

## **Buildings That Are Old, New**

**By Ernest D. Wichels**

Monday, June 29, 1964

Several days ago the Casa de Vallejo was heavily damaged by fire. The blaze was confined to the wooden, or eastern portion of the structure. The younger generation is undoubtedly of the opinion that this has always been a hotel—but less than 50 years ago it served an entirely different purpose.

At the height of World War I it became apparent that the thousands of male workers in Mare Island and Vallejo needed a “physical fitness” program. (Two years or so ago the late President Kennedy felt the same need to bolster our national well-being, and today “Stan the Man” Musial heads this program.) So, in 1918, the citizens of Vallejo sponsored the Industrial Y.M.C.A. and installed a physical fitness program.

The “Y” was built—and today this original “Y” structure is the Sonoma Street portion of the Casa de Vallejo. The hotel lobby was the reading and writing room of the “Y”; the present coffee shop was the locker and shower room. The rooms upstairs were dormitories for bachelors. The current Spanish Room, where the city’s service clubs hold weekly luncheons, was the open handball court, and one of the city’s champions was Kenneth R. Dick of York Street. The Garden Room floor is built over the swimming pool (the pool is still there!). Over the pool was the gymnasium—the principal game was volley ball.

Three times a week a number of local men gathered at 5:30 for an hour’s contest. Director was the late “Pop” Loomis, one of the most popular coaches ever to reside in Vallejo. Some of the regulars at these evening games were the Reverend Dr. Mobley of the Presbyterian Church, Assistant Postmaster Ralph Casaday, Druggists Les and Bert Knott, Machinist Terrell and the writer.

Following the war, about 1922, it became financially impracticable to maintain the Industrial “Y” by popular subscription and it was closed. Sometime later, Vallejo’s successful businessman, Harry Handlery, purchased the property and with the aid of architects Slocombe and Tuttle, created the Casa de Vallejo Hotel. Later, the 5-story western wing was added.

### **OLDEST SUISUN VALLEY HOME**

In the Vallejo Chronicle of May 15, 1895, appears this item: “The oldest house in Suisun, Valley belongs to Mr. Henry Martin. It is a stone structure two stories high and

bears the date of 1861 on the cap stone. At that time Mr. Martin settled in the valley with his father, who came here in 1850. On this ranch the Suisun Indians used to have their headquarters. 'In that adobe there,' said Mr. Martin, 'old Chief Solano died'." It is reputed that Chief Solano is buried near the buckeye tree across the highway from the stone residence.

However, the reliable historian of the Solano County Historical Society, Wood Young of Fairfield, amends the above account. He advises that the oldest surviving house in Suisun Valley is the two story stone home built by Nathan Barbour in 1859.

Barbour was the son-in-law of bandy Alford, early pioneer, who donated the site of the historical Rockville Stone Chapel, built in 1856. The 1861 Martin home is the second oldest. Family tradition says the impressive stone house cost \$8,000 and is built from stone quarried in the nearby Martin Hills. The same stone appears in the Chapel and in the Club House of Green Valley. It was extensively remodeled in 1922 and again in 1927 by Samuel Martin, now deceased, son of the pioneer. It is now occupied by his widow, Mrs. Martin.

Vallejoans as well as other county residents are familiar with this house, on the Suisun Valley Road, midway between U. S. 40 at Cordelia and the Rockville Corners. Incidentally, the buckeye tree mentioned by the Vallejo Chronicle in 1895 is still there beside the road, but no one yet knows where Chief Solano is actually buried.

### EARLY CHURCH STRUCTURE

Some weeks ago we spoke of the building of the century-old Ascension Episcopal Church. We shall continue with other early churches. The first Catholic Church in Vallejo was located at the corner of Capitol and Marin, where the E and J Travel Agency is now situated. This was in the early 50's. In 1867, General John B. Frisbie donated half a block to St. Vincent's on Florida, Sacramento and Santa Clara, and on June 18, 1867, the cornerstone was laid. On June 27, 1868-96 years ago this week the church was dedicated by the Most Rev. J. S. Alemany, Archbishop of San Francisco. Alemany Boulevard in San Francisco bears his name.

The local parish priest who was instrumental in the building of St. Vincent's was the Rev. John Louis Daniel.

Things were not too serene however, in the first two weeks of St. Vincent's existence. The Vallejo Chronicle of July 7, 1868 has this story: "Vallejo was visited by a lightning storm last night which struck a corner of a warehouse on Mare Island (Building 71), and completely shattered one of the crosses on the south side of the Catholic Church tower, but no damage to either structure."

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