

Historical Sites Marked

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Our readers, like all Solano and Napa County residents, are inveterate motorists. One can meet drivers of local automobiles on any given day in almost any spot in California. Along with the highway safety signs, directional signs, etc., one does not travel far without seeing this one: "Historical Marker, 500 Feet."

How many Napa and Solano residents have actually stopped to read the marker? California's golden history is written in nearly 800 bronze markers scattered about this state, but in truth they are about the most lonesome objects along our highways.

Let's look at a few of those which are nearby. It may be more convenient to read them here than by pulling out of speeding traffic.

There is a difference between historic parks and historical monuments and historical landmarks. The parks and monuments are areas set aside by the State of California as having a special role in California's history. Accordingly, they are administered by the Division of Beaches and Parks, and staffed by rangers, historians, and historical guides for maintenance, and for interpreting the area for the public.

Solano County has one—the Benicia Capitol, ably administered by Ranger Edward W. Strouse and his assistants. Other examples are Fort Ross, the Jack London Home at Glen Ellen, and the Sonoma Barracks and General Vallejo's home in nearby Sonoma.

Historical landmarks, with which this column will deal today, are sites, actual buildings or features which are important but not appropriate for operation as state historical parks or monuments.

SOLANO LANDMARKS

There are nine historical landmarks in Solano. No. 153 is located at the Benicia Capitol and commemorates the founding and naming of Benicia by Robert Semple. No. 174, also in Benicia, located at West J St., marks the first building erected in California by a Masonic Lodge for use as a hall. The hall was built in 1850 and occupied by Masonic Lodge No. 5 until 1888; subsequently used as a boys' club and later as an American Legion Hall; it was re-acquired by Benicia Lodge No. 5 in 1850.

Markers Nos. 175, 176 and 177 are also in our historic neighboring city of Benicia. No.

175 marks the site of the first Presbyterian Church in that city on April 15, 1849—the first Protestant church established in California with an ordained resident pastor. No. 176 tells of the establishment of the Arsenal by Captain Charles P. Stone in August 1851. No. 177 marks the establishment of Benicia Barracks on April 30, 1849, which was later merged with the Arsenal. First Lieut Ulysses S. Grant was stationed here in 1852 and 1853.

A spot familiar to all Vallejo travelers is marker No. 534, the Vaca-Pena Adobe on U.S. 40 about 2 miles west of Vacaville. This is the Oldest structure in our county.

No. 574 was dedicated right here in Vallejo—the site of the State Capitol from February 1851 to February 1853. This marker was located at 219 York St. until the Redevelopment program began; the bronze tablet is now in the office of the Vallejo Redevelopment Agency, 516 Marin St., and will be relocated at the site of the capitol building when improvements are completed.

MARE ISLAND MARKER

About four years ago the state appropriately recognized Mare Island, and the bronze plaque is artistically mounted on the wood stock anchor of the old ship SARANAC at the foot of Tennessee Street. Marker No. 751 reads: FIRST U.S. NAVAL STATION IN THE PACIFIC. Mare Island Navy Yard was established Sept. 16, 1854, by the then Commander David G. Farragut, USN. Site selected in 1852 by a commission headed by Commodore John D. Sloat, USN. Mare Island had the Navy's first shipyard, ammunition depot, hospital, Marine barracks, cemetery, chapel, and radio station in the Pacific."

On May 30, 1963, the Solano County Historical Society in cooperation with the Division of Beaches and Parks dedicated Marker No. 779 at the Rockville Stone Chapel, near the junction of Suisun Valley Road and Rockville Road. We suggest that readers visit this quaint chapel and one of the oldest cemeteries in Solano County. The plaque reads: "Erected by pioneers of Methodist Episcopal Church South with volunteer labor and donated funds. Cornerstone laid Oct. 3, 1856. Dedicated Feb. 1857. Site supplied by Landy and Sarah Alford. Chapel deteriorated by 1929 and deeded by the church to Rockville Public Cemetery as a pioneer monument. Restored in 1940."

NAPA COUNTY PLAQUES

Napa has thirteen markers—each worthy of your inspection. The best known is No. 359, the Old Bale Mill, 3 miles north of St. Helena. An intensive campaign is now under way to secure public subscriptions for restoration. Another mill, marked by No. 547, is the Chiles Mill, located in Chiles Valley some seven or eight miles east of Rutherford. It was

built by Joseph Chiles about 1845, and was used until the 1880s. The foundations are still there—the country is beautiful and worth the trip.

No. 561 is Schramsberg, the first hillside winery of the Napa Valley, founded in 1862 by Jacob Schram. Located three miles south of Calistoga on Highway 29. Another winery, the Charles Krug, is marker No. 563—the oldest operating winery in the Napa Valley, just north of St. Helena. The next number, 564, marks the log blockhouse constructed in 1836 by George C. Yount, pioneer settler; No. 693 marks the grave and monument of Yount, founder of Yountville. Both are at Yountville.

Calistoga claims several markers. No. 682 is the site of pioneer John York's log cabin, and No. 683 site of pioneer Hudson's cabin. Sam Brannan's cottage and his store are both appropriately marked, Nos. 684 and 685. The cottage is all that remains of Brannan's dream to make Calistoga the "Saratoga of California." The Kelsey House is likewise marked, as is the historic railway depot.

Finally, on Mt. St. Helena, north of Calistoga, is the Robert Louis Stevenson Memorial State Park, where the immortal writer lived in 1880 and wrote the "Silverado Squatters."

Wherever you drive, take time to drive off the road when you see the sign: "Historical Marker, 500 Feet."

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