



# Mariano Vallejo's Legacy of California Hospitality Around the Sonoma Town Square

By Lee Foster

(Author's Note: This post is an updated chapter for the next release of my book [\*Northern California History Weekends\*](#). This chapter is about Mariano Vallejo's legacy of California hospitality in Northern California. Some of that heritage is located around Sonoma's Town Square.)

# In Brief

In the transition from Mexican to American rule in California, the presence of Mariano Vallejo of Sonoma looms large. Vallejo was skillful enough to flourish under both regimes. He set a pattern for hospitality that has become a mark of the open California lifestyle. You can see some of that legacy around the Sonoma Town Square.

## The Historic Story

Sonoma was the most northerly reach of Spanish/Mexican penetration into California. The mission and adjacent military post were founded here at a time when friction between Spain and Mexico escalated. Because of that conflict, resources for founding missions diminished.

Outside influences were also affecting California. These included the arrival of Boston whaling ships. Richard Henry Dana described their arrival in his book *Two Years Before the Mast*. In addition, the first mountain men/explorers began making overland treks into the area. They brought another element of change to the mix. Among the early explorers was Jedediah Smith.

What historic spots can you see in Sonoma? Start at the Sonoma Mission. Nearby are the Barracks where soldiers were stationed. Beyond that complex, visit the charming town square. Finally, be sure to stop at General Mariano Vallejo's house.

The church was officially named Mission San Francisco Solano. It is a stark, white, low-slung structure. The mission is less elaborate and more of an outpost than were the other missions farther south. Father Jose Altimira, who was ambitious and talented, founded the mission in 1823. But he was a generation too late to expand the mission system. This 21<sup>st</sup> mission was destined to be the last Franciscan venture in California. The mission now houses a special collection of watercolor paintings of the missions. The artworks are known as the Jorgensen Collection. Chris Jorgensen painted them 1903-1905.

The soldiers stationed at Sonoma stowed their gear and horses at the Barracks.

# Sonoma Town Square

The Town Square of Sonoma is one of the prettiest in Northern California. It is as close to bucolic picturesque as you will find. Huge old oak trees stand at attention over the grass and gardens. Around the Square, more than a dozen buildings date 1823-1855.

Be sure to look at one of the interesting monuments in the square. The sculpture honors the Bear Flag Patriots. The year was 1846, and the future of California was a guessing game. Would the area remain under Mexican control? Would the U.S. extend its Manifest Destiny domination to this western shore? Or would California become its own republic?

Some hotheads in Sonoma favored the republic idea. They fashioned a crude flag with a bear on it. Actually the bear looked more like a pig. However, in revolt they hoisted their Bear Flag in honor of the California Republic. At the same time, the movement was swept away 25 days later. That's when an American naval vessel captured Monterey, the Mexican capital.

The Gold Rush events of 1848 confirmed the political direction of the area. The search for gold brought a stampede of Americans. This insured that California would be part of the United States. It was touch and go for a while, however. No one knew whether California would be a Northern or Southern state during the Civil War.

## Vallejo's House

Mariano Vallejo's house is a short walk from the Square. It is a New England Gothic-style structure. Vallejo named the home Lachryma Montis, or Tears of the Mountain. He took the name after the numerous springs in the hillside. Vallejo's house is an interesting expression of house construction at the time. It was built in New England in 1851. The prefab house was made of spruce wood. Once finished, its pieces were shipped around the Horn to California. General Vallejo lived here until his death in 1890. As you walk through it, you will see many touches of rural aristocratic life, which are evident in the furnishings.

While in Sonoma, you can sample some of California's wine history. Stop at the Buena Vista Winery. The building is the original home of one Colonel Agoston Haraszthy. Haraszthy is often cited as The Father of California Wine. He introduced vinifera varietal cuttings from Europe. The cuttings replaced the so-called Mission grapes, which the Franciscan fathers planted. Mission grapes produced a wine satisfactory for sacramental purposes. But they were not very interesting for secular gustatory satisfaction. Haraszthy founded Buena Vista Winery in 1857. Another notable historic winery is Sebastiani. It is within walking distance in Sonoma. The winery has been a family affair for generations.

## Getting There

Drive north from the Bay Area on either Highway 101 or I-880. Take the smaller Highways, such as 116 or 121, until you reach the juncture with Highway 12. Then drive north on Highway 12 into Sonoma.

## Be Sure to See

The Mission is part of Sonoma State Historic Park and is located at the edge of the Square (20 E. Spain St.; 707/938-9560). Adjacent is the Barracks, also on the edge of the Square. Spend some time enjoying the Square, with its Bear Flag statue, and its many restaurants, shops, and small hotels.

A famous deli—The Sonoma Cheese Factory—is where jack cheese is made and every conceivable picnic item is purchasable (2 W Spain St.; 707/996-1931 or 800/535-2855; [www.sonomacheesefactory.com](http://www.sonomacheesefactory.com)). General Vallejo's house is a half-mile northwest of the Plaza (707/938-9559). The Buena Vista Winery is near the Square (18000 Old Winery Rd.; 800/926-1266; [www.buenavistawinery.com](http://www.buenavistawinery.com)).

Sebastiani Winery is at 389 4<sup>th</sup> Street E.; 707/933-3230; [www.sebastiani.com](http://www.sebastiani.com).

## Best Time of Year

Sonoma is an excellent year-round destination. The outlying areas reflect the agricultural seasons.

[Booking.com](http://Booking.com)

## **Lodging**

Built around an elaborate hot springs and spa, the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa is the dominant lodging in the area. The facility offers a wide range of treatments. Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa is at 100 Boyes Blvd., Sonoma; 800/862-4945; [www.fairmont.com/sonoma](http://www.fairmont.com/sonoma)).

## **Dining**

The Depot Hotel is a restaurant in an 1870 train depot one block north of the Plaza, featuring Italian cuisine and wines. The Depot Hotel is at 241 1<sup>st</sup> St. W., Sonoma; 707/938-2980; [www.depotsonoma.com](http://www.depotsonoma.com).

## **For Further Information**

The town of Sonoma is represented by the Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau (453 1<sup>st</sup> St. E., Sonoma; 707/996-1090; [www.sonomavalley.com](http://www.sonomavalley.com)).