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Edited by George Tays

Vallejo

NILES FLOUR MILL

Registered Landmark #46

by

Don Morton

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources

Division of Parks

Berkeley, 1938

NILES FLOUR MILL

by

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The site of the Niles Flour Mill, a stone-foundation, stands within the city limits of Niles, Alameda County, California. The registered State Landmark, number forty-six, is four miles northwest of the historic Mission San Jose and twenty-four miles south of Oakland. It is along the old Haywards-Mission road, several miles east and parallel to State Highway seventeen.[1] The exact spot where the old "Vallejo Mills" or Niles Flour Mill stood is just across the Southern Pacific tracks as one enters the little city of Niles from the north on old Vallejo Street.[2] The stone foundation lay about one hundred feet west of the bank of the Alameda Creek, between the old Sunol road (Niles Canyon Road) and the railroad, or about midway between Vallejo Street and the historic Alameda Creek.[3]

The three forks of Alameda Creek, from which Alameda County derived its name in the early 1850's, meander from the Hayward-Alvarado foothills of 400 to 1,200 feet elevation. They join the main stream one mile southwest of Decoto along the old Nursery Road of the former Rancho Arroyo de la Alameda. The creek then flows for two miles to Alvarado. It half-circles the little city of Alvarado at two points, each one-half mile

apart, and then meanders into the San Francisco Bay three miles beyond the town.[4] Among the three upper forks of the famous Alameda Creek the northern branch meanders from township 3, south; range 2, west. There are six tributaries on the upper, or northern branch four miles south of Castro Valley. The middle fork of Alameda Creek begins up among the Decoto hills. It joins the southern or main branch of Alameda Creek two miles northwest of Centerville. Hence, when speaking of "Alameda Creek" as the boundary line of the old Alameda Rancho or locale of the historic Niles Flour Mill it is in reality the southern fork or main branch of the Spanish-named creek wherein our story begins.

The Alameda Creek or main stream, which extends from Livermore Valley to the bay, was discovered and named by the Portola expedition in 1769. The Spanish Fathers called the stream "Rio de la Alameda."[5] It was lined with willow trees and gave the appearance to the first Spaniards of a tree lined avenue, which to them was an "Alameda."[6] The creek is the largest in the county, about twenty-one miles long. The dam which José de Jesús Vallejo spoke of during the litigation proceedings "to increase the water-power to turn the giant millstones" of the old "Vallejo Mill" or Niles Flour Mill was situated several miles west from the outlet of the three other tributaries which empty into the main channel. It was located about one mile up Niles Canyon ("the glacier-cut Alameda Canyon,")

near Stonybrook Canyon.[7]

The native people of the "Alameda Canyon," or Niles Canyon, encountered by the first white men in 1769, 1770, 1772, and 1776 were the Tamien tribe[8] or family (San Jose Indians) of the great Costanoan nation. At the point where the San Joaquin and Sacramento streams empty into San Francisco Bay the Costanoan territory began. "The winding north shores of the bay were Wintun and Coast Miwok. The entire southern border, including the long arm known as San Francisco Bay proper, was Costanoan to the Golden Gate. From here south their range followed the coast to beyond Monterey."[9] Dr. Kroeber said that the records preserved show one principal dialect for each mission. At the establishments of Santa Clara and San Jose Mission, however, the speech of the native Indians differed so slightly that the two tribes were united and classified in a single dialect group. In 1856 Latham separated certain of the dialects subsequently classified as Costanoan and Miwok. In the earliest linguistic map of California in Powers' Tribes of California in 1877, Power still grouped together as "Mutsun" the languages then known.[10] Fourteen years later (1901), in his Indian Linguistic Families, Powers divided the same dialects into two families. He designated them the Costanoan and Moguelumnan nations. "It was the sudden English surd stops pronounced with somewhat less breath or some degree of sonancy - during the explosion - to cause them (the native Tamien tribe of the Niles Flour Mill

region) at times to assume to English ears a quality approaching that of sonant stops."[11] Thus, in 1776 when the great diarist, Father Font chronicled the famous Anza expedition across the "Rio de la Alameda" (Alameda Creek) it is evident why he referred to the dialect of the native Niles Indians as, "distinct from all those we had formerly heard and is very ugly."[12] It is possible that the native Tamiens of the Costanoan nation sounded to the pioneer Spanish trail blazers just the same as it may have to English ears, "a quality approaching that of sonant stops." In Font's complete diary of that noted second California expedition from Mexico to Monterey, Dr. Bolton said [13] "they continued northeastward (below Mission San Jose, Sunday, March 31, 1776) past Warm Springs, Irvington, and the Lagoon; the 'somewhat salty' lagoon mentioned by Font." It is further said that the arroyo "about half way on the road" was that of Alameda Creek. Here the Spaniards heard the native "Niles Indians," or the Tamiens of the Costanoan's chorus, "Au, Au, Au, Au,.." In a condensed translation of Captain Anza's diary (April 1, 1776), Dr. Eldredge said[14] that upon the same journey through what is now Alameda County they passed six Indian rancheria between the present site of the Niles Flour Mill and the bay. In recording the history making observations of the local primitive-like Indians within the vicinity of the present landmark for Sunday, March 31, 1776, Father Font said:[15]

I said Mass. Day dawned fair with a frost so heavy that the grass, the tents, and everything else was very white. It was quite cold all night, and likewise today it was cold, with the northwest wind which was blowing. We set out from the Guadalupe River at eight o'clock in the morning, and having traveled some ten long leagues in varying directions at four in the afternoon we halted on the banks of the Arroyo de San Salvador, so-called by Father Crespí (1769). It is known also as the Arroyo de la Harina, for so the soldiers called it during the journey of Señor Fages because in it a load of flour got wet....

The Indians whom we saw along here are totally distinct in language from the previous ones. They are somewhat bearded, gentle, and very poor, but in color they are the same as all the rest....

After we had left the sloughs and taken the higher ground, we passed along the shores of a somewhat salty lagoon, which we left on our right and into which apparently flowed some arroyos from the canyons of the range of hills which we were following (Apparently the three upper forks of Alameda Creek east of the present Haywards). All the rest of the road is through very level country, green and flower-covered all the way to the estuary, but with no other timber or firewood than that afforded by the trees in the arroyos which we encountered, which were five. All along the plain [present site of East Bay cities from Niles to Berkeley] we saw occasional Indians, some of whom fled on seeing us and others who waited for us. These latter the commander (Anza) tried to win by giving them glass beads. Those whom we saw before we reached the first arroyo appear to be very poor and miserable, for they have not even firewood by which to keep warm, and they go about naked like all the rest in those countries, and eat grass and herbs and some roots like medium-sized onions, which they call amole, and in which those plains greatly abound. One Indian who carried his provisions on the end of a pole invited us to eat some of them.

About half way on the road we came to an arroyo with little water [Alameda Creek] most of it in very deep pools. It has on its banks many sycamores, cottonwoods, and some live oaks and other trees, and it appears to flow west to empty into the estuary, toward which all the arroyos flow and toward which runs a thick growth of trees....

From these trees about thirty Indians came out on the road to us, armed with some-what dilapidated bows and arrows, but in a peaceful mood....

Their language is distinct from all those we had formerly heard and is very ugly.... Their method of greeting us was as follows: They came running, and before reaching us they raised an arm extending the hand as a sign that we should stop. Yelling with rapidity, they said: "Au, au, au, au, au, au, au, au, au, au, au, au," and then they halted, vigorously slapping their thighs....

A long series of village names has been preserved through the notations of the pioneer missionaries. Something like one hundred are known to have furnished converts to San Francisco alone. Most of these names are "Costanoan" in sound. The native Niles-San Jose Indians or Tamiens of the Costanoan nation are extinct "so far as all practical purposes are concerned. A few scattered individuals survive, whose parents were attached to the Mission San Jose."[16] They are said to be of mixed tribal ancestry and live almost lost among other Indians or obscure Mexicans of today. Of the little wars - or village fueds, that agitated the Costanoan groups from time to time, the following have been recorded:[17] The Salsoan against the natives of San Francisco; the Sakla-n against the same, or against the Oakland tribe transplanted to the mission; the Ausai-ma against the Mutsu-n; the Wacharo-n or others of the Soledad region against the northern Salinans. As the local Niles-San Jose, or Tamien Indians died out under the shock of contact with civilization those from a greater distance were brought to the Mission San Jose in increasing numbers.

The Mission San Jose de Guadalupe situated four miles south of the landmark Niles Flour Mill, was erected by Father Lasuén in 1797.

> In the years 1794 and 1795 exploring parties of priests and soldiers looked for suitable sites for the new Spanish missions. Prior to that time three other expeditions had crossed the future site of the Mission San Jose. A few scouts sent out by Portola in 1769 penetrated the southeastern tip of present Alameda County. In 1770 and 1772 Captain Pedro Fages led two expeditions from Monterey. The first reached the present site of Berkeley and the second followed the shores of the bay.[18]

The men led by Lieutenant-colonel Don Juan Bautista de Anza in 1776 around the southern end of the bay and to the San Joaquin formed the last group to enter the Niles region. It was then thought of as a possible site for a mission and the party of 1794 was sent out to examine it for that purpose. Thus, about three years later the Mission San Jose was established. At the time of its founding it was the only settlement northeast of the pueblo (town) of San Jose.[19] The first limit to its lands was fixed in 1806. The boundary line was set almost directly east from the present site of the town of Alvisc to the Mt. Diablo range. It is said that the northern boundary was drawn in 1820 when the San Antonio Rancho was granted to Don Luis María Peralta. "At that date the southern boundary of the rancho and the northern boundary of the San Jose Mission was designated as the San Leandro Creek."[20] There were a few scattered settlers such as herdsmen in the vicinity

of what is now the city of Niles but there was not any general occupation of the lands until the secularization laws were passed and put into effect. In 1834, just before secularization laws took place Mission San Jose had 2,300 Indians. From 1797-1869 the baptisms numbered 8,945 and the Indian marriages 6,945. "When the humane and unselfish government of the missionary fathers ceased, Don José de Jesús Vallejo became the first administrator (1837)."[21] Rumors of the slaughter of mission cattle in large numbers, for the sale of the hides and tallow, and unauthorized sale of mission property, led Governor Alvarado on January 17, 1839, to appoint an inspector to supervise the accounts of the administrators.[22] It is further recorded that the administrators were appointed who administered away the tangible property in favor of themselves and their friends with marvelous industry and celerity:

> People whose names were held in esteem among the colonists, members of the 'first families,' leaders in public opinion and public affairs, are recorded as having despoiled the missions of their lands and cattle by wholesale.[23]

The native Niles-San Jose Indians, unused to working without the guidance of the mission fathers had abandoned the lands to which they had been assigned. They wandered away to adopt again their former mode of life. The governor therefore, on October 28, 1845, gave public notice for the sale to the highest bidder of the missions.[24] The once free, native Indians of

the Niles Flour Mill region who held lands within the district were required to apply to the government for title. They were at the same time prohibited from selling their grants. Thus with the period of secularization the remaining land was taken up. It was divided into the two San Lorenzo ranchos on the north, one owned by Guillermo Castro and the other by the De Soto family.[25] Just south of them was the Rancho El Arroyo de la Alameda. The Alameda Rancho was granted by Governor Alvarado to Don José de Jesús Vallejo in August, 1842.[26]

Don José de Jesús Vallejo's original holdings consisted of 17,755.38 acres in Alameda County.[27] Within a few short years he lost the title to the big Alameda Rancho. It ended with a lone twelve acre strip of land. The latter was the site of his "Vallejo Mills" or Niles Flour Mill. The four square leagues of his Alameda Rancho originally belonged to the Mission San Jose.[28]

(Prior to 1797 it was Indian land.)

> Hearing of this beautiful land of promise and the success of the Mission Fathers, settlers commenced pouring into the valley at an early date. Among the very first was the Higuerra family of three brothers, followed by Augustine Alviso and Don José de Jesús Vallejo, who built the first flouring mill (outside of the Mission) in northern California at or near the present town of Niles.[29]

Don José de Jesús Vallejo was a son of Ignácio Vallejo and an elder brother of General Mariano G. Vallejo. His father, Ignacio Vallejo was a native of Jalisco, Mexico. The latter's parents, or grandparents of Don José de Jesús, emigrated to Mexico

when Don José's father was not yet born.[30] They settled in the Province of Guadalajara, now the State of Jalisco. A copy of the genealogical record of the famous Vallejo family was filed in 1806 in the Spanish archives of Alta (New) California. A translation of the record, re-written by C. H. Shinn in 1891, said in part:[31]

> ... Don Alonzo Vallejo commanded the Spanish troops on board the vessel which brought the royal commissioner Bobadilla to America with orders to carry Columbus a prisoner to Spain. ... Captain Vallejo [another famous Vallejo] was under Cortez. He followed that illustrious cut throat to the complete conquest of Mexico, and became governor of the province of Panuco, lord of great silver mines, and master of peons....
>
> Bilboa, the ancient capital of Burgos, Spain, [Site of present 1939 Civil War Strife] was the place from which the branch of the Vallejos' that is known in California started for the New World. Of this branch came Don Ignácio Vicente Vallejo, born in 1748, in the city of Guadalara, Mexico, and designed, as were many of the family before him, for holy orders and the service of the church.
>
> The young man (the father of Don José de Jesús Vallejo) rebelled, volunteered under Captain Ribera Y Moncada in Padre Junípero Serra's famous expedition (Portola-party, 1769-1770), landing at San Diego in 1769, and thus became a pioneer among the Spanish pioneers themselves. He soon became prominent in the colony, and was not only made military commander of various towns, but was long the only civil engineer in the province, laying out most of the greater irrigation works of the missions and pueblos, and becoming the owner of extensive and valuable estates....

Don José de Jesús, the builder of Niles Flour Mill and founder of Niles, was the second son of the pioneer Ignácio Vicente Vallejo. Don Jose was born in the old Mission at

Monterey in 1798.[32] He became a captain of engineers. In 1818 he distinguished himself by his brave defense of Monterey against Captain Bouchard. In 1819 Don José de Jesús Vallejo married Doña Soledad Sanchez de Ortega. It is said among other things he was comisionado and administrator at Mission San Jose from 1836 to 1840 and military commander at the Pueblo de San Jose from 1841 to 1842.[33] After 1852 Don José de Jesús Vallejo was postmaster at the Mission San Jose. His mansion stood just west of the Haywards-Mission highway opposite the Mission San Jose. It was built in 1850.[34]

It is said that Don José de Jesús Vallejo's affairs on his Alameda Rancho were left primarily in hands of the overseers. An expensive flour mill became the most famous asset of Vallejo's estate.[35] Thus, around the "Vallejo Mills" or Niles Flour Mill, history centers in this section of beautiful Alameda County. The more modern griet mill, today known as the historic landmark, was erected in 1853. It was one of several Don Jose's flouring mills.[36] The flour mill of 1853 was the first water-wheel mill constructed following the primitive adobe mill at the Mission. "Having mentioned the subject of flour mills one may state that in 1850 there was a very crude one at Niles, the property of J. J. Vallejo, and in 1852, one was built at the Mission San Jose by E. L. Beard and H. C. Ellsworth."[37] Relative to the construction of Don José de Jesús Vallejo's larger mill T. E. Akers said:[38]

Vallejo employed Zachariah Amos to build a grist mill on the Alameda Creek just below the point where the creek leaves the foothills. He made a contract with Amos whereby he agreed to pay him $20,000 for his labor and material. This contract was dated May 27, 1856. Vallejo, according to the contract, paid $5,000 on September 1, 1856 and was to pay the rest within 4 years from the date of the completion of the mill. The remaining sum of $15,000 was to bear interest at the rate of 1½ per cent a month. To secure himself Amos took out a mechanic's lien on June 2, 1857, for the water-flumes, mill and machinery and the land on which the mill was located, a tract of about 12 acres [present site of city of Niles]. Amos claimed the lien was for the amount due him from Vallejo, and that the bill had been certified by Vallejo to be correct. Vallejo said that he had been informed that Amos had filed some papers with the Recorder of Alameda County in regard to the mill, but he did not know the contents or the true legal effect of the same. The case was held over until the next term of the court.

Meanwhile, Adler, upon whose testimony Vallejo expected to be able to prove fraud, had gone to Chile. The court refused to grant a continuance of the case, until a deposition from him could be secured. On October 8, 1858, a computation of the mortgage debt was made.[39] The following day, Judge Craven B. Hester issued his final decree for Blankman and his wife. The opinion of the court was that the plaintiffs were entitled to a decree of foreclosure and sale of the mortgaged premises. The litigation was a long drawn out affair. Finally, on June 12, 1865, Judge Samuel Bill McKee granted a decree of foreclosure.[40] In making his decision he did not consider the distances as given in the description, as they had proven incorrect. The Judge accepted only the fences that existed in

1857 as the intended boundaries when the mortgage was made by Vallejo. The boundaries in the Vallejo mortgage read as follows;[41]

> ... On a point on Alameda Creek 300 yards above the mill where a wire fence meets the creek, down the meanders of the creek to another wire fence about 3/4 of a mile, at right angles along this fence ½ mile to near the foot of the hills, thence east to the first fence and along this fence to the place of beginning, including the grist-mill, race and water privileges and about 12 acres of land.

On February 18, 1878, O. C. Miller purchased for an unknown amount the water-flumes, ditch, and water-privileges connected with the Vallejo mill. The last deed to the Vallejo property in Alameda County was sold (1883) to Peter Maguire, the homesite of Vallejo in Mission San Jose. The place was sold for nineteen hundred dollars. Don José de Jesus Vallejo died in Salinas, Monterey County in 1882.

The "very crude flour mill at Niles of the 1850's," as it was referred to by one authority[42] was erected by Don José de Jesús Vallejo in 1841. It was built of primitive-like mud brick (adobe) on the bank of Alameda Creek some distance above the larger "Vallejo Mill," the site of the landmark known as the Niles Flour Mill. Prior to the period of about 1841, it is said that horse-power mills were in use at many places. The original grinding stones for the first water-driven mill were brought from Spain.[43] They were for Vallejo's first flouring mill (1841). In later years one of them served

as a doorstep to the old adobe building. The pioneer adobe flour mill of the early 1840's was quite as famous as Vallejo's more modern mill. It is said there were new grinding stones ordered from France in 1849. The foundation stones for the larger Vallejo mill were quarried from the hills of Niles Canyon. They were laid in "natural" cement. The stone aqueduct (flume) which Vallejo built to conduct water to the mill extended about one mile up the canyon.[44] The aqueduct or flume was originally two and one-half feet wide and three feet deep. In 1904 the aqueduct was walled over by brick. It formed part of the Spring Valley Water Company's pipe line.[45] Today it is situated near the locale of the giant Hetch Hetchy fresh water line from the O'Shaughnessy Dam, Yosemite National Park of the High Sierras, via Modesto and Mission San Jose to South San Francisco. After the new flour mill of 1853 was erected the old Spanish adobe mill of 1841 was used for grinding other grain. It was thus operated for more than two decades. It is further said that the old oak rafters were put together with wooden pegs. Mr. Atley was the first miller to run the newly-built mill.[46] At that time, the present historic landmark was beginning to become known as the "Vallejo Mills." The "Vallejo Mills" was the pioneer start of the town of the same name. It was in later years changed to "Niles" during the advent of the railroads.

In the early 1850's the "Vallejo Mills" or Niles Flour Mill had become a social center as well as the new

industrial life of the vicinity. "Often the heavy timbers of its large warerooms were bedecked with lanterns, while dancers gracefully swayed to music on its floors."[47] It is said that in 1852 a public ball was held in the old mill warehouse. At the colorful affair more than three hundred dollars was raised. The money was used at that time as a fund to establish the first Niles district school. It was one of the first, spirited "community drives" in Alameda County. In the early 1870's the first Sunday School in the township was held in the historic flouring mill wareroom. When the railroad was finished in 1869 "Vallejo Mills" was changed to "Niles." It was named after Judge Niles.[48] Judge Niles was an executive of the Central Pacific Railroad, now part of the Southern Pacific system. In 1878 the old flour mill by the old mill stream was used by A. and L. F. Lenmeister.[49] The Lenmeisters were millers born in Bavaria. They arrived in the United States during the general "flour mill boom" of the 1850's, and to Niles about twenty years later.[50]

The last flour milled in the Niles Flour Mill was by W. M. Corges in December 1884. Having heard that "his mill" was to be permanently closed, Corges seemingly wished to die along with the Spanish symbol of pioneer California. Hence, it is believed why he was found a few days later in his room a suicide. Thus, too, "where the tree-lined Alameda Creek issues

from Niles Canyon and passes into the plain" across Haywards to the bay, stands the landmark Niles Flour Mill; a living symbol of the days of Don Jose de Jesus Vallejo of the 1840-1850's; the colorful flouring mills by the old mill stream at Niles, California.

NILES FLOUR MILL

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