake Curry, honors the pioneer William Gordon, who settled there in the 1840s. It was Gordon's daughter who married the early Napa pioneer Nathan Coombs in that decade—and these two families have been prominent in the civic and political life of Central California for more than a century.

We are indebted to Napa County's ablest historian, Ivy M. Loeber of St. Helena, for some background on the Napa name. It was originally spelled "Nappa," and was the name of an Indian tribe that lived in a village on the river in the southern Hart of the county. The meaning has been variously interpreted. Some historians say it meant "village"; others "fish." One Indian authority wrote that Nappa was the word for "the food you eat as you travel," which was a sort of mush made by putting water, meal and hot rocks in an Indian basket cook, and carried thus while traveling.