

Unveiling Ceremonies

Chief Solano Monument

Sunday, June 3, 1934



Official Program



Suisun Valley

On State Highway, four miles west
of Fairfield

Sponsored by

Massassoit Tribe of Fairfield and the Redmen of the
Reservation of California



CHIEF FRANCISCO SOLANO

(By MARY JEAN DAVIS)

Just about one hundred and seventeen years ago—not very long in the light of the ages—Jose Sanchez was sent by the Franciscans (who had settled in San Francisco) to explore the territory (now known as Solano County) and to christianize the Indians.

He landed on the shores of the Suisun Bay near the present city of Benicia. The Suisunne Tribe of Indians that roamed all over what is now Suisun, Fairfield, Rockville and Benicia—saw Jose Sanchez and his men crossing the bay at dawn. They were there on the shores to meet him. A terrible battle ensued, for the Indians resented the intrusion of the White Man. But the White Man had guns, which not only terrified the Indians (for it was the first time that they had ever heard a gun) but slaughtered them wholesale. The Indians, however, refused to surrender and fought desperately until Jose Sanchez drove them back into their village at Rockville, or Yulyul, as the Indians called it. Once driven back into the village, surrounded by the Indian women and children, Jose Sanchez felt the Indians would surrender.

And Chief Malica did stop fighting and stepped forward, facing the White Man as if about to surrender. Jose Sanchez and his men waited. But suddenly a weird song arose from the Indian chief's lips. It was the DEATH SONG. The Indians joined the singing. The Chief gave the signal and the Indians set fire to the tipis; then, following the example of their chief, they rushed into the burning tipis—living sacrifices rather than surrender to the White Man.

When the Spanish leader realized what was happening, he commanded his men to rush into the village and to rescue the Indians from this wholesale suicide. Some were rescued, but more of them perished; a few in terror fled to the hills.

The story goes that a certain young Indian by the name of Sem-Yeto (The Brave One) belonging to the Suisunne Tribe, had gone with some companions on a hunting expedition. Upon returning to camp, he found the tipis in ashes, the charred remains of the women and children, and the whole slaughter of the braves by the White Man. It is believed that only a small group first viewed these pitiful remains but it was not long before Indians from neighboring tribes joined with Sem-Yeto and to add their numbers to his in warfare against the common enemy. The Indians who had escaped to the hills returned; and, with one accord, all elected Sem-Yeto as their new chief; for he was great of stature and gifted in wisdom.

But pondering upon the fate of Chief Malica and the White Man's guns, Sem-Yeto decided that to save his people he must not fight; he must compromise with this powerful White Man who mowed down all before him. And not only did he refuse to fight the enemy in the interests of his people but he embraced the religion of the White Man and was baptized by the padres in the Sonoma Mission, which is still standing in the city of Sonoma. His new name was Francisco Solano, after Francisco de Solano, the name of the mission in Sonoma, which in turn was named after a Spanish missionary in Peru.

Many of the Indians following the example of their great chief, became Christians. Thus guided by a leader with deep insight and with vision that could see far into the future—into a future in which the Red Man would be swiftly and completely annihilated if he did not

learn to compete with the White Man—the Red Man lived side by side with the White Man in mutual helpfulness and peace. Indeed, the tales are still extant which tell of Chief Solano's kindly greetings to the in-coming pioneers and of his helpful advice in their problems concerning the farming of a new country. For Chief Solano and his men had learned to farm from the padres and were quite competent to advise the stranger.

General Vallejo (for whom the city of Vallejo is named) was the staunch friend and advisor of the Indian chief; and recognizing his ability and realizing the Indians' rights, he advised Chief Solano to apply to the government for a grant of land. So in 1837, Chief Solano petitioned for a grant of land—four square leagues—stating that he owned enough cattle and horses to establish a rancho. The petition was granted, and the Indian became the owner of a rancho that included Rockville, Fairfield, Suisun City, Suisun Valley, and land extending southward nearly as far as the city of Benicia.

So capable an Indian was the great Chief Solano that Spain made him a commissioned officer in the Spanish Army and the American government depended upon him to keep the peace between the Indians and the White Men. So when a certain Mr. Armijo asked to buy a piece of land just above Chief Solano's grant, he was told that he might have it on condition that he did not disturb the Indians living on it and that in case any difficulty arose between himself and the Indians that he take his trouble to Chief Solano, arbitrator and peacemaker.

Fair as Chief Solano was in his dealings with the White Man, it is with regret that the White Man admits that he was not fair with the great chief; for after a few years Chief Solano was forced to sell his grant for fifty dollars to accommodate the selfish wishes of the White Man.

It was a sad mistake and it is to the White Man's credit that he regrets it. It is also to his credit that after one hundred and seventeen years, he is unwilling that the White Man forget the debt he owes this great Indian. After one hundred and seventeen years, the White Man erects to the Red Man a monument in memory of those qualities that are never old—that are great in any man no matter what his color, creed, or race—qualities of hospitality and brotherhood.

Although Chief Solano's death is shrouded in mystery, it is believed that he, no doubt, died as he had lived, in the service of his people. An epidemic of smallpox broke out among the Indians sometime in the '40's, which almost completely wiped out the Suisunne Tribe. After the burial of Chief Solano somewhere in Suisun Valley, a few sad Indians without a chief filed up the hill and away, leaving their Rockville home forever.

More or less mystery surrounds the death and burial place of the famous chief, but there is no doubt of the place in which he lived and ruled. His adobe home was in Rockville. After his death, it was occupied by a certain Jesus Molino. Later it was transformed into a stage station. Now nothing remains of the home but the adobe foundation which still stands to testify of this early history, and upon which has been built a modern structure.

So in commemoration of his **great life**, the Red Men of California under the leadership of Dr. H. V. Clymer, Massasoit Tribe No. 262, have sponsored the erection of a bronze statue in memory of a **great man**—Chief Francisco Solano.