

Old Stone Building Sparks New Historical Research and Discoveries

Jerry Bowen

Our voyage of discovery began when Cordelia historian and artist, Daphne Nixon, called me and asked if I knew anything about a small rubble stone and adobe building on Suisun Valley Road near the college. Since then we have found that Solano County is lucky enough to have roughly a mile of historic sites that date back to the earliest *recorded* history of the county that still survive in one form or another.

That historic mile extends from Rockville to Interstate 80 where thousands commuters pass daily, unaware of the historic significance of the sites along Suisun Valley Road.

The sites include Rockville itself, the Pony Express Trail, an old wagon and stage road, the site of Chief Solano's rancheria (village) a mission site, an old structure built of stone, Chief Solano's original gravesite and the original location of Cordelia before it was moved to its present site.

It was along this route that the first Pony Express rider, William Hamilton, rode from Rockville to Benicia on April 23, 1860.

One of the sites, the Santa Eulalia Mission was known about but the location or its status was not. For over a hundred seventy years it was assumed there was nothing left of the mission buildings.

A call from Cordelia artist and historian, Daphne Nixon set Carol Noske, and Jerry Bowen on a fantastic trip through time researching old records, history books and maps trying to learn more about the small rubble stone structure near Suisun Valley Road on the old Mangels Winery property.

To fully appreciate the history of this important area, we need to start with the earliest documented history. The first historical documents about the Suisun Indians were recorded at the Mission San Francisco de Assis also known as Mission Dolores at San Francisco.

In January 1804 fourteen neophytes (Christianized Indians) took a trip from the mission for the East Bay and never returned.

Their deaths were documented in the Mission Dolores's Libro de Difuntos (Book of the Deceased).

They were probably killed while trying to bring relatives back to the missions who were living among the Suisuns and their allies the Chupcans.”the Suisuns’ repelled all intrusions by the Christian Indians until 1810. They also protected mission runaways who did not wish to be Christianized

On February 5, 1810 the Spanish governor and the commander of the San Francisco Presidio were preparing an expedition into Suisun territory at the same time the missionaries at San Francisco were allowing newly converted Carquins (Vallejo Tribe” to go back home on “paseo,” (authorized trips). The San Francisco Mission documents recorded the following report:

“On February 16 or 19, 1810 in the rancheria of the pagans called SuyuSuyu, they killed three neophytes. Seven people had gone on a “paseo” to the rancheria of the Karquines and four had remained there. The other three had gone on to said rancheria of SuyuSuyu, where they had friends. They were killed just as they were coming near. So swear their companions, who say the pagan Chupanes (tribe of Indians centered around today’s Concord.) came and told them this.”

In a report to the Viceroy, Commandante Arrillaga prepared for a major punitive expedition against the Suisuns as follows:

“He ordered the commander of the San Francisco Presidio, Second-Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga, to go out in pursuit of pagans of the village called Sespesuyu to the north of the San Francisco Presidio. Over the past three years they have brought things to a sorry state, having killed over that time sixteen Christians.”

Second-Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga with seventeen soldiers and an auxiliary force of Christian Indians of unknown size attacked the Suisun force of 120 on May 22, 1810 near today’s Suisun City. Note that many of the history books say the attack was at today’s Rockville. This error in history can mostly be traced to General Mariano Vallejo.

The military force brought six boys and six girls back to San Francisco, a mixed group of Suisuns and Chupcans and they were baptized at Mission San Francisco. Arrillaga filed the following report based on Moraga’s statement of the battle:

“Said second-lieutenant... took as prisoners eighteen pagans. They were set free because they were gravely wounded and he had no way to transport them. He believes that not one of them could have avoided death. Toward the end of the action the surviving Indians sealed themselves in three brush houses, from which they made a tenacious defence, wounding the corporals and two soldiers. Those were the only injuries sustained by the troop. No one was killed. After having killed the pagans in two of the grass houses, the Christians set fire to the third grass house, as a means to take the pagans prisoner. But they did not achieve that result, since the valiant Indians died enveloped in flames before they could be taken into custody. The second lieutenant says that he could not reason with the pagans, who died fighting or by burning.”

On December 22, 1810 Mission San Francisco baptismal records show that eleven Suisun Indians were baptized along with five Indians of other tribes. Four of the Suisun women had their marriage renewed in the Catholic faith on the same date.

The exodus of the Suisuns from their homeland in Suisun Valley to the San Francisco Mission continued during 1811. Between March and June 1811 sixty-nine more Suisuns were baptized including forty-eight adults and 21 children.

By 1813 most of the Suisun Indians had been removed from their tribal lands to the missions at San Jose and San Francisco including 10 year-old Sina, the real name of our "Chief" Solano, not Sem-Yeto.

In 1823 a 36-year-old Spanish priest, Friar Jose Altimira was in charge of Mission Dolores in San Francisco. Early in the same year he prepared a proposal to expand Mexican Settlements into the northern area of California. In April his proposal to join Mission San Rafael Archangel to Mission Dolores as well as sites in the Petalumas Indian area. Friar Juan Amoros who was in charge of the San Rafael Mission opposed it.

But Friar Altimira who may be described as a little headstrong went ahead any way and began an expedition on June 25, 1823 to seek out sites in the north.

During the trip he camped to the west of present-day Sonoma at a site with many hot and cold springs now occupied by the Cline Winery on Highway 121. He liked the area but continued his search eventually entering Suisun Valley near present-day Rockville.

Santa Eulalia Asistencia is established in Suisun Valley

During his expedition to establish the last mission to be built in California in 1824, Friar Altamira pretty much had his mind made up to place it at today's Sonoma. But, he continued on to check out areas a little further including the Napa area and at Suisun Valley near today's Rockville. He rejected both as the final and only mission site to be established under Mexican rule. Napa was rejected even though it had many of the same assets as the Sonoma area but not as much available water and Suisun Valley because of a lack of timber that could be used for building and the excessive distance from the Presidio of San Francisco.

Building of the Sonoma Mission was begun in the spring of 1824 and 602 Christian Indians from the older missions had been moved there by the end of 1824. The first new convert at the mission was an Ululato from the Vacaville area, baptized on April 4, 1824.

By the end of the year, Altimira also decided to establish a Rancho near Rockville about a quarter mile south of today's Stonedene Mansion. The site probably had been part of the original Suisun Indian village that extended to the site where the Stonedene Mansion stands today. Even though it didn't have the qualities for a full mission it was considered

an ideal area for raising horses and cattle. Along with the Rancho he also built a small sub-Mission known as an Asistencia, naming it Santa Eulalia. It included a temporary house for the neophyte Indian Alcalde (Mayor), probably Jesus Molino of the original Suisun Village, and a horse corral that was run by the Alcalde and his family. An adobe house was built for the use of visiting padres.

According to San Francisco Mission records, an infant that had been born at Santa Eulalia was baptized on August 14, 1827.

In the following year a Christian Tolena woman, Olimpia Nauayac, died at Santa Eulalia. She was the mother of Hipolito Guilac who had been baptized at the Mission Delores at San Francisco.

Hipolito died at the Santa Eulalia ranch four years later. The records stated, "The first day of February, 1832, I gave Holy Burial to the body of the neophyte Hipolito, former nurse, former cook, interpreter of the three languages that predominate at this mission, that is to say, four, Kacunda, Petaluma, Suysun, and Huiluc, and most recently the catechist and baptizer of the sick and the babies of the non-Christians that live at the Rancho of Santa Eulalia in the locality or land of Suysun ... He had been baptized at the Mission of Our Patron San Francisco on January 26, 1812. (signed Friar Fortuney)"

During those years from 1824 to 1832 the Christian Indians grew crops and ran livestock around the site and probably lived in wattle houses between the adjacent hills and the present day Suisun Valley Road area. They also worked to convert non-Christians from Hill Patwin and Valley Patwin tribes to the north.

The Suisun Indian, Sino, was baptized at Mission Delores at San Francisco Solano and given the name Francisco Solano on July 24, 1810, shortly after the battle between Moraga and the Suisun Indians. He was among the Indians that were sent to the Mission San Francisco Solano at Sonoma in 1824 at the age of about twenty-five and by 1826 he was one of the alcaldes (missionary-controlled Indian headmen) of the Sonoma Mission. Note, the name "Sem-Yet-To" was not applied to him nor was there any indication as to being a chief of the Suisuns yet.

The 1836 census shows there were 552 Indians at the new Pueblo of Sonoma. Francisco Solano was still listed as one of the six Indian alcaldes at the pueblo of Sonoma.

By October 1837 Solano was listed as a head-of-family, with an eighteen-person household including seven women and girls ranging in age from twenty down to nine years old.

Other records from Mission Delores show some of his marriages as follows: Francisco Solano Sina married Helena Saquenmupi (SF5-B 371) a Wappo/Coast Miwok speaking Aloquiomis from Pope Valley at Mission San Francisco Solano in October of 1827. She died in 1830. In April of 1833 he married eighteen-year-old Guida Coulas a Patwin speaking Topaytos from today's Berryessa area. Later and possibly the last records

available show that Francisco Solano married twelve year old Maria del Rosario Ullumole on January 9, 1839. In 1874 a writer for Hubert Howe Bancroft, Henry Cerutti , interviewed what was claimed to be Francisco Solano's last and favorite wife, Isidora Filomena, though no official record seems to exist documenting their marriage. A fire in 1896 at the Sonoma Mission may have destroyed the official record of their marriage.

Secularization of the California missions, the process to take the missions away from the church and placing them under government rule, was ordered by Governor José Figueroa by proclamation in 1834. Under the rules of Secularization, the Indian neophyte heads of household were to receive parcels of land, "not over 400 nor less than 100 varas square," (one vara equaled a little less than 3 feet).

In 1838 Francisco Solano was issued a provisional grant of four leagues of land (approximately 17,000 acres) by Vallejo for his service to the General. The grant, Suisun Grant, included Francisco Solano's original homelands at the asistencia, Santa Eulalia, near Rockville. Apparently, Solano moved back to his original home at the asistencia for the next few years although he remained in contact with General Vallejo.

By 1838 the plague descended on the northern provinces and in two years it was estimated that between 60,000 and 70,000 Indians had died of the disease. By 1839 much of the mission at Sonoma was in ruins and Francisco Solano no longer appeared in the mission's vital registers.

The official title to Rancho Suisun was finally granted to Francisco Solano on January 28, 1842. Vallejo bought the land from Solano just four months later, in May of 1842. Francisco Solano's provisional grant issued to him in 1837 was finally made official on January 28, 1842. It is interesting to note that General Vallejo's own personal lawyer represented Francisco Solano and Vallejo's nephew, Governor Juan Alverado, approved the final grant. It appears that crafty old General Vallejo's intention all along was to acquire the Suisun Rancho for his own use when he bought the land from Francisco Solano just four months later for \$1,000. In 1850 he sold the land to Archibald Ritchie for \$50,000, a tidy profit by any measure.

At this point we don't know how much time Solano actually spent at the Santa Eulalia Asistencia. Most travelers that wrote accounts of their trips through the area during the 1840s usually only mentioned one of Solano's fellow Indians, Jesus Molino.

One thing seems certain is that in 1846 when the Bear Flag Revolt occurred, Francisco Solano disappeared from the scene altogether. It is said that he feared that his good friend Vallejo died when he was imprisoned at Sutter's Fort. Unsubstantiated rumors say that he wandered far to the north, even as far as Alaska, although that is hard to believe.

In 1848 the war with Mexico ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and California was annexed to the United States. The gold rush began and was the pivotal

point for great changes by 1850 in California. Solano had returned in 1850 to find his old friend Vallejo was still alive and then returned to his home at the Santa Eulalia Asistencia. Vallejo was elected to the first session of the California Congress and was selected to serve as chairman of a committee that was to define the derivations of the new counties. It is in the report that the first documented evidence that Francisco Solano was "...the great Chief of the tribes originally denominated Suisunes...The residence of this chief was the valley of Suisun...Before receiving the baptismal name of Solano, the chief was called "Sem-yeto," which signifies the "brave of fierce hand." So, from that day on Sino, AKA Francisco Solano, became known in history as "Chief Solano."

Samuel Martin arrived in Suisun Valley from his gold mining ventures in 1850 and settled or perhaps more accurately "squatted" on land quite possibly at the mostly deserted asistencia where he found "Chief" Solano who had become desperately ill who soon died.

From this point on history becomes quite unclear as to accuracy and documentation of Solano's death. Various reports over the years placed his burial under a buckeye tree alongside the Old Sacramento Road (today's Suisun Valley Road) near Rockville across from the Martin stone mansion that was built in 1861. The burial site is commemorated with a bronze plaque on the Solano County College campus today. The road has had been modified and widened over the years and the Buckeye tree no longer exists.

On December 11, 1850 General Vallejo sold most of the Suisun Ranch to A. A. Ritchie. Ritchie then sold one-third of the Suisun Rancho to Captain Waterman. The ownership by Ritchie was confirmed in 1853 and a patent issued later. Samuel Martin then made his first purchase of Suisun Rancho land from Waterman on February 10, 1853 consisting of 136.60 acres together with a piece containing six acres and making altogether 142.60 statute acres. That six-acre piece was from that time on surveyed as a separate property, and as we shall see, it appears that the location was the site of the old Santa Eulalia Mission/Asistencia site.

Another old stone building surfaces.

In a biography in the 1909 *California Historical and Biographical Record*, about Sam Martin, it states the following:

The Santa Eulalia Mission site had pretty much fallen into ruins because all the Suisun Indians had either died or moved to other locations after the secularization of the missions. Only one of the tribe is known for sure to have remained, Jesus Molino, because of land court case testimony when witnesses testified they had seen or visited with him and information in his probate (# 005) located in the Fairfield Archives. He was described as living in either a large adobe or a small stone house with several acres of land nearby under cultivation depending on whose testimony was given.

An early survey of the Suisun Rancho for A. A. Ritchie shows a structure with nearby cultivated land in approximately the same location as the small stone adobe building located on the old Mangel's Winery property. Today the structure is located in the field adjacent to the WestAmerica Bank parking lot on WestAmerica drive. Over the years the little edifice is known to have been used as a stage watering stop and a tool room for Mangel's Winery. The small building was preserved as a historic site in the Pony Express Business Park development being built by Headwaters Development Company today.

Another stone structure is located on the six-acre site that was part of Martin's original purchase and which I believe may have been the central site of the Santa Eulalia Mission/Rancheria.

The Canevascini Winery at Santa Eulalia

Now, let's take a look at some more of the history of this piece of significant land.

The Indians no longer existed as a tribe in the area, Samuel Martin bought the property in the early 1850s and title to the land was secure as a result of the Land Grant litigations and resolution.

Stepping back a little, Giovanni (John) Canevascini was born in Ticano, Switzerland to parents Giacomo and Annuciata (Piantoni) Canevascini on February 17, 1847. In the "1912 History of Solano and Napa Counties" a short biography continues as follows:

"At the age of twenty-two years, in 1869, he came to the United States, landing on the Atlantic Coast, and from there coming to California. From San Francisco he came afterward to Solano County, finding employment in a vineyard; he also built twelve miles of fence in Monterey County. All of this experience was of untold value to him, not only giving a much-needed income, but giving him an excellent opportunity to see the country at the same time. In 1877 he purchased property near Suisun, and this has been his home ever since. His ranch comprises six acres and is planted to vines and fruit exclusively.

"Mr. Canevascini's marriage united him with Miss Rosa Nessi, who had come to this country from Switzerland in 1877, the year of their marriage. Two children were born of this union, but only one is now living, Ida, at home with her parents."

In a series of property transactions between Samuel Martin, and brothers Peter and Giovanni Canevascini from 1877 to 1880 Peter and Giovanni acquired the Santa Eulalia Mission property that had been on the southwestern corner of Martins Ranch.

Now we have to speculate again as to what was or wasn't there at the time. It is possible that the mission building itself was still standing at that time. Inside one of the rooms there is an unusual "sink" sculptured from the wall's stonework with a hole that drained the contents onto the floor. Also embedded in the stone wall are cut nails that were probably used to hang articles or clothing on. The nails in the wall are of the Type B cut nails dating from 1820 to 1900. This could possibly be used to help establish about when the stone portion of the structure was built.

Apparently, the Canevascini's constructed a wooden building on top of the original stone building. Barely visible today, painted on the front of one of the wooden sections of the building is a very faded "Peter Canevascini Winery". The nails used in that part of the building are of the wire nail variety.

Rosa Canevascini died in 1929 and Giovanni in 1931 and were buried in Rockville Cemetery along with their daughter Mary who died in 1887 at the age of seven.

On November 15, 1904, Peter Canevascini sold two and one-half acres to Antonio Pienovi for ten dollars. The property has remained in the Pienovi family's hands since then.

Sacrarium tells a tale of early local mission

I had been wondering whether the lower, stone-built section of the Canavascini Winery building might have been standing at the time of the active mission period from 1825 to 1838. The unusual 'sink' sculptured from the wall's stonework with a hole that drained the contents onto the floor was also a mystery.

The answers to the mysteries came from the editor of the Vacaville "Reporter" Karen Nolan

Karen obviously was excited about what she wrote in her e-mail to me, and after I read it I almost fell over. I believe she had identified the best clue as to the building's original purpose and it has been right there, visible to anyone who had an idea about what the purpose of the sink was.

Karen said it was a sacrarium. She said "When I covered the building of St. Joseph's (and also Mt. Carmel) churches, I learned about the special room with the sink connected directly to the ground."

Thank goodness she told me what a sacrarium was because I am not of the Catholic persuasion.

In short, "In ecclesiastical usage the term was given to a shallow stone basin, the French cuvette, placed near the altar in a church, with drains to take away the water used in the ablutions at the Mass. A sacrarium is a special basin that is connected by a pipe directly to the ground. Sacrariums are found inside Roman Catholic Church buildings. The purpose of the sacrarium is to dispose of water used sacramentally, and particles of the consecrated Eucharist by returning these particles directly to the earth from which it came.

"The presence of the sacrarium shows our reverent care for holy things. When materials designated for a sacred purpose have completed their service, we honor them even in their disposal. By returning our sacred substances to the earth beneath the church building, we honor them, the ground over which we worship, and the God who created them and consecrated them to nourish our faith."

The “sink” may be the best clue we have that identifies the smaller of two rooms in the stone section of the building as quite likely the Santa Eulalia Mission Church built in 1824-25 by Father Altimira as a sub-mission to the Sonoma Mission.

The other, much larger room, was most likely the main room where services were held if we are right. Not only is there an excellent chance it is the Mission, but also it would now be the oldest standing structure in Solano County at about 182 years old and it’s in very good condition.

If I appear to be cautiously optimistic, I am. Only when people who are considered experts in the matter have studied the area can we actually say it is one hundred percent what we think it is.

We are looking for someone now.

We must also thank the Pienovi family, Ronald and Gordene, and their son Mike who lives on the property, their daughter Julia and her husband Matthew Forristall, all who have an avid interest in the local history. They have been completely open to the intrusion of their lives by members of the Vacaville Heritage Council and the Reel History Video crew many times over in a spirit of cooperation that has been beyond all expectations.

Developers have been trying for quite a while to buy the property, but thanks to the Pienovis, it isn’t going to happen.

As Mike commented one day, “I intend to live here until I die and I hope my kids one day will also feel the same.”

Now that it is out in the open about what a jewel Solano County, and specifically Suisun Valley may have, we will close this part of the story of what I consider the most significant mile of recorded history of Solano County History and more specifically along Suisun Valley Road.

Santa Eulalia-A final Summary

I diverted a little from the story when the sink was identified as a sacrarium and helped identify the stone portion of the “Canevascini Winery” as possibly the original Santa Eulalia Chapel building and its significance as a historical site.

Giovanni (John) Canevascini’s brother, Peter Canevascini, sold the Canevascini property to Antonio Pienovi for a ten dollar gold coin in 1904. Giovanni’s wife Rosa died in 1929 and he passed away in 1931. Both are buried in the Rockville Cemetery.

Sometime in the 1920s Antonio Pienovi built a home on the property and is today occupied by his grandson, Mike. One of the stories I was told by the family is that during the days of prohibition the family had their own small private “moonshine still” that was used by family and friends for their own use and parties. Also, at one time a renter occupied the home that Antonio built but couldn’t afford the rent for a time. So, in compensation, he built a large fountain sometime in the 1930s that is still in use today. It is a rather unique piece of artwork of the times built of any and everything that was available including mine drill cores, miscellaneous rock from the gold country and various other items. It is a beautiful piece of work.

Nothing appears to have been known about the source of a trough that was used as a watering source for horses or the building the Pienovie's used as their own "Pienovi Winery" over the ensuing years.

In 1940 a "Hendry & Bowman" report about adobes and other buildings in the S. F. Bay Area stated, "The Sonoma Mission report of December stated that a rancho had been established in a place called Suisun...and provisional house had been erected by the mayordomo." This was the Santa Eulalia sub-Mission of the Sonoma Mission.

Then Rodney Rulofson made a visit to the site in 1957 and determined the "horse trough" was actually a crude baptismal font. The *Daily Republic* published an article on the find May 5, 1957. In it Rodney stated, "Evidence so far points to the existence of an 1800 Mission branch established by Father Jose Altimira near Rockville. These missionary branches were called asistencia...the baptismal font seems so far to be authentic except for the cross usually seen on them, but Rulofson pointed out that these Indians who built them were most primitive."

In 1992, late Vacaville Heritage Council (VHC) Historian, Bert Hughes, also made a visit to the site and took measurements and photos of the font. Nothing more seems to have been done with the discovery that we could find.

So, last year we at the VHC decided it was time to see what we could find out about the font after Daphne Nixon found the old stone adobe not far away from the Santa Eulalia site. In reviewing old maps and surveys of the area it appeared the stone adobe was very old and could possibly have been a part of the old Santa Eulalia Mission. Alissa DeCarro sent a letter to property owners in the area asking if any of them had a large bowl shaped item on their property and got a quick response from Gordene Peienovi.

What followed was the story you have been reading about in the previous eight parts. The Pienovi's have been great to work with. They welcomed all our interviews and visits to the property as well as allowing considerable video work by Ted Haskins and Jesse Hayden to record the site as completely as possible for future research and verification that the stone structure on the property is in fact the original Santa Eulalia Mission church.

You might say we have come full circle, but the research will continue. If it does prove to be the original chapel, it is the only asistencia structure to still be in mostly original condition in California. This would make it a very significant historic site for Solano County.

In addition, while we were doing our research, we may have determined that the original location of Cordelia before it was moved to its current site might have been at the old truck stop at the intersection of Suisun Valley Road and I-80. But...that's another story to be researched and told.