

## Goosen did well by the city of Fairfield

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

Sunday, January 23, 2005

In 1886, Henry Goosen opened a blacksmith shop and general hardware store in Cordelia. He had a strong background in well drilling, pumps, steam machinery and related areas. As such, he had become interested in the Fairfield Water Works, located on Empire Street behind the Courthouse. He was in the process of overhauling the aging machinery, when a devastating fire destroyed the plant on Christmas Eve 1901. This is the second installment on Henry Goosen and downtown Fairfield during the first decade of the 20th century. - Editor

The owner of the Fairfield Water Works, W. K. Hoyt, was severely underinsured. Goosen saw an opportunity for himself and for Fairfield residents, according to the Solano County Republican on Feb. 7, 1902.

“The fire which recently destroyed the Fairfield water works plants and caused W. K. Hoyt, the owner, so much of a loss as to make it impossible for him to rebuild, will result in a great improvement and benefit to the people in general Fairfield. What has been Mr. Hoyt’s loss, which, for a man of his age is a hard one to bear, has been his neighbor’s gain. Henry Goosen, the enterprising merchant of Cordelia, purchased the property of Mr. Hoyt and at once set to work to get things in shape for giving the residents of Fairfield a good water supply.”

Supplying sufficient water for Fairfield’s 700 residents was an ongoing concern for town trustees, being discussed at meeting after meeting. Goosen’s venture into rebuilding the Water Works and adding a new well for the town’s supply system was received with enthusiasm.

“In connection with Mr. Goosen’s extensive establishment in Cordelia is a well-boring outfit which experienced men are employed to operate. When he purchased the water-works property, as soon as arrangements had been completed for supplying the town temporarily, well-boring was begun. Last Saturday the main vein was struck at a depth of 65 feet and an immense flow of water was secured, probably enough in this one, of four or five wells, to supply the entire town. The quality of the water is considered first-class. A steam pump, with a capacity of from 4000 to 5000 gallon an hour and which was being operated at almost tow-thirds of its speed, failed to lower the water in the well.”

Not only did he have strong entrepreneurial instincts, he also seems to have had the

financial means to put them into practice.

“Mr. Goosen has been busily engaged otherwise than in sinking wells. He has had erected a large wooden frame 34 feet in height and set on a concrete foundation. This supports a ten-thousand-gallon tank and another one of 4000 will soon be placed on it. The pump, which is operated by steam power, is so arranged that it can pump water from three wells at one time.

“Up-to-date machinery has been put into the plant, an engine room and work shop, in addition to the above, have been completed and a building to be used as a store room, office and sleeping place for the engineer will soon be begun. Mr. Goosen will put in a pipe-fitting outfit and it is his intention to supply every resident in Fairfield with water, having his own mechanics to lay the piping.”

Despite his successes with the new well, water shortage remained a concern for the Town Trustees for some time to come. The Solano Republican reported on Friday, May 16, 1902, that “a discussion of the water question disclosed the fact that at present about 10,000 gallons more water is used daily than flows into the distributing reservoir, although the flow exceeds that of last summer by about 20,000 gallons.”

By 1904, Goosen decided to open a new General Hardware Store in downtown Fairfield. Situated on the west side of Texas Street, near the corner of Webster Street, next to Parr’s Repair Shop and A. H. Munroe’s Drug Store, the two-story building quickly became an important part of the growing Fairfield business district. Five years later, in July 1909, he could advertise a variety of services: “Henry Goosen Hardware - Deep Well Boring A Specialty,” ran his ad.

“My own make of Pumps. Plumbing. Aeremotor Windmills Pipes. Harness and Supplies. Paints. Oils. Belting. Farming Implements. Machinery and Vehicles: extras of all kinds. Stoves. Ranges. Gas Ranges. Tin and Agate Ware. Acetylene Gas Machines. Lathe and Machine Work. Keen-Kutter Hardware - Quality.” At the bottom of the text, he signed as “Proprietor of Fairfield Water Works.”

Besides the hardware and machinery business, he also operated a secondary business. A second ad next to his primary one advertised: “Fairfield Lumber Yard Office: Texas Street, Fairfield. Pine and Redwood Lumber. Posts, Shingles, Shakes, Sashes, Doors, Blinds.” It was signed, “Henry Goosen, Prop.”

The summer of 1909 was a hot one, punctuated by grass fires in the valleys. On July 11, 1909, Vacaville suffered a devastating fire that destroyed the Raleigh Hotel. The Solano Republican of July 16 carried this story on Page 2. The headline was the destruction of the 744-750 business block on Texas Street in Fairfield. “Fairfield

Property Swept By Fire - Business Block on Texas Street Nearly All Destroyed," ran the headline.

"Fairfield was visited by a disastrous conflagration early Tuesday morning when some of the best business property of the town was totally destroyed, causing a loss of \$35,000 ...

"The fire originated either in the inside of or at the rear of the drug store of A. H. Munroe ... at the corner of Texas and Webster Street and was discovered at 1:45 o'clock by Mrs. P. O'Neill, who, with her husband made her home in a cottage owned by S. M. Bassett on Webster Street, almost adjoining the drug store building. Mrs. O'Neill sounded an alarm which was heard by Mrs. Munroe. The Munroe's living apartments were over the drug store and their only exit was by way of a stairway on the rear of the building. By the time Mrs. Munroe awakened her husband and Dr. B. Collenet, who made his home with them, the flames had gained such headway that they had to be assisted from the burning building by a ladder. They escaped only partly clad."

"Miss Gertie Lawlor was the heroine of the fire," the Solano Republican was able to add in its next edition. "As soon as she heard the first cry of fire she jumped from her bed, bolted out of the front door, ran barefooted to the engine house two blocks distant, and rang the fire bell. On her way back to her home she assisted Ray Miller in carrying and placing the ladder which gave the Munroe's means of escape from the burning building.

"Mr. Munroe kicked his bare foot through a window, a piece of broken glass being driven entirely through the foot and causing him a dangerous wound. He was carried to the home of Mr. and Mrs. James H. Prather, where his injuries were attended."

The Fairfield fire company arrived within minutes, but was unable to cope with the flames. The Suisun fire department was called and responded with the gasoline engine and hose company. They were able to save the Capitol Hotel on the corner of Texas and Jefferson streets, which was owned by Mrs. Charles Eikerenkotter.

Fortunately, the Suisun Fire Department had received new equipment. "The gasoline engine purchased by the Town of Suisun about two years ago was given its first severe test at this fire and it proved itself equal to almost any use it might be put to. It was attached to the main pipe of the Suisun water system and two lengths of hose were put out, one sending a stream of water from the rear of the Capitol hotel and the other on the burning buildings on Texas Street. Two men were at each nozzle. When one of the streams was shut off it required the combined strength of three men to control the other nozzle, so strong was the pressure of water.

“To say the least, the credit of preventing greater destruction of property is due to the Suisun firemen and the Fairfield people are loud in the praises of the great work done by them.” Interestingly, the Fairfield Water Works are not mentioned as a water supply for the firemen, although “nozzles from the rear of the Capitol hotel” would be within a few hundred yards of the pumping plant.

Goosen and his business escaped the worst, mostly due to the fact that the business owned its own well. “Goosen Has Close Call,” the Solano Republican summed it up.

“Henry Goosen’s hardware store and residence, which are on the west side of Webster street narrowly escaped being destroyed. The store building was badly scorched and several times was on the verge of being on fire, but the owner had provided his premises with fire protection from a private well and large pump. A continuous stream of water was played on the building and it was saved. Mr. Goosen was away from town at the time of the fire.”

Many residents desperately tried to save their downtown, among them the “Rev. C. E. Pettis, pastor of the Fairfield Methodist church, was seen working with a bucket brigade dashing water on one of Mr. Goosen’s buildings.” While Goosen was fortunate to save most of his business, others lost everything during that night.

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

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