

# Treasure other than gold lured immigrants

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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Many of Solano County's pioneers were lured to California by the Gold Rush and its economic opportunities, before settling down instead to cultivate the rich soils.

Others made the perilous overland journey in search of very different riches, among them Germans in the years 1850 to 1860, many emigrating from the German states of Hannover and Schleswig-Holstein.

In 1848 and 1849, the German states attempted to create the first national assembly of freely elected representatives in Frankfurt. Their efforts ultimately failed, partly through the attempts by the Danish King to annex Schleswig-Holstein. Hannoverian and Prussian troops fought the Danish troops, until Russia and England intervened, forcing Prussia to withdraw.

The German state assembly could no longer sustain its revolutionary efforts without Prussian aid. In the aftermath of the failed revolution, with the political pendulum swinging mightily to the right, many supporters either were severely punished or decided to leave their homeland.

Of the 2.6 million immigrants to the United States during the decade 1850 to 1860, nearly a third came from Germany. They sought not riches from gold, but a free country offering them the opportunity to build a society based on democratic principles.

Thus, locally we have the phenomenon that a large number of German families settled in the Suisun Valley and Cordelia area, most of them originating from Northern German areas. Names such as Dittmer, Glashoff, Siebe, and Goosen still remind us of their origins.

Among this group was the family of Frederick Goosen and his wife Christina. Frederick was born in Hanover in 1810, Christina in 1827, most likely also in that area. They came to Solano County sometime around 1852, after a harrowing sea crossing during which their two young daughters died. They settled in the Suisun Valley. Frederick became a naturalized citizen of the United States on March 18, 1854, likely followed by Christina. That same year, their daughter Annie was born, the first of seven children to be born in California.

Frederick purchased land from Capt. Waterman and Capt. A.A. Ritchie late in 1855,

with the deed recorded on Jan. 1, 1856. He added more land in 1859, purchased from Macey Hiram. With these lands, he started a dairy farm. He seems to have prospered, being able to sell land to another German settler, John (Johann) Siebe in 1866.

The census of 1870 lists Frederick and Christina, as well as Annie (born 1854), William (born 1858), Henry (born 1860), Fred (born 1862), Caroline, Josephine, and Louisa, likely the seven children of the couple. Frederick died on Sept. 23, 1878, "aged 68 years, 3 mos and 8 days." His widow, Christina, survived him, dying in 1914 at age 87.

The couple's fourth child, Henry, was born Jan. 23, 1860 in Green Valley. At age 12, he left the family farm to begin work with David Hale, owner of the Hale Ranch in Suisun Valley. Henry was fascinated with all newly introduced machinery. For the next eight years, he would work on the Hales Ranch in the summer and the J. L. Heald machine shop in Vallejo during the winter months.

An enterprising young man at 19 years, he owned and operated a threshing outfit with two friends, Henry Dittmer and Christopher Harder. Dittmer and Henry Goosen bought out Harder after only one year of operating. Around 1880, he also seems to have worked at least for a short time for the Cordelia Nelson Quarry at Bridgeport Hill, today's Nelson Hill.

A few years later, in 1886, Goosen bought the old Cordelia mill and opened a blacksmith and repair shop in it. His shop also featured a hardware store, Henry's first foray into this business form. He would operate the business until 1907, when he opened his hardware store in downtown Fairfield.

The hardware store and blacksmith shop prospered. On Jan. 10, 1887, Goosen married Katherine Mary Stark in Napa. The couple had three sons - Victor, Howard, and Earl. Other business opportunities beckoned Goosen besides the hardware store. Likely based on his experiences in working at the quarry, he developed an interest in drilling and maintaining water wells. This, in turn, led him to become involved with the Fairfield Water Works around 1901.

Availability and accessibility of water was one of the bigger concerns of town boards in Fairfield and Suisun that year.

The Fairfield Water Works had been founded in 1866. Built by the Suisun and Fairfield Water Company, it later was offered for sale to the highest bidder after the town of Suisun finished its own water system. The purchaser was one of the company's officers, W. K. Hoyt, who paid \$350. He continued to operate the Fairfield Water Works. By 1901, with rising water needs, the operation had become woefully outdated.

"Water Supply - Board Considering Means for Increasing It," read the Solano Republican headline on March 15, 1901. It reported on a special meeting by town trustees to consider "the matter of the water supply for the town for the coming summer." Residents had signed a petition, in essence supporting the trustees' every decision.

The trustees discussed the installation of individual meters to measure household consumption. At the time, the town averaged 90,000 gallons daily, but trustees expected to lower this to 65,000 gallons per day with the installation of meters. Another option was a pumping plant with two 10,000-gallon holding tanks, which could be used in the summer months.

The third option was to replace the existing too-small pipeline connecting the town and the water reservoir. A minimum of 20,000 feet of new pipe would have to be laid through Suisun Valley, necessitating a bond measure to finance the improvement. The trustees settled on meters as their choice and called for bids for their installation.

Trustee Hillborn stated that "the springs on the town land i.e. the Fairfield Water Works, were running at their full capacity, something that they had not done since the town water had been installed, and that it was possible that the supply from that source would be sufficient to meet the needs of the town until July or August."

It was a fortunate decision on their part to ensure additional water supplies. A devastating fire destroyed the Fairfield Water Works on the afternoon of Christmas Eve 1901. The Solano Republican bemoaned its loss in a column on Dec. 27: "One of the Old Landmarks of This Vicinity Which Had Seen Better Days.

"The origin of the fire is not known but it is supposed to have started from a spark from the smokestack which lodged in some portion of the tankhouse tower and was fanned into a blaze by the heavy north wind which prevailed at the time.

"W. K. Hoyt, owner and operator, was in the engine room at the time and knew nothing of the fire until it broke through the roof. It had then made such headway that it was impossible to save anything. It burned slowly and lasted about two hours. Nothing connected with the plant escaped the ravages of the fire, the machinery being ruined. There was an insurance of \$300 on the plant. The loss has been placed at \$3000. The plant was in the course of being overhauled by Henry Goosen of Cordelia, and the work would have been completed the day the conflagration occurred. The loss falls heavily on Mr. Hoyt. Mr. Goosen had tools valued at \$200 destroyed by the fire."

As a result, "the majority of residents in Fairfield have been suffering from a water famine, having to bring their supplies from neighboring places connected with the

Suisun system or from wells in the vicinity.”

Town trustees considered selling the Water Works to Suisun to connect with that town’s water system.

But Goosen had other plans for the Fairfield Water Works.

I will continue the story of Henry Goosen in my next column.

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