

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Casa Grande

During our recent motor tour through Napa Valley, we visited "Casa Grande," the home of Gen. Vallejo, near Petaluma. It was our first visit to this huge adobe building. We were amazed at its size and grandeur, its location overlooking the vast countryside and we were amazed at how many adobe bricks, made from adobe at hand, went into the construction of such an imposing building, far away from the nearest community according to the distances of horse and buggy days.

It was Sunday morning when we drove into the yard of Casa Grande which is now a State Historical Monument. We parked our car and wandered into the building. As we gazed in admiration over the valley toward Petaluma, we observed a young ranger - by name Peter R. Ramer - walking slowly over the grounds with a stick in hand, looking for the world like a prospector searching for oil or perhaps water. When he spotted us on the veranda he came forward and explained that he was looking for bits of china, petrified wood or other items which might prove valuable to the researchers and to those who are restoring this historic old adobe.

General Vallejo's old homestead, with almost five acres of land, was deeded on Nov. 28, 1910 to the trustees of Petaluma Parlor, No. 27, of the Native Sons of the Golden West. It was given with the understanding that the property was to be forever held by the parlor and serve as a memorial to William D. Bliss, who had purchased the property in 1859.

After the State Park system was established to care for areas of scenic, recreational, and historical interest. Dodge Young of the Petaluma parlor offered the ancient adobe building and adjoining 4.9 acres to the state. On August 15, 1950 the deed was finally cleared and on Jan. 2, 1951, Vallejo's old Petaluma adobe "Casa Grande," became the property of the California State Park system.

The first restoration work of the state involved raising and resetting the 300-ton wall which had shifted during the years. The walls are now being reinforced with stove pipes filled with steel and concrete and inserted into the interior of the wall. The walls vary in height, from 20 to 23 feet. Adobe bricks are being used,

remodeled in pioneer fashion from the ancient crumbled bricks and from nearby soil.

Mr. Ramer took us on a tour through the building and into the upstairs sala where the proportions of the large room were admired. One of the most interesting features was the fireplace, one of the earliest in California. It is built of larger adobe bricks with a hearthstone in back of the chimney.

The old Petaluma adobe, the house with a past, under the care of the State of California, is destined to be a house with a future. It is a landmark of time; a milestone in California's agricultural and industrial past and an interesting relic and fitting memorial to two men. One is General Mariano Guadalupe, the builder not only of the house but of an empire, which he saw happily become a part of the United States of America, and the other is Henry Bliss, pioneer lawyer and one-time owner of the house.

William D. Bliss purchased the Vallejo adobe for \$30,000. Bliss's mother had been the wife of the historian, George Bancroft.

While the old adobe was still the property of Bliss and the land of the original Petaluma rancho was assessed for not less than three million dollars, it was visited by its builder. At that time, the spring of 1880, Vallejo wrote his son, Dr. Platon Vallejo who lived in Vallejo:

"The other day I visited Petaluma and I ordered a picture taken of what was my old home which I had not visited for some 30 years and though almost in ruins, it nevertheless doesn't fail to show what it was in those times. It is a sad memory, but one bows to that which says that 'all is perishable in this world.' I compare this relic with myself and the comparison is an exact one, ruins and dilapidation. What a difference between then and riches; now age and poverty."