



People of the Bear Flag Rebellion

(By Steve Beck, Director of Educational Programs, Sutter's Fort State Historic Park)

As part of the "cannon demonstration," we interview 2-6 students portraying characters who were participants in the *Bear Flag Revolt*. These are some of the prominent characters of the *Bear Flag Revolt* with a brief description of the role they played. The Bear Flag Revolt was fought June 14-18, 1846; although preliminary events began on June 12, 1846. The *Bear Flag Republic* lasted 24 days. The American Flag was raised over Monterey July 7, 1846. It was raised at Sutter's Fort on July 11, 1846.

John C. Fremont: This is the man for whom the cannon in the southeast bastion is named. In 1846 Fremont was in California ostensibly to make maps for the U.S.. He had the largest and most heavily armed map making team ever assembled. He was in command of over 60 hardened mountain men who were selected because of their ability to handle a rifle. Fremont was probably sent here to spy on the situation in California and if war broke out between the US and Mexico, Fremont would be able to protect American settlers and seize California for the United States. He was also here to deter the British from occupying California. He acquired the cannon from the Bear Flaggers after they attacked Sonoma.

Mariano G. Vallejo: This was the general in charge of the Mexican military headquarters at Sonoma. There were very few men in his army because he had to pay them from his own funds. They were mainly around to protect his house and family from raiding bandits. The Bear Flaggers had to awaken Vallejo and his army to let them know they were under attack and under arrest. Vallejo, his brother Salvatore, his brother in law Jacob Leese (American), and Victor Prudon were taken prisoner during the revolt and marched to Sutter's Fort where they were jailed. The Bear Flaggers spent several days hanging around Vallejo's hacienda drinking his wine and brandy and deciding the future of their new republic.

William Todd: This was the man who designed the original Bear Flag. After it was raised above Sonoma, the native people referred to it as el choate, which means the boar. I usually refer to it as el puerko (the pig). They thought it looked more like a pig than a bear. William Todd was also the nephew of Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of Abraham Lincoln.

Jose Castro: Castro was the general in charge of the Mexican cavalry stationed at San Jose. He issued the proclamation that ordered all Americans to leave the Department of California immediately. This is what precipitated the Bear Flag Revolt.

William B. Ide: Ide was the first and only President (Commander) of the Republic of California. He wrote the original proclamation of independence and terms of rebellion. He was an educated man and former school teacher. His adobe has been preserved as a State Historical Landmark near Red Bluff.

Susan Haskell Ide: The only first-lady for the Republic of California.



Christopher "Kit" Carson: Carson was the guide for Fremont. He was responsible for the only deaths that were directly related to the rebellion; although a couple of American settlers possibly acting as scouts were murdered by the Californios near Petaluma, prior to the rebellion. During the rebellion, Carson was sent to look for the Mexican army (which didn't exist). All he found was grandpa Berryessa and his 20 year old nephews the deHaro twins. They were armed only with their traveling side arms, and had no knowledge of the revolt. Carson and his men shot them so they wouldn't carry information to the Mexican authorities.

Francisco Arce: Lieutenant Arce was the Mexican officer in charge of rounding up the caballadas of government horses that were to be used by Castro to drive the Americans out of California. On June 12 or 13, he was attacked at Knight's Ranch, near Sutter's Fort, by Americans who seized the horses for themselves.

William Bell Elliot (Uncle Billy) – Uncle Billy was a prominent member of the Bear Flaggers. Newly purchased red flannel that was destined to become his red long underwear was possibly used for the stripe on the original Bear Flag. Hence, it became known as the "Uncle Billy's Bare Butt Revolt."

Elizabeth Patton Elliot – She was the wife of William and supplied some of the material for the original Bear Flag and possibly helped with the sewing. Some accounts have the material for the red stripe on the flag coming from a piece of her petticoat.

John Bidwell: Bidwell did not participate in the revolt on July 14th but he arrived a day or so later and wrote a short "Declaration of Independence" that was adopted by the Bear Flaggers. Others had written and orated much longer documents, but after sharing freely in Vallejo's brandy, the Bear Flaggers weren't in the mood for long speeches. The Declaration roughly reads: "We the undersigned hereby agree to unite for the defense of an independent California." The document was also used as the oath for the *California Battalion*.

William Knight – Owned a ranch near present day Woodland and was one of the earliest settlers in the Sacramento Valley. He supported the Bear Flaggers but didn't want to antagonize the Mexicans (in case the rebellion was not successful). He presented himself to Vallejo following, the conquest at Sonoma, as being *merely an interpreter* for the Americans. The caballada of Mexican horses that was stolen from Francisco Arce was done on Knight's ranch. Knight carried word of the Mexican Army gathering horses to the Americans at Sutter's Fort. Because of this, Knight is sometimes referred to as *The Paul Revere of the Bear Flag Revolt*."

Carmel Lucero y Tapia Arce Knight – She was the wife of William Knight and the cousin of Lieutenant Francisco Arce. She told her husband William Knight about Arce's mission to gather government horses for the Mexican Army that were to be used to drive foreigners from California. She probably got the information from Arce's wife. Consequently, she was a spy.



Blue Jacket – A Native American in Sutter's elite guard and cavalry. He was selected by Fremont (or one of his subordinates) to guard the Mexican prisoners (Vallejo etc.) in the Fort. He was chosen because Fremont believed that Sutter and Bidwell were being too easy on the prisoners. I suppose this means that Blue Jacket did not show the prisoners much respect. Blue Jacket was probably a former Mission Indian because he spoke Spanish. He may have been a member of the Moquelumne group of Natives.

Ezekial Merritt: Merritt was the military leader of the Bear Flaggers. He was a renowned mountain man and Indian fighter who was known more for his bravery than his intellect. For his efforts in the Bear Flag Revolt and his ability to lead men, Fremont made him a captain in the California Battalion. He later squandered the Battalion's food money on a drinking binge in Monterey.

Nancy Kelsey – She had a husband and two brothers-in-law who fought in the Bear Flag Revolt. She was present at Sonoma during the revolt and may have helped sew the original Bear Flag. She and her family occupied General Vallejo's house while Vallejo was imprisoned at Sutter's Fort. She is also remarkable for having been the first white woman to cross the Sierra Nevada. She came to California with the Bidwell Party in 1841.