SUISUN INDIAN TIMELINE

The first historical documents about the Suisun Indians were recorded at the Mission San Francisco de Assis also known as Mission Delores at San Francisco.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 Delores’s Libro de Difuntos (Book of the Deceased) as follows:

"On January 25, 1804 a party left here for the other shore to the east of the mission at about ten in the morning. Shortly afterward a strong storm came up. Fourteen men went on this occasion. In the days immediately after we received reports that everything seemed fine. We heard nothing more until, three weeks having passed; we heard that the party went far beyond the strait of the Carquines to the village of Suyusuyu. (Suisun) ... It is not possible to affirm whether they died by drowning or at the hands of the pagans, as the incident has caused everyone to stop talking. But I am inclined to believe that they died by drowning. If the pagans had killed them, their relatives would have told me about it. Four Christians from another party said that on the March 7 they [the former group], definitely left the area directly across the bay."

In June 1809, the Carquin Indians that inhabited the area around present-day Vallejo moved to Mission San Francisco. Sixty Carquin children under age, ten were baptized that summer. Until the Carquins moved to the mission, they more or less served as a buffer from the Spanish for the Suisuns.

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 to go back home on "paseo," (authorized trips). The San Francisco Mission documents recorded the following report as a result of the "paseo":

"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.”

The three men killed were all Carquins that had been baptized two months earlier.

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 fighting men on May 22, 1810 near Rockville.

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.

Buoyed with some success in converting Suisun Indians, an expedition under missionary Ramon Abella visited Suisun Valley on October 28, 1811 as he was returning from the Sacramento area heading towards Carquinez Strait. He reported the following:

“We went about one league and stopped at the end of the slough of the Suisunes (Suisun City) at half a boat’s length from shore so that one could jump onto solid ground. It was on a big plain, with fine land, completely covered at a short distance with oaks and live oaks, finally becoming uneven and hilly.

“We sent four neophytes from the San Francisco Mission, natives of this area, to locate their countrymen, and fifty men from two villages presented themselves, all unarmed. They brought us some of those things, which they held in high esteem, and gave us their war decorations. We responded in the same manner by paying part of their value. The villages are called Malaca (Vacaville’s Lagoon Valley area) and Suisun (Rockville area). According to what the Indians said, the latter is divided into three parts. They claimed that it was quite close but according to the signs between here and the shore somewhat less than two leagues away; a short time ago they were living on the shore. That was where Second Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga struck them the blow. Thoroughly cowed the poor people have remained, for they are badly scared. ... The place is very good for the establishment of missions but there remains the difficulty of getting there except by boat through the narrow passages mentioned above.”
Friars Buenaventura Fortuny, Ramon Abella and Sergeant Jose Sanchez who visited Suisun Valley on October 28, 1811 while returning from an exploration of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta reported, “We went about one league and stopped at the end of the slough of the Suisunes at half a boat’s length from shore so that one could jump onto solid ground... That was where Second Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga struck them the blow. Thoroughly cowed the poor people have remained, for they are badly scared.” By his description he would have been at or somewhere near today’s Suisun City.

During the expedition they made contact with the Indian rancherias of the Tolenas, Malaca and Ululatos tribelets of the Suisuns.

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. I’ll go into that a little more later in this series.

“A Spanish exploratory expedition of fifty-five Spanish soldiers crossed the Suisun Plain in October of 1821, on their way north to explore the Sacramento Valley. They had crossed Carquinez Strait in the present Vallejo area on October 21. The following morning they headed eastward along the later route of Interstate 80. They found no native peoples living on the Suisun Plain. Diarist Bias Ordaz wrote:

“...taking the road to the east, guided toward the Suisun, in which proximity was found a running aguaje (spring) at the foot of a hill. It became the spring or Pool of San Blas, where we halted. Following a short stay, we continued the march over the Plain of the Suisun until 5:30 in the afternoon, (stopping because a site was found adaptable for passing the night.)”

The Pool of San Blas was almost certainly the aguaje shown on a later land case map in the gap in the ridge just northeast of Cordelia and south of Rockville. Lieutenant Argüello’s brief diary gives further information regarding the final stopping place.

“After traveling for seven hours at a normal pace, I made a stop at the place called Suizun (a destroyed rancheria of that name). Here I determined to spend the night.”

Randall Milliken then wrote, “So the October 21, 1821 overnight stopping place was at the village site where Gabriel Moraga had attacked the Suisuns in May of 1810. It was somewhere on the plain eastward of Rockville, almost certainly the place where Father Abella had met with Suisuns in the fall of 1811. Elsewhere I have suggested that the location was probably at the present town of Suisun City.”

He was right the first time; the attack was at the Suisun City area.

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In 1823 a 36-year-old Spanish priest, Friar Jose Altimira was in charge of Mission Delores 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 Delores 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.

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