

Roads and streets: a perpetual pain

By Jerry Bowen

Sunday, April 06, 2003

As I was maneuvering my way past various road repair and construction sites to the Vacaville Heritage Council the other day I was trying to think of a subject for this week's column and there it was. It seems that among the subjects that we constantly complain about - the weather, growth, the environment and open space - the roads and highways rank high as a subject of debate, discussion and just plain complaining.

Well, it ain't a new subject! I remembered an article I read in an early Reporter article that took a humorous view of the condition of Vacaville's streets that was published on January 19, 1884.

1884 Vacaville Town Council Road Repair Petition by Prayer

The following prayer and petition was presented to the council by Mayor Blum from numerous citizens:

"Our fathers, who art in Vacaville, hallowed be thy names (if you will grant our prayers), thy kingdoms come, (but God pity your subjects, for you are likely to become oppressive, and be blown up with dynamite or by the REPORTER), thy wills be done (provided they don't conflict with our interests), give us this day our desires (we don't ask for bread) and grant the following petition:

First-That the mud-hole standing in the middle of the street be filled up, as strangers as well as citizens are liable to imagine that the bottom has fallen out there. The county is not able, nor the government willing to establish a light-house there, to warn off those who may almost at any moment plunge into the Slough of Despond, so horribly depicted by John Bunion; pilgrims are continually driving along both on horses and in vehicles and a public thoroughfare should be both safe and pleasant. If no other remedy be at hand we would suggest the purchase of four healthy mules, that they be sunk up to their heads so that their ears may protrude as danger signals, and their yough-ye-yough! Yough-ye-yough! may serve as foghorns. If it be deemed expedient to fill up the hole, it is humbly suggested by your petitioners that the waters and the land surrounding it be donated to the Government for a branch of the Mare Island Navy Yard, so as to get some red-tape naval officers stationed here. Should Uncle Sam decline the gift, then we would suggest that wiggle-tails, frogs, malaria, and old general appearance of Don't-Care-for-Nothing-Nor-Nobody be given the ponds.

Second, We suggest that a sewer be made to the creek, sufficiently large to carry off the water.

- Signed, 999 citizens.”

After Mayor Blum presented the petition to the council, the members couldn't resist responding in kind.

Councilman Parker moved that a search warrant be sworn out and placed in Hugh Cernon's hands directing him to search for that thousandth citizen who had not signed the petition.

The column went on to report that the Chief of Police, Cernon, returned after a diligent search, to report that the thousandth man must have left town or was clinging to a mule's ear in the mud-hole, as he could not find him.

Then Councilman Eversole responded by saying he thought he had seen him mounted on an old gray horse, lost in the chaparral, west of town.

Councilman Long said he would go out to see Bob Campbell, road overseer of this district, about that mud-hole and claimed that the 999 petition signers have no right to meddle in it.

Councilman Scoggins, demanding to be heard, bellowed, “Your Honor, and Gentlemen of the Council: In relation to that petition, I move the impeachment of Jeff Owens, and Jeff Gordon for concocting it.”

Gordon countered by saying, “Gentlemen will please pay no attention to this charge as the water is dammed up for use in case of fire. Why, gentlemen, a dozen shingles could be torn off and immersed there and extinguished.”

Owens also responded by saying, “I disclaim having anything to do with addressing our fathers who art in Vacaville, it would have been unbecoming in me as City Attorney for me to have done so.”

Scoggins replied: As the gentlemen deny of course I will take it back, but I do say that if the county of Solano insists upon exercising guardianship over the town of Vacaville, and take money from its citizens or road tax, that a reasonable amount should be expended in filling up that and all others of the like nature, therefore I move that the Mayor hand the petition to “Uncle Bob Campbell” with a request that he act.

After all the theatrics and bombastic fun, you would think there might have been some

action taken to solve the dilemma of the sinkhole that represented Vacaville's streets. That is, if you thought politics moved faster in small towns than large cities at the time.

More people were moving into the area and the pressure to do something about new roads and improving them slowly began to mount. New roads in the area were proposed and eventually built. Pleasants Valley area was one of them. In May 1884 a petition was circulated to get the county to build a new road from J. W. Gates ranch to a point known as Fitch's cliff in the hills west of town.

The only efforts I found in the next four months of news was a recommendation by Mr. Morgenstern to use county jail prisoners for the purpose of working on the roads in Vacaville. The practice had been in use for some time in Fairfield and Suisun City.

At the time, Vacaville was not yet incorporated and that topic became one of the prime subjects in future news. One of the issues to entice incorporation was to "macadamize" the roads (A mixture of gravel and rock). After two tries, Vacaville finally became incorporated in 1892 after the earthquake destroyed much of the downtown area. Then the City Council had the clout to make improvements, subject of course to bond issues.

Were the roads improved? Well, the streets were macadamized, but still became muddy sinkholes during wet weather especially when improvements required digging up the streets. It wasn't until 1914 that some of the streets were treated to the new process of paving.

Today the perpetual sideshow continues as improvements to our historic downtown area are made as streets are often dug up again. In the long run, it's worth the frustration of maneuvering around the work as our downtown continues to be improved while retaining its heritage with a mixture of both the past and present.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/160>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/160/>