

## Newspapers offered mish-mash of news briefs

By Jerry Bowen

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I've always found it interesting to read the tattered newspapers of old and compare the items printed then to today's news.

The 1860s newspapers were regular gossip columns, and if you thought politics are rough today, the early newspapers really slammed the party that each paper's editor didn't support. Not only that, competing newspapers regularly thumped other newspapers in such a manner that today would be a lawyer's dream source of libel income.

In 1866, the Solano Press regularly updated the reader with items from each and every community in the county. Let's take a look at a few excerpts from the Sept. 15, 1866, edition. In this section, the news was countywide with several different subjects in just one paragraph. Within this long paragraph there were many items of historical interest that writers and historians extract for use in articles and historical research. See if you can determine what might be of interest.

"The Public School, at Fairfield, under the charge of Mr. George W. Lynch, commenced on last Monday....R. H. Waterman, of Fairfield, has been appointed Inspector of the San Francisco Board of Underwriters.... Leut. R. M. Apgar has purchased a ranch at the head of Suisun Valley, and proposes to lead a rural life, for while....The only contribution to the Lincoln Monument Fund, from any of the Public Schools in this County, was that of Suisun No. 5, Mr. Hatch, teacher, of \$4.35.... A letter arrived at the Post Office, last week, from San Francisco, directed to 'His Honor, the Mayor of Suisun City.' Postmaster Losh is somewhat puzzled as to the existence and identity of the recipient....Col. Reeves has moved one of his buildings from the eastern end of Main street to his lot on Solano street, next to the engine house....The Suisun City Mills were busy for a few weeks running night and day for five days out of each week. The new warehouse adjoining them is a valuable improvement to the town and makes a material change in the appearance of the east side of the Plaza....The new road on the western side of town, has been formally opened by the Roadmaster, greatly to the satisfaction of the Fairfield people....Great quantities of grain, from all directions, continue to arrive at our warehouses daily, and several of the wealthy farmers are preparing to store the grain at home....William H. Turner is preparing to erect a new and handsome residence on his farm in Suisun Valley....The Suisun City Public School opened on Monday last; Mr. W. L. Masterson, late of Pleasants Valley being the teacher....The Postmaster at this place has received official intelligence of the

establishment of a mail route from Suisun to Lower Lake, and proposals for carrying the mail will be advertised as soon as the Department determines the number of trips per week it is necessary to make; the distance is 78 miles....The pipe for the Suisun and Fairfield Water Company-over 6,000 feet-has been completed in San Francisco, and will arrive here soon. The other works of the Company are being pushed forward with energy....Two or three fights and no fires are chronicled the past week....There are now two lines of stages to Sacramento from this place-fare \$2.50-in addition to Cutler's line Vacaville."

You would think that trying to find a fact within the small print of the time, in long paragraphs with unrelated subjects would to drive a person doing research of history up a wall. It does, but often many minor items of interest are revealed that become important in future research, as long as you take notes and list the reference of course. I'm one of those people who take copious notes, but can never find them when I need them!

Then there are the articles that give you a chuckle such as the one as follows that was in the Solano Republican in 1911 (the spelling and punctuation is as was printed).

A boy who was required to write an essay on "hens" produced the following: "Hens is curious animuls. Hens don't have no nose nor no teeth nor no ears but they ken heer. They swallow their whittles whole and chew it up in their crops inside of 'em. The outside of hens is generally put in pillows and feather dusters. The inside of hens is sometimes filled with marbles and shirt buttons and sich. A hen is generally a good much smaller than many other aimuls and not combined but they can dig, and do dig, up more tomato plants than most things that aint a hen. Hens is very useful to lay eggs etc. and do. Hens is got wings and can fly then they get skeered. I cut a hens head off with once a hatchet and it scared her to death."

After reading that I guess I'll have to relent and agree that education has improved since then!

When it came to crime, accidents and suicides, articles were much more descriptive about the victim's condition than the news of today.

The following excerpts under a headline, "Horrible Murder Near Suisun: A Tribble (sic) Crime-Burglary, Arson, and Murder!" is a little more tame than some I've read, but still pretty descriptive:

The Solano Press, Sept. 5, 1866: "About three o'clock yesterday morning the 'Three Mile House,' a saloon or 'deadfall' on the Vacaville road . . . was observed to be on fire. . . . The charred remains of a human being were found among the ruins-afterward

identified to be the body of Martin Maguire. Justice Halle repaired to the spot, impaneled a jury, and summoned three surgeons-Drs. Simmons, Norman and Jacobs-who minutely examined the skull of the deceased and found a portion of it fractured and driven in on the brain.

"The Coroner's Jury examined several witnesses during the day. Dr. S. S. Simmons testified that he examined the skull of the deceased, found the bones on the left side fractured and driven in upon the brain-a portion of the parietal bone being driven in on the brain so that the fire did not affect it-the rest of the brain being in a healthy state."

Some of the strangest and today, amusing, items in old newspapers and magazines were the ads for "miracle" medicines that cured almost anything. These so-called medicines got their start in England because of the extortionate level of taxes on booze. Owners of pubs got around the problem by closing their businesses and rebottling their alcohol as "bitters" and miracle disease cure-alls in apothecary shops.

Imagine an ad today that cured drunkenness with a remedy that contained 90 percent alcohol. Dr. Haines' Golden Specific was one such cure.

Hood's Sarsaparilla was promoted as a cure for Catarrh in the head. Anti-obesity pills to "surely reduce stoutness at a rate of 4 pounds a day" were touted by the Herbal Remedy Co.

Swamp-Root was hawked as "The most perfect Healer and Natural Aid to Kidneys, Liver and Bladder Ever Discovered."

Today we still have "Vaseline," but in 1895 it was promoted as a cure for, "Burns, Wounds, Sprains Rheumatism, Skin Disease, Hemorrhoids, Sun Burns, Chilblains, Croup, Coughs, Sore Throat etc."

Wheat Bitters claimed testimonials from people cured of "Malaria, Fever and Ague, Intermittent Fever, Jaundice, Biliousness, General and Nervous Debility, Sleeplessness or Insomnia and bad indigestion."

With all those "miracle cures" available then, one would expect that today nobody should be sick. In 1907, the Food and Drug Act put a damper on the apothecary business somewhat, but when you see some of today's ads on television and in print, perhaps there still may be something to learn from past history.

I found it very interesting that newspapers before the mid-1870s are in better condition than newer ones. The reason for this is that the older paper that was used had high rag content. As time progressed less rag content was used for economic reasons and we

find the newspapers of the 1900s and beyond have deteriorated considerably unless great care was used in their preservation.

Today, I understand that much of our newsprint comes on recycled paper and I suspect that in the future there will be even fewer original newspapers to enjoy.

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