

## *DIO DE LOS MUERTOS MEMOIR*

Sonomaites are well acquainted with that decorative Victorian at the end of a long, stately cottonwood tree-lined driveway, just a short walk west of the city square. In the 1800's *Lachryma Montis* was home of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, whose father Ignacio had arrived in 1774. Ignacio was part of a Mexican colonial army contingent, which accompanied church father Junipero Serra to found the first presidio mission. Many personal effects and historic documents of the family and of Mariano--destined to be a player in California's history--are on museum display at the site.

Mariano Vallejo derived the Latin *Lachryma Montis* (Mountain Tear) from a spring called Crying Mountain (*Chiu cuyem*) that used to flow around the property. He spared no expense outfitting his family residence, including imported European crystal chandeliers and white marble fireplaces in every room. Nor did he ignore gracing its grounds with grape vines, abundant fruit trees, and decorative fountains. Some 110 years after Mariano's death I was preparing a side dish for a "Dia de los Muertos" event to be held at *Lachryma Montis* by the then Sonoma Poetry Collective....

*I should know more about the place!* I thought; and—well, thanks to the Internet--I discovered how little I had known about the founding of my native state. In the early 1800's "Alta California" was a forlorn isolated colony of the crumbling Spanish Empire. I had learned about the famous missionary, Junipero Serra, at Yerba Buena Elementary School in San Francisco. The picture drawn was of a great *solitary* hero, not of army-accompanied stagings of colonization.

When Alta California fell under Mexico rule after its 1822 independence from Spain, three to four thousand "Californios"--Spanish colonialists--remained on the land. The next years were turbulent as Mexican Governor Manuel Victoria ruled with a heavy hand. When he refused to secularize church-held lands, some Californios rebelled. An 1833 drawn battle led to Victoria's recall and appointment of Governor Jose Figueroa. Figueroa died September 1835; 1836 saw Acting Governor Jose Castro replaced by Acting Governor Nicolás Gutiérrez; then appointment of Governor Mariano Chico.

Chico, likewise unpopular and anticipating revolt, went to Mexico to gather troops but was penalized for leaving his post. Military Commander Gutierrez returned as Acting Governor. Despite commenced release of mission lands and assets to Californios and mission-connected Indians, Gutierrez faced continuing unrest. Californio Spaniards were gaining possession of large tracts of land, as most Indian recipients gradually either sold or abandoned their holdings.

Meanwhile, Juan Bautista Alvarado (Mariano Vallejo's nephew), Jose Castro (Alvarado's cousin), Andres "Pio" Pico, and, in the south, Carlos Carillo, openly were assailing Mexican central government's control of Alta California. In 1836 (a year after American battle for Texas), with Gutierrez again in power, insurrection smoldered. The fuse was lit when Alvarado, Secretary of Territorial Deputation, confronted Gutierrez at Mexico's northern Alta California capitol at Monterey, over collection and management of taxes. Alvarado was hoping for support from Uncle Mariano. Vallejo, however, did not believe the time ripe for overthrow.

*Enter Isaac Graham....*

Graham, Virginia-born in 1800 but raised in Kentucky, at age 18 had become a full-time trapper and mountain man. He spent three of the next 10 years with Daniel Boone in Missouri; another three with Kit Carson; and the rest with different beaver trapping parties. Powerful of frame, crack rifleman and horseman, Graham reportedly was a "naturally brave man" of forceful personality. He had spanned America's territory and rivers from east over the Rockies into New Mexico, working Canadian, Arkansas, Platte, Green, and Humboldt Rivers. More than once he fought Indian bandits; if Pawnees had not decided to aid his party in an Arapaho attack, Graham would have lost his life with others. In 1829 he joined a trapping expedition to the great Northwest.

Graham arrived in Alta California around 1833 or '34 from Oregon, reportedly pursuing a debtor. Failing to collect, temporarily destitute, he settled at Yerba Buena (San Francisco). Migrant 'foreigners' (American and European) hoping to subsist in Alta California had to conform to Californio

administration. To obtain a simple letter of naturalization, one had to complete one year of residence, be known honest and respectable, provide three citizen letters certifying he was of Roman Catholic religion, and possess proved income of \$1,000/year. Legal holding of land, however, required marriage to a native Mexican.

Graham, contemptible of a dictated way of life, remained what was called an “extranjero.” He moved to Navidad near Monterey, and the first thing he did was establish a distillery. Freely generous among peers, the rag-tail clientele that grew around him became the nexus of a private army.

It’s not known when Graham and Alvarado formed a sympathizers’ relationship--only that, civil strife rampant in 1836, Graham pledged at a meeting between them to assemble a force to make the foe “tremble.” Alvarado, in exchange, promised institution of fair government, equal rights with Californios, tracts of land, and \$3.00 a day for service.

Besides Alvarado’s own force of “paisanos” and those of cousin Castro, Alvarado now could count on “Ace in the hole” Graham’s 50-man force of “rifleros.” At Monterey he strategically placed forces so their numbers seemed greater than they were. Sending ultimatums, he hoped for a diplomatic resolution. Besieged Gutierrez held fast, despite three merchant ships in the harbor lending ammunition aid to the insurgents.

Graham proposed sending his own ultimatum. If not yielded to, he would make an attack. Alvarado forcefully declined, but Graham was not to be denied. Gutierrez’s surrender came quickly after the first unleashed four-pound cannonball landed directly on his roof.

Graham used the same tactic a while later at mission San Fernando, against some southern Californios opposed to ‘northern’ control. That time, with the two contingents facing each other, Alvarado well knew that Graham *would* attack on his own. Alvarado joined in the advance and reportedly submission was won without one shot fired.

At the Monterey presidio, Alta California was declared a sovereign state of the Mexican Republic with Alvarado as governor, while Gutierrez and other officials were deported. Alvarado sent notice to Uncle Mariano that he had claimed to have acted under Mariano's orders, and summoned his uncle to Monterey to take part in the new government.

A provisional government was created: six resolutions declared Alta California a self-governing state with its own congress and free of religious persecution, although Catholicism would remain its main religion. On November 29, 1836 Mariano swore an oath of allegiance and accepted rank of Colonel of the Cavalry.

Mariano had risen to prominence in Alta California through an illustrious career: age 15, Cadet, Mexican Provincial Army at Monterey; age 19, Sergeant and delegate to Mexican Provincial Legislature at Monterey; ages 20- 21, mid-commissioned Officer over a force containing renegade Indian chiefs (notable during this time, a three-day battle contra the Miwoks, who fled to refuge at Mission San Jose); age 23, a participant in the emergency installation of governor Pico (1832); age 25 (after Mexico's 1833 decree of secularization of mission lands and assets) Mariano became Commander of the San Francisco Presidio and overseer of Sonoma's Mission San Francisco Solano. Finally, in 1834, under Figueroa, Mariano was made Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> District, and Director of Colonization of the Northern Frontier.

At the Monterey convention, Mariano Vallejo, of proud Spanish heritage, superior intellect, and military and diplomatic skills, finally emerged from the wings to play a key role in events to come. A troop formed by him and Alvarado, commanded by Mariano's brother Salvador, was victorious in a battle near Los Angeles.

Alvarado appeared wont to reduce Graham involvement. One time when Alvarado was absent from the Monterey garrison, it was taken over by some opponents. Graham got word of it at Navidad and rode to the rescue. His strategic surrounding of the fort routed the invaders, despite their heavy reinforcements. Meanwhile, prominent southern Californios at Santa Barbara under Carlos Antonio

Carrillo and his brother united themselves to form a government, and during 1837 Carlos took the gubernatorial lead.

Whether or not Alvarado's attitude toward Graham was out of concern for Graham's competitive popularity, without his backing Alvarado was in difficult straits contra the southern Californios. Castro was sent to Mexico to secure sanction of Alvarado as governor. Mexico President Bustamente, whose forces still were depleted from the fight over Texas, was incapable toward regaining Alta California. August of 1838 he quickly confirmed both Alvarado as governor and Mariano Vallejo as commander, making Mariano the most powerful military man in the territory.

Albeit there had been gain in Alta California autonomy, the revolution failed the reforms promised those who had begun it. Whereas "Americanos" like Graham had wanted full independence, Alvarado preferred statehood under Mexico. Many of the coup's original leaders felt betrayed; some, Isaac Graham notable among them, were slated for far worse.

Threats had been circulating that the Californios were of a mind to drive out all extranjeros/foreigners. April 6, 1840, a group led by Castro circled Graham's house several times. When Graham asked what was up, Castro replied they were going to march against Commander General Viejo at San Francisco. According to Graham, Alvarado feared Viejo, while Castro had ambitions on Viejo's post.

In the middle of that night Graham, his partner, and associates were savagely attacked by henchmen and dragged to Castro on a hill behind the house. Graham, alive only because of a misfire, was taken in chains to Monterey while his partner (Henry Naile, stabbed several times) was left by the road. Jails in the province filled with "foreigners." Some never associated with Graham eventually would be released; but many others would join him tortuously confined in one small adobe cell.

Trial of the jail-weakened men was held April 23, 1840 at Alvarado's home. None were able to produce a passport, and it was decreed they had no right to remain in Alta California. Each then was

questioned as to a revolutionary movement under Graham. Alvarado reportedly was responsible for trumped-up evidence that Graham led a foreign conspiracy (one testimony was by a Graham enemy named Garner; another testimony, extracted on threat of being hanged).

In the end, 46 persons were found guilty—interestingly, an even 23 each, American and English. Orders issued to confiscate all property belonging to Graham and the other prisoners. Lawyer Thomas Jefferson Farnham had pled that, if not released the prisoners be tried quickly, arguing that America and/or England well could become involved over the treatment of its citizens on foreign soil. Also telling is that the convicted all were part of Graham's circle of men who, since 1836, had been questioning Alvarado about money owed and promises made.

Both America and England had a consul at Sandwich Island, but Alvarado bypassed suggestion the convicted men be sent there by a Vallejo ship, insisting they be conveyed to Mexico authority, via San Blas with Castrol to "protect" them. Shackled in cramped quarters in tropical heat, thirsty and barely fed, the prisoners kept up spirits singing the Star-Spangled Banner, Rule Britannia and Hail Columbia—until, that is, Castro issued orders to stab the next man that sang.

A 60-mile overland trek to Tepic followed three-weeks at sea. Initially shoeless and in chains, lawyer Farnham came to their rescue with philanthropic aid—a few donkeys to share rides, and one night of lodging. (Castro had talked openly about doing away with Farnham but never followed through.)

Mexico's Minister of the Interior had some praise for Alvarado, but overshadowed by a warning that, to avoid problems with other countries, *legal* proof of conspiracy had to accompany any such future remandings. Meanwhile, Farnham persuaded Thomas A. Larkin to get out word to American authorities; surely they would welcome excuse to show a force of arms to Mexico.

The U.S. wasted no time sending and permanently stationing the ship St. Louis to Monterey Bay. Alvarado took a powder (claiming interior Indian trouble), while the St. Louis' captain questioned

Californio officials about the entire affair. At the same time, Powhatan Ellis, U. S. Minister to Mexico, demanded better treatment and immediate release at Tepic. Mariano Vallejo, however, remained loyal to Alvarado for the time being.

Between 1840 and 1841 the Mexican government held a full investigation, but tread softly. A later accusation and Mexican court martial of Castro for cruelty was considered a scam, to demonstrate even-handedness in the matter. Castro pled innocence; Manuel Micheltoarena, Castro's lawyer, arguing that Castro merely had followed orders. Castro was released with no blight on his record, and returned to Alta California.

Trial of Graham and 19 others before Mexico's highest tribunal lasted to June 1841 (some men having been released for insufficient evidence). The only proof of treason Alvarado could offer was an informal statement from Graham's avowed enemy, Garner, who had led the nighttime apprehension. Whether or not it was Mexico's paranoia, over giving the U.S. cause to increase its focus on Alta California, all the prisoners were found not guilty.

Graham returned to Alta California. Joseph L. Majors, a naturalized Mexican citizen, effected purchase in his own name of a rancho for Graham and Naile, who had survived the attack. At "Zayante," nine miles north of Santa Cruz, Graham and Naile began a lumber operation, operated another distillery, and eventually would build a road (still in use), down the Santa Cruz mountains through Branciforte.

Mariano Vallejo in the interim had removed his command post from San Francisco to Sonoma. His relative isolation at the Sonoma garrison allowed him to act decisively as a foreign minister. Yet, although commanding at Sonoma with full authority, he still ultimately was directly answerable to Mexico's central government. He believed, however, that Mexico could not maintain control of Alta California; more and more he had become convinced that regional prosperity and security would rest with the enterprising character and political ideals of its settled people.

As the mission system closed down, Mariano's adroitness secured an ally for life in the imposing Suisunes' Chief, Solano (aka Sem-Yeto, "Mighty Arm"). Mariano and brother Salvador (commander of field operations), both patrons and friends of Chief Solano, thus had 3,000 friendly Suisunes supporting the Sonoma garrison against hostile groups.

Mariano had spent some ten thousand dollars of his own money to establish and maintain the northern frontier troops, and Sonoma Presidio as a counter to Russian presence at Fort Ross. He sent Chief Solano with 80 well-armed Suisunes to Monterey in a dramatic demonstration of his effectiveness. Then he himself arrived, and forced Alvarado to send a commission to present a \$10,000 claim to the Mexican government.

Mexico's response in 1842 (the year following Graham's release) was to send Manuel Micheltoarena, leading a force of "cholos" (former convicts) against Alvarado. Alvarado was forced to surrender, and Micheltoarena became governor. Mariano, at his own request, was discharged as army commander. He received land grants in excess of 150,000 acres, additional grants of 80,000 acres (circa Suisun and Pablo Bay land, now occupied by cities of Vallejo and Benicia and some in Santa Rosa), plus confirmation of the Petaluma Ranch and Sonoma Temblec Ranch. Brother Salvador, whose service to the Mexican cause often meant stiff hand-to-hand combat against hostile tribes, also received some thousands of acres of land.

Then in 1845, three years into Micheltoarena's governorship, Californios under Alvarado and Castro rose to battle again. A defeated Micheltoarena retired to Mexico with his army, and Mexico appointed Andres "Pio" Picos as governor, serving at Los Angeles.

*Enter John Fremont....*

Large numbers of "Anglos" had continued to emigrate to, some marrying Californios, settling on Alta California land. When a "survey" expedition led by U. S. military officer John C. Fremont arrived in 1845, Fremont assured field commander Castro that he only would confine his troop to San Joaquin

Valley for the winter, then head to Oregon. Unknown to locals, however, the U.S. and Mexico were on the brink of war.

Fremont loitered around Santa Clara Valley; then, instead, he led his men toward Monterey, congregating on Gavilan Peak overlooking San Juan. Castro marshaled a volunteer army and demanded that Fremont keep his word. Fremont grudgingly withdrew after a three-day standoff, but not for long.

Local turmoil followed Fremont's departure--wild rumors again, that Castro forcibly was going to evict all Anglos, and possibly induce Indian pillaging and killings. Fremont doubled back. He convinced a group of American settlers near Marysville Buttes to oppose Castro. Not known by Fremont, however, was that another group of settlers were planning decisive action of their own....

The Vallejo brothers freely gave kindness, food, and sometimes land to arriving immigrants. For all practical purposes, they had settled down to ranching--Salvador at Napa and Mariano at Sonoma--when the sun went down on June 13, 1846.

Dawn of June 14 armed "Americanos" assembled at Mariano's home, demanding that he surrender his Sonoma fortress. The group included members of the "Grigsby-Ide" settlers' party, mountain men, and explorers. Robert Semple of the group later noted it was "as rough- looking set of men as one could imagine."

Mariano, undaunted, invited three representatives from the group for breakfast and wine. He told them to consider him one of them, but the group was wary. They respectfully informed him he nonetheless was to be detained. Mariano was hopeful of U. S. annexation of Alta California, knowing Mexican rule was inadequate to manage its large and rich area. Relieved of his trust to the Mexican government, he graciously accepted arrest.

The 'Bear Flaggers' seized the Sonoma presidio. Creation of the Bear Flag Republic was declared, with William B. Ide as Commander and Chief; and Mariano was imprisoned at Sutter's Fort. Having won such a surprisingly effortless, apparent victory, the 24 Americans were at a temporary loss.

Some suggested looting the adobe arsenal; but Ide made an impassioned plea for restraint, "Choose ye this day what you will be! We are robbers, or we must be conquerors!"

To legitimize their conquest, the rebels decided to raise a new flag over the plaza. By most accounts, the making of this flag was overseen by William L. Todd, a nephew of Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of the future president. A Californio woman donated a rectangular piece of very light brown muslin. The wife of John Sears, one of the Grigsby-Ide party, tore a four-inch wide strip from a red petticoat and sewed it to the muslin, a stripe along the bottom reminiscent of the stripes on the American flag.

Todd then drew a star in the upper left corner (some say in solidarity with Texas, then also at war with Mexico) and, next to it, a crude rendition of a grizzly bear, using a brownish mixture of brick dust, linseed oil, and Venetian Red paint. The words CALIFORNIA REPUBLIC were written in black in the middle, to the right of the star.

A few days after the Bear Flag was raised, Ide issued a proclamation setting forth the goals of the new California Republic, words obviously heavily influenced by both the U. S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution:

"...to establish and perpetuate a liberal, a just and honorable Government, which shall secure to all, civil, religious and personal liberty; which shall insure the security of life and property; which shall encourage industry, virtue and literature...relying on love of Liberty and hatred of Tyranny. And further promises that a Government...must originate among its people: its officers should be its servants..."

Castro thought to turn the tide; but near the town of Olompai his force was defeated by a Bear Flagger company half the size of Castro's, and his numbers fell away. Things were going well for the new Republic; on July 5, however, Fremont showed up again, at Sonoma. He seized control, forced Ide to concede to Fremont as Commander and Chief, and likewise forced the Republic's military to join his unit, naming it the "California Battalion."

On July 7, 1846--following outbreak of the Mexico/U. S. war--Commodore Sloat and his troops landed at Monterey and claimed California for the United States, raising the 28-star American flag over

the capitol. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, U.S. Navy Lt. Joseph Warren Revere, Paul Revere's grandson, arrived in Sonoma, hauled down the Bear Flag, and ran up the Stars and Stripes. Revere handed the Bear Flag to Midshipman John E. Montgomery. Montgomery later would write in a letter to his mother that "Cuffy" (his nickname for the bear) "came down growling," because the flag snagged a few times as it was lowered.

Fremont, now a U. S. Army lieutenant colonel, took his now 428-man California Battalion to San Juan Bautista. He ultimately achieved a meeting with Pico (not without some difficulties); and on November 28, 1846 achieved signing of the Treaty of Cahuenga, ending armed hostilities between the U.S. and the Californians.

Mariano Vallejo had been released from jail by September of 1846, and his aid was sought against resistant Walla Wallans. Mariano, not feeling strong enough for command, appointed Salvador; but instead of an attack, the unarmed Walla Wallans voluntarily went with their families to Sutter's Fort. Mariano's land grants over time totaled some 150,000 acres: 80,000 acres in the Suisun and San Pablo Bay region (area now occupied by Vallejo and Benicia, the latter named after his wife); the Petaluma Ranch, Sonoma's Temblec Ranch, and some holdings in the Santa Rosa valley.

In 1911 the Bear Flag was adopted as California's official flag (its present design, the last of several makeovers, by California historian and artist Donald Kelley in 1953). As to the original choice of the bear symbol, some believe it was a play on Californios' great fear of the grizzly bears; others, that the flaggers identified with the animal's fierce determination as a fighter. General Vallejo In his memoirs, the *Recuerdos* (Recollections), refers to the flag's design as "strange," saying, "the bear looked more like a pig." It's uncertain what the original looked like, in that it was destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire.

As to Isaac Graham, although much has been written suggesting his support during the Bear Flag Revolt, that appears not so. His last decades were marked by the outright murder of

Henry Naile (his partner and adoptive son; which deed went unpunished), and in litigious divorce and custody battles with his ex-(second) wife. One bright note was reunion and time spent with grown son Jesse from his first marriage. Graham died November 3, 1863.

Mariano Vallejo's brother Salvador, commissioned in 1863, organized the First Battalion of Native Cavalry, serving as far east as Arizona. Platon, Mariano's son, was a doctor on front lines of the later Civil War. Mariano's generosity continued unchanged> He stayed in regional politics the rest of his life; and went on to serve as a delegate to the California Constitutional Convention in Monterey in 1849, later as a State Senator. He met President Lincoln on a White House visit arranged by U. S. Generals Sheridan, Sherman, and Grant. He spent considerable time in his 12,000-book library, where he wrote a five-volume History of California.

Mariano's 1890 death at age 82 was much lamented. The Sonoma Plaza was circled by a funeral procession of hundreds of mourners for the man who had earned the dignity of being among California's first founding fathers....

More than a century later, the Dia de los Muertos invitation to Vallejo's beloved home advised, "Although General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo will be one of the dead poets, his spirit will be very much alive at Lachryma Montis, both at the Live Poets' Dinner and the Dead Poets' Readings." Guests were to bring a poem to read, written by their favorite dead poet.

We live poets were treated to roast goose, just as had Mariano's guests at a January 1870 dinner. Ours was prepared by local poet Bill Churchill and assistants. Mariano, in a January 29, 1870 letter to son Platon, had captured the pleasures of shared food, wine, and comraderie in the valley environs he loved:

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*"The afternoon and dusk have been particularly beautiful, indescribably lovely. We dined--your uncle Salvador, Ignacio Soberanes and Juan Angula--on goose, very well stuffed with red chile, good bread, a bottle of wine, and, for dessert, a frying pan full of excellent beans a la Mexicana. As soon as we had risen from table, a fire was lit in front of the staircase, two benches were placed near it and I drew near in*

*a white armchair.... The guitar was brought and the song and dance began. In the big green door of the storehouse a group of Italians applauded the singing. The night calm but very dark; the driveway, the fountain playing, truly it seemed the place of a pastoral scene...."*

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After our marvelous feast, which was held in the old storehouse, poetry readings were held between the villa's front porch and garden fountain, where all sat comfortably on chairs. A lovely, balmy evening, it was as if we were surrounded by the spirits of General Vallejo and his friends. His letter ended as if written in the moment:

*"The singing and music continue; your uncle regales us, the spectators, with a thousand stories, salty little lies to lighten the fiesta. ... I enjoy everything, half silent; Juan laughs without a care, and Jef does too. Now at nine o'clock at night they are going to dance the jarabe!"*

The poem I chose to read was written in Italian by my immigrant father who died in 1963. Given the Italian contribution to Sonoma's vineyards, it seemed fitting:

*Si como soffio d'olezzanti venti, o dolce nota d'arpa vespertina,  
a te Colombo, mi affetto e rammenti, ch'io sempre amai tua maesta divina.  
Sorridente come mamma il ciel e aulenti di San Francisco,  
la ricca collina ti manda i fiori suoi festa, e concertati risonan lungo la marina.  
Ma piu che il fior del clivo e il sereno California ciel,  
su t'e--qual stella che non e terrena.  
Mondo t'irrise e io t'accolgo in seno, e tua catena bacio, e si bella,  
dove poi gloria nasce in large piena....*

My Italian vocabulary is tiny when it comes to literary material. Nonetheless, with a large Italian dictionary I translated Dad's poem, only for myself, as best I could. Thus, with apologies to him:

*Like a breath of perfume on the air,  
or sweet note of harp at Vespers time,  
to you, Columbus, affection,  
and my constant love for your mastery divine.  
The sky smiles down like a mother  
upon the royal court of San Francisco--  
the wealthy hill sends you flowery praises  
as along the Marina merry melodies go.  
But greater than the blossoming slope  
and the serene California night  
are you: that star above*

*shining an extraterrestrial light.  
World makes its mirth and I, in my breast,  
I welcome you with pleasure,  
your fetters I kiss and there we spar,  
where is glory born in widest measure....*