

# Historic Peña Adobe Park

A brief history: People have lived in the Lagoon Valley area for hundreds of years. This region was first occupied by the Ulatis Indians who supported themselves with hunting and fishing, as well as foraging for local vegetation. Their population was decimated by epidemic diseases brought in by settlers in the 1830s.

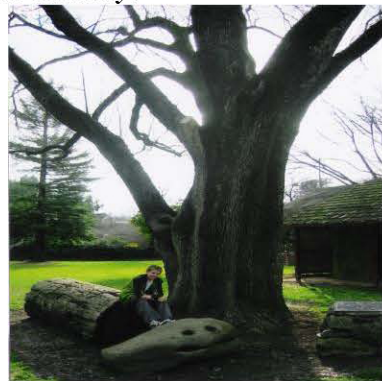


One early land grant in the area was Rancho Los Potos, granted to Juan Manuel Vaca and Juan Felipe Peña in 1841. The two families each built adobe houses in the Lagoon Valley. Peña Adobe Park is what remains of their settlement.

Nine years after the Peñas and Vacas arrived in New Mexico, California became the 31<sup>st</sup> state. In 1850, Juan Manuel Vaca sold nine square miles of Rancho Los Potos to William McDaniel, who later with Lansing Mizner laid out and founded Vacaville.

Peña Adobe has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1967.

1) This elm tree is speculated to be around 100 years old. Elms are aggressive, fast growing trees that can reach heights and widths of 80 feet. This tree is a survivor of the Dutch elm disease, which killed millions of elms over much of the country.



2) As you may or may not know, orange trees are not native to this area of California. So how did this tree get here? It is believed that as the Peñas traveled here, they passed through New Mexico and parts of Southern California before settling in this very spot. They may have picked up citrus when they went through Southern California. As this tree was planted by the Peñas when they arrived in the mid 1800s, this orange tree is thought to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest orange tree in the state of California.



3) This statue is known as Our Lady of Guadalupe. It is an image of the Virgin Mary that is believed to have appeared in Mexico on the cloak of a native man. In 1737, it was chosen as the patroness to the city of Mexico City, and in 1910, Pope Pius X declared her the patroness of all Latin America. Then in 1935, Pius XI extended it to the Philippines.



4) Construction started on the adobe in 1842, and was completed several years later. The bottom floor consists of three rooms totaling 51' X 18' in dimensions, and the top floor has a 47' X 14' room. The walls of the adobe are two feet thick and are made up of 23x10x3 inch adobe mud bricks. In 1880, the adobe was modernized by encasing the entire structure with wood, and also had a kitchen that was added on. However, by 1950, the house was abandoned and the wood siding became damaged by the elements, which in turn exposed the adobe brick to rain, damaging the structure. Then in 1965, the entire house was restored, along

with the surrounding area, and became a park in 1967.



5) The ovens were built, of course, for cooking. Early in the morning, a woman would rise and start a fire in the oven, and let it die down. The brick that the oven is made from absorbed all the heat that the fire exerted. The woman could then put bread in, and the heat from the bricks would actually raise the dough. The heated brick was also used in making tortillas, where they were put on the outside surface and then heated by the brick.



6) During the renovation in the 1960's, there was also an archaeological dig that occurred in the adobe area. Naturally, there were artifacts that were placed in this museum. The museum was originally the add-on kitchen that was constructed in 1880. The kitchen was dragged about 50 feet, and now

stands here, filled with artifacts and is now known as the Peña Adobe museum.



7) The Willis Linn Jepson garden was named after the botanist who was a Vacaville native, and wrote a book entitled "A Flora of Western Middle California". He collected specimens from Lagoon Valley and loved to spend time here as a boy. The garden was 100' X 200' and had statues, a croquet ground, and a patio with chairs. There were Black Mission Grapes, Cedar of Lebanon trees, and even a cork oak tree. There were also many flowers which included tea rose bushes, tulips, pink Castilian roses, marigolds, hollyhocks, verbena, china lilies, Bird of Paradise, Mock orange shrubs, lilacs, and multiple bulbs. The garden was truly a beautiful spectacle when it was flourishing.



8) The Indian Council Grounds, also known as the Burial Grounds, are right here. During the adobe restoration, remains of Indians were found and were buried here. These were most likely the Ulatis Indians, who lived in this area for hundreds of years. They were extremely close to nature, and survived on waterfowl, fish, small game, berries, and vegetables with no real need for agriculture. Along with the Suisuns, Patwin and Wintun Indians, they formed a nation that occupied the entire western Sacramento Valley. However, during the 1830's, there was an epidemic that was brought in from Hispanic and Russian settlements, which wiped out entire villages in the area.



**Eagle Project by Jason Hansen, Oct. 2006**

