

Weddings bring two families closer

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By the late 1880s, Vacaville had become a settled and prosperous community.

Numerous families had moved into the area during the preceding years, the orchard industry had established itself as profitable, the town offered educational facilities, several churches, general merchandising stores, millinery stores, tailors, saloons, hotels, and many other amenities to support a comfortable life.

It is therefore always surprising to note the actual number of people who lived in the general area. The census of 1880, for example, lists 1,299 people in the township, while only 361 lived in the town of Vacaville itself.

Social contacts had to have been quite frequent within such a limited group, especially among the young, unmarried sons and daughters of the area's residents. The Reporter faithfully reported all the dances, teas and other entertainments that took place as well as anybody's travels to or from the town to visit with friends and relatives.

Two of these families, the Christopher and the Towson families, had very close social contacts during the late 1880s.

Both families had arrived early to settle in the Pleasants Valley area. The Christopher family came from Tennessee, settling first in Mendocino County in 1854 before coming to the Vacaville area, where they purchased a ranch along Lagoon Valley Road, today's Pleasants Valley Road.

The Towson family also was among the early settlers, purchasing a ranch alongside the Christopher ranch, near today's Foothill Boulevard.

The 13 Towson and six Christopher children likely knew each other from early childhood on, but the year 1890 brought the families even closer together.

The year began with two weddings on the same day, Jan. 1, 1890, for Charles Christopher and Ruth Towson and for Allen Towson and Nannie Christopher. The Reporter announced on Jan. 2:

Married

"Christopher-Towson - January 1, 1890, at the residence of the bride's parents, by Elder Felkner, Mr. Charles B. (Boone) Christopher, to Miss Ruth Towson.

Towson-Christopher - January 1, 1890, at the residence of the bride's parents, by Elder Felkner, Mr. Allen Towson, to Miss Nannie (Nancy Ann) Christopher.

By these marriages two of the oldest and most respected families have been joined by the holy bonds of wedlock. A large number of invited guests were present at both places and many valuable presents were bestowed upon the couples. Bountiful dinners were spread and relished. The happy couples are in the city."

As was traditional, the respective bride's parents each hosted a wedding. Both couples likely had a similar circle of friends, not to mention the same group of relatives. One can only wonder at everybody's stamina: two wedding ceremonies and two wedding feasts in one day!

Nancy Ann's wedding dress has survived and is on exhibit at the Vacaville Museum. Made of dark red silk taffeta and velvet, it is well-tailored in the severe style fashionable during the winter of 1889-1890. Her high standing collar, a new fashion element of that day, follows the advice that "for a woman to show her neck during daylight hours is poor form."

As a daughter of a prosperous ranching family, she could afford a custom-made dress, but chose a dark color instead of the traditional bridal white. Also according to the fashion of the day, this allowed her to wear her wedding gown for several months afterward as an evening dress.

Allen and Nancy Ann both owned property in the area; he 19 acres, she nearly 30 acres, of which about 20 acres consisted of orchards. The remainder was used for other agricultural ventures such as grain and cattle. They do not seem to have had any children.

Barely had both families recovered from the festivities and the newlyweds had settled in, when a third brother-sister couple celebrated their nuptials on Nov. 25, 1890. Once again at the Towson home, the Reverend O. O. Felkner married Edna Towson and Benjamin Christopher Jr. This time, The Reporter announced in a short notice on Nov. 27:

Married

"Christopher-Towson - At the residence of the bride's parents, near Vacaville, Nov. 25th, by O. O. Felkner, B. [Benjamin] F. [Franklin] Christopher to Miss Edna Towson."

Like her sister-in-law, Nancy Ann, Edna chose a dark wedding gown, of gray de-lustered silk satin. Again the fashion style was up to the minute, with extremely tight sleeves and a rounded bolero style bodice that was a short-lived fashion element. While we do not know where Edna Towson commissioned her dress, it was obviously crafted by an expert seamstress. It also is on display at the museum.

The bride was 24 years old, the groom 30. The great register of 1896-98 also recorded that Benjamin Christopher was 5 feet 9 inches tall, of fair complexion, with brown hair and brown eyes.

The couple settled on 55 acres, which they farmed mostly in fruit, mainly peaches, apricots and prunes. They had six children: Ralph, Warren, William Ellis, Vernon Earl, Gerald and Karen. Warren and Karen died during childhood.

The next segment in two weeks will explore a high fashion wedding in Vacaville and will provide a glimpse of a typical home wedding.

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