



The Novato Historian

The Quarterly Publication of the
Novato Historical Guild and the Novato History Museum
Preserving Novato's History

Feature Section

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June 2005

The Novato Historian

Volume 29, Number 2

Reminiscence by Vallejo on His Petaluma Adobe

By Bill Glass

Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo was born in Monterey July 4th, 1807, the eighth of thirteen children born to Don Ignacio and Maria Antonia [nee Lugo] Vallejo. In 1823, at the age of sixteen, Vallejo petitioned Governor Luis Arguello for enrollment into the Presidial Company of Monterey as a cadet.

By 1830, Vallejo was assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco. In 1833, Vallejo was sent to the Russian settlement of Fort Ross to espionage the ongoing developments there and at Bodega Bay. In 1815, the Russian Government had purchased these coastal lands from the Pomo Indians for three blankets, three pairs of trousers, two axes, three hoes and an assortment of beads.

Concern over the "Russian problem" led California's Mexican governor Jose Figueroa to appoint Ensign Vallejo as Military Colonel of the cavalry and Director of Colonization of the

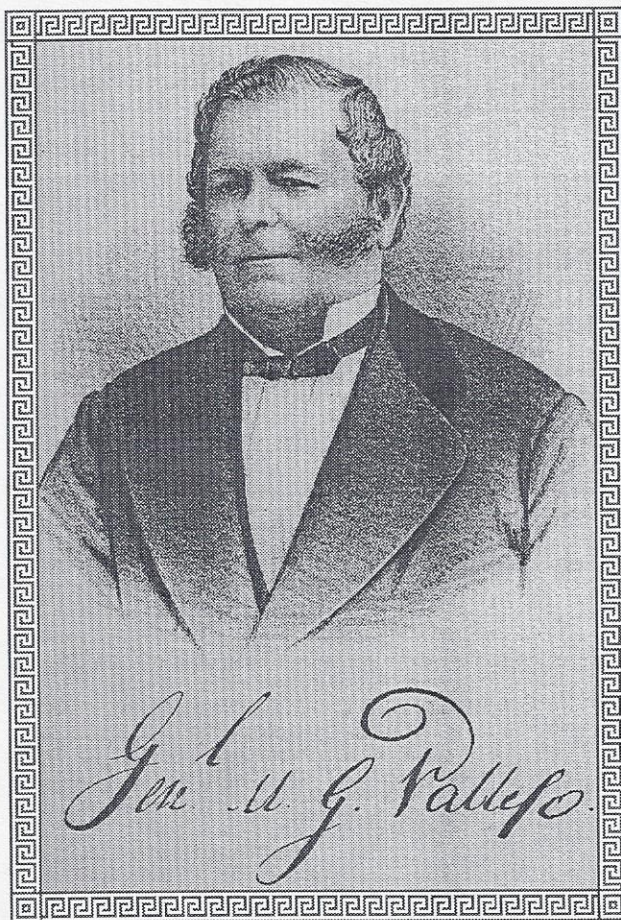
Northern Frontier. Figueroa, who took office in 1833, had already appointed Vallejo administrative supervisor for the secularization of the San Francisco Solano Mission [Sonoma].

Powerless to remove the Russian "invaders," Figueroa instructed Vallejo to establish a pueblo at Sonoma mission and in the surrounding countryside in hopes of dissuading further Russian intrusion.

In Vallejo's "History of California" he states;

"General Figueroa ordered me to proceed to found the town of Sonoma and following his orders in June 1834, I embarked 80 cavalrymen in two schooners and set out for the Sonoma landing but because we did not know the bay currents very well, the trip took us fourteen days. First, the schooners became grounded in the mud near Novato where we

were attacked by several hundred Indians, but their attack was ineffective. When the vessels were freed

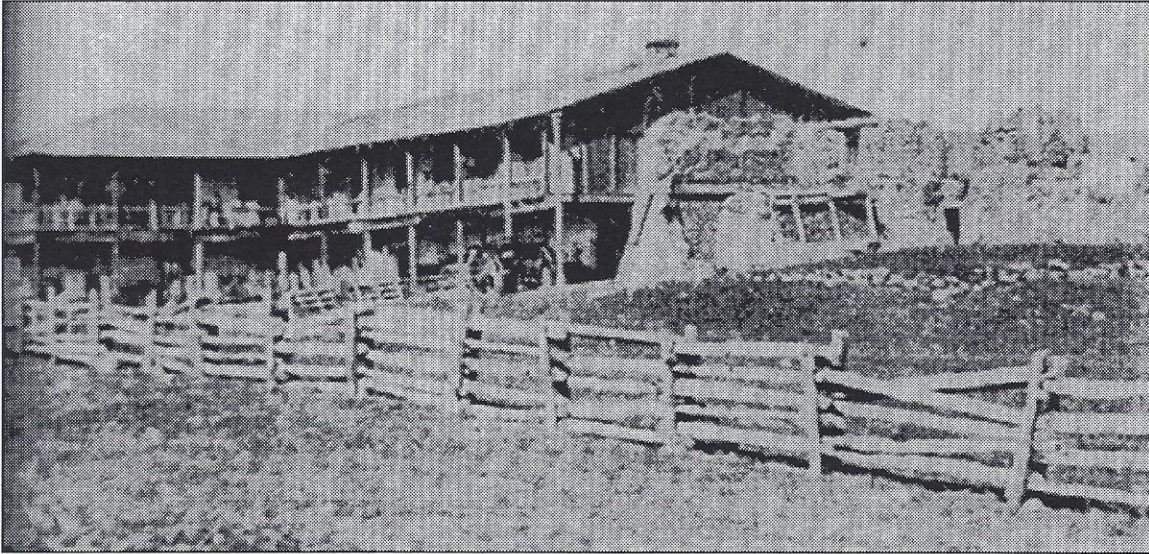


we went on to the landing of Padre Ventura [Lakeville], Where I landed my troops and camped.

After two days I made a treaty with the Licatiuet Indians, we re-embarked and after three days we dropped anchor at the place known then as Point Tolar, now Midshipman's Creek. . . ."

sold it after two years to William D. Bliss for \$30,000.

Miss Nancy L. Denman of Petaluma and a member of its Literary Society was appointed by the members of that organization to contact General Vallejo inquiring as to the history of Casa Grande,



The Petaluma adobe as it appeared in the late 1870s.

Vallejo wasted little time secularizing Mission Solano. Rather than following the traditional Spanish practice of secularizing missions after a ten year period and turning over mission lands and property to the Indians—for whom they had been held in trust; a new policy was adopted, whereby individuals who had ingratiated themselves to the Mexican government applied for land grants. Who had ingratiated himself more than Vallejo?

Through a succession of land grants, Vallejo became the patron of not only the land in Sonoma but that land stretching from the Carquinez Strait to Petaluma, approximately 250,000 acres, making Vallejo *the* largest landowner in California. Vallejo owned over 50,000 head of cattle, 24,000 sheep and over 8,000 horses [Mare Island in Vallejo was so named for a maverick mustang belonging to Mariano that was allowed to remain feral after swimming across the Carquinez Strait during a roundup].

After title to Rancho Petaluma was confirmed by the land commission, Vallejo sold the adobe and accompanying acreage to William Whiteside in March, 1857 for the sum of \$25,000. Whiteside

the large adobe rancho located three miles east of the Petaluma River over crossing. She wrote a letter to the General on May 13, 1889.

Vallejo's response was as follows;

"Dear Miss Denman:

Your letter of the 13th inst. reached me in safety, and at your request I will narrate some of the interesting facts concerning the old adobe, three or four miles east of Petaluma.

I built the house in 1834 to 1844 and it was of immense proportions, owing to the different departments for factories and warehouses. I made blankets enough to supply over 2,000 Indians; also carpets and a course material used by them for their wearing apparel. A large tannery also, where we manufactured shoes for the troops and vaqueros. Also a blacksmith shop for making saddles, bridles, spurs, and many other things required by the horsemen. I have a blanket still in my possessions made there, and although in constant use, is in perfect condition.

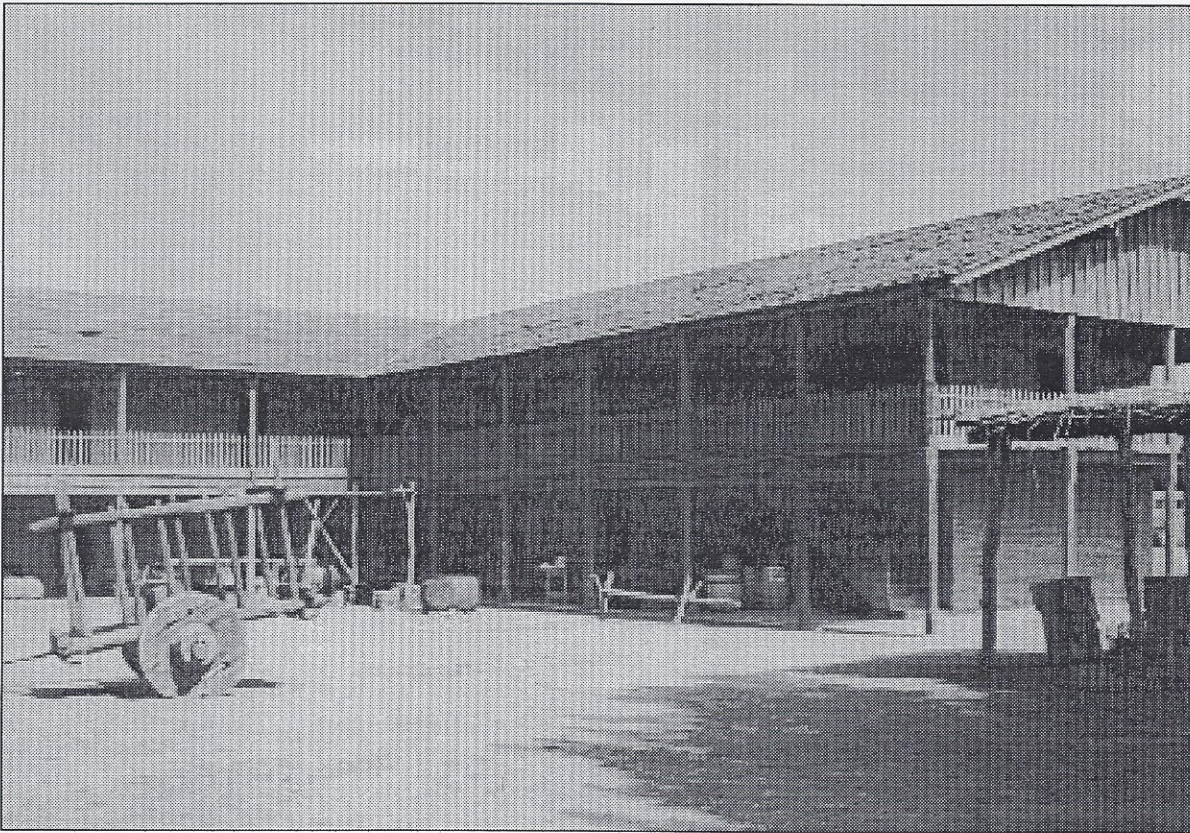
My harvest productions were so large that my storehouses were literally overfilled every year. In 1843 my wheat and barley crop amounted to 72,000

Spanish bushels (a "fanega" or Spanish bushel is equal to one and one-half of our bushels) and my ploughmen were about 200 men. Corn about 5,000 bushels, besides a superabundance of all grains for daily use, such as beans, peas, lentils and vegetables of all kinds. All these products were stored in different departments of this large house, besides giving freely to the Indians who lived in the surrounding country in peace with me. A large number of hides were preserved every year, also tallow, lard and dried meat to sell to the "Yankees."

redwoods, and prepared for use by the old fashioned saw, by four kanakas (my servants) brought from the Sandwich Islands by Captain Cooper, my brother-in-law. It had wide corridors inside and outside, some of which were carpeted by our own make of carpets.

Mr. Fowler, father of Mr. Henry Fowler of Napa, was the last carpenter who worked in my old house. I sold it to Mr. Whiteside about twenty years ago for \$25,000. It was never attacked by Indians.

When I was taken prisoner by the Bear Flag



The restored adobe as it appears today. Note the contemporary carreeta in the foreground. Drawn by a pair of oxen; the wagon was used to haul cattle hides to Anglo-European trade ships.

In one wing of my house, upstairs, I lived with my family when in Petaluma. The south front was 250 feet long, and the building formed a large square [only one half of the original building remains today.], the house having an immense courtyard inside, where every morning the laborers met and called the roll before dispersing for their various occupations.

The house was two stories high and very solid, made of adobe and timber, brought by oxen from the

part, this house was filled with what I have already mentioned and they disposed of everything.

The meaning of the word 'Petaluma' signifies in the Indian language "a beautiful panorama seen in the great declivity from all points." Hoping this reaches you in time, and will give you a full detail of the old adobe is the sincere wish of yours very truly,

M. G. Vallejo"

Eight months later, on January 18th, 1890 General Vallejo died.

The Class of 1955

By Joan Marzell Quinn, Cary, North Carolina

It does not seem like 50 years have gone by since my eighth-grade graduation. Yes, I know that is what everyone says, yet the statement is so true. Time has a way of sneaking up on us, and before we know it, our early teen years have turned into our 60's, leaving us awestruck that those grammar school memories happened two generations ago.

I clearly recall the first day that I walked into the old Novato Grammar School. The building was located in downtown Novato. Mom walked me to school that first day from our Arroyo Avichi Road (now called Indian Valley) chicken ranch. I had never seen so many kids my own age. Some of the girls looked a lot like me. They wore little homemade cotton dresses that came above the knee. Braids bounced down their backs waiting the pulling of the ten boys in our class.

Our first grade teacher was Mrs. Estes. She was the mother of young boys, so she knew how to handle the antics of most of the six year olds in our class. There was, however, one overly active child, who shall remain nameless. The only way this kind soul of a teacher could contain him was to tie him in a chair, sometimes even tape his mouth. Needless to say, there was no medication for ADD at that time!

We had an interesting list of primary teachers. The most beautiful teacher was Miss Teresa Dalessi. I think that every boy had a crush on her. Miss Marguerite Dolcini was a terror in the eyes of some kids...Miss Dolcini would have Yvette Borloz and I serve coffee to the teachers. This task allowed the two of us time out of class to search the bell tower and all its nooks and crannies. The tower was the home of the "ditto machine" (fore-runner of a copier) and the mysterious costume closet. There was also a teacher, who probably deformed the ears of most of the boys in our class by twisting them vigorously!

Due to the influx of new residents, double sessions began during our primary years at the old school. We were coming and going all times of the morning, and late afternoon. Even the auditorium stage became a classroom.

The most interesting part of the school day was the long ride on the school bus. The bus driver was a man who worked at the local pool hall, and sometimes the bus would not appear in the morning. Two of our most loved drivers were Walter Strayer and Peggy Price. On some of those hot days in the fall of the year, Walter would stop the bus at the downtown delicatessen (owned by the Hatfield's) to buy us all ice-cold Popsicles. What a treat! The most ice

we would have seen fifty years ago would have been a tray of ice in the tiny freezer compartment of our home refrigerators.

Somewhere during our primary grade years, a new man came into our lives. Mr. W.J.J. Smith was tall, handsome and the first Superintendent of the Novato School District. I think that I instantly fell in love with this man when he first bandaged my injured knee. He was a person in total contrast to our Principal, Miss Lulu Sutton. As we all feared the look and voice of Miss Sutton, W.J.J. Smith was a kind and smiling addition to the faculty.

In the fall of 1952, our class divided in half and was sent to two different schools: Marion and Olive. Eloise Lambert and myself were assigned to Olive Street School. The biggest reward was that our teacher, Mrs. Katherine Steele, drove the two of us to school each day! Olive Street School provided my first glimpse of television. Woody's TV store provided a black and white television to view the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

Later our class rejoined forces at Marion Street School. Those years bring back memories of diagramming zillions of sentences with the aid of Mr. Patterson. Dances were a major social event. Everything from sock hops, Hot Dog Day luncheons, choir practice, basketball games, and eighth-grade graduation were part of our lives. Our next adventure was to be the founding class of Novato High School.

Tucked away in my memory will be: the cool stucco building of Novato Grammar School, with its dark cloak closets filled with cubby holes holding our smelly Friday tuna fish sandwiches wrapped in wax paper; the huge jar of white paste that was quietly opened by some kids for an afternoon snack; the little carton of white milk (and the rare carton of chocolate) that we had with our graham cracker during morning snack time; the wet boots and the smelly damp winter coats; the breeze that blew into the classroom with the scent of forsythia bushes in the spring; the occasional dog that would wander into the classroom and lay down for a nap; the sound of the siren from the fire department across Highway 101; the laughter of friends, the voices of teachers, the cheers at a game. These are the things I remember most about my grammar school days in Novato. My own grandchild will be entering kindergarten this fall, not in Novato, but in North Carolina, where I now live. Part of me will be with her on that first day, hoping that she too, will have many fond memories of her grammar school days.