

Exposition was to showcase county

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

Sunday, July 03, 2005

As many of my readers have guessed by now, I am intrigued by the number of great community events, celebrating a specific moment in local history or just life in general and usually involving the whole county, that have taken place over the last 150 years of Solano County's existence. Headlines of the various local newspapers always spout tantalizing words such as "thousands of visitors," "pageants," "gigantic" and "spectacular," and recount the enormous efforts to create these elaborate festivals.

Nearly a year ago, I stumbled on another of these great community events: The Bells of Solano County, which took place in 1930. For once I have been unable to find photographs chronicling the event. I am hoping that some of you will actually have participated in the exposition and maybe even have a photograph to share. If so, please contact me.

Sometime in 1929, David A. Weir, then publisher of the Solano Republican and certainly one of the men of his generation to shape the Fairfield-Suisun area, came up with the idea of celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Solano Republican with an exposition featuring Solano County's achievements.

The first major headlines informing the public of events to come occurred on Dec. 5, 1929, with the headline announcing: "Solano County To Attract Thousands To Great Fair."

Named "The Bells of Solano County Exposition," May 24 to June 1, 1930, were chosen as the dates. The location was set across from the Solano County Courthouse on the then empty lot bordered by Texas, Jefferson, Union and Missouri streets. Today, that same lot is occupied by the "Old Library" and the new county government center.

The exposition was to include "Products Show, Farm and Home Appliance Show, Style Shows, Food Shows, Art and Educational Exhibits, and Probably Junior Live Stock Show," as well as a "Motor Car and Truck Show."

No community celebration at the time was complete without a pageant celebrating local history, and the Bells of Solano County were no exception.

"Marvelous Pageant Planned for a Three-Way Arrival at Suisun to Proceed to Exposition Grounds which are to be Brilliantly Illuminated," continued the Dec. 5, 1929,

headline.

As always, developing such an elaborate event took time and resources.

“Featuring the diamond anniversary of The Solano Republican in a manner befitting the occasion, “The Bells Of Solano County Exposition” has been a dream of publisher David A. Weir for more than a year. To realize it, the wheels of progress were set in motion early enough to accomplish the seemingly impossible.”

Compared to today, the relative short time period in which such a large event could become reality is still astonishing. The article’s date, Dec. 5, barely leaves five and a half months to establish this exposition.

David A. Weir already had the county’s support at that time. “With the approval and endorsement given the project by the Board of Supervisors, Monday, December 2, 1929, the date was definitely set for May 24 to June 1, 1930, inclusive, the site chosen being central in the city of Fairfield, opposite the courthouse, where this gigantic and spectacular Fair will be beautifully designed and brilliantly illuminated. The Firemen’s Club Hall (then situated at the corner of Texas and Jefferson Streets) is to be included in the setting and for the purpose of style shows is to be transformed into a gorgeous ‘Blue and Gold Room.’”

In the initial planning stages, the pageant was at the heart of the exposition, centering on a classical theme and unconcernedly mixing Greek and Roman mythological figures.

“Briefly outlining the plan of the pageant, it might be of interest to state that Neptune and Diana will arrive from San Francisco at Vallejo, whence they and their mermaids will proceed via Benicia to Suisun. Here they will meet another section arriving from Sacramento via Dixon and Vacaville, and will also be joined there by Venus and her escorts coming from the north via Rio Vista and Elmira. The assembled cortege will then proceed to the exposition grounds at Fairfield, where Jupiter and Juno will be received by Saturn and Minerva who will share the honors of the reception with Apollo and Ceres, as well as with prominent officials and also with members of the various committees whose interest will insure success of the first great event ever held in Solano county.” (It seems that the writer of this column did not participate in the Benicia Pageant of 1923, another “greatest event ever held.”)

Initial construction of the fairground booths was already underway, and “Farreaching advertising is planned to attract the readers of the nation. Further details will be announced as rapidly as the news develops.”

The news did indeed spread rapidly, as David A. Weir’s editorial the following week on

Dec. 12 recorded. "Inspired by the spirit of unselfish devotion to a common cause, there have come to the desk of the editor of "the Solano Republican" a number of newspapers published within the county and outside of it, indicating in a most effective manner that Solano County can act in unison on any project of county, state and nationwide interest," he proudly wrote.

The Vallejo Chronicle, Vallejo Times-Herald, Vallejo News and other, unnamed local newspapers carried the story on Dec. 3 and 4. The Sacramento Bee picked it up on Dec. 5, followed by the San Francisco Call. From there, news of the Solano County Exposition spread.

"The Solano County Exposition bids fair to reach the most farthest parts of the country, as already trade journals, and national magazines are asking for information. Fairfield and this community will be in the fore as never before," Weir concluded his article.

In a separate column, the newspaper announced the selection of county sheriff John R. Thornton as the general chairman of all committees. "That "Jack" Thornton, as he is popularly known, is a man well qualified for this important chairmanship, requires no affidavit. That friend and foe alike will stand by him on this great effort to give Solano County a county fair in 1930 that will go down in history ... is certain."

Yet the great news was overshadowed by an even grater tragedy - the previous Sunday, Armijo High School, also the home of the Solano County Free Library, had been completely destroyed by fire.

The following week, newly appointed chairman John Thornton invited county residents in an elaborate plea to become involved in this event. Judging by some of his words, not everybody must have been happy for the event to take place.

"Fully aware of the fact that 'united we stand, divided we fall,' let us forget sections, personalities, and personal interest in the effort which shall lift this great Fair above the commonplace and give it the spark of life to which it is entitled by reason of its timely connection with the Diamond Anniversary of The Solano Republican," Sheriff Thornton wrote.

I will continue my story in my next column.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/271>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/271/>