

## **Bells of Solano rang with enthusiasm**

**By Sabine Goerke-Shrode**

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This is the third installment of the development of "The Bells of Solano County," the first Solano County Fair. It took place in Fairfield in May 1930. The idea for the fair was conceived by David A. Weir, then publisher of the Solano Republican. He wanted to combine the newspaper's 75th anniversary with a large, agriculture-oriented fair showcasing Solano County.

In a matter of weeks, the fair's chairman, Sheriff John Thornton, assembled a group of Solano County citizens willing to chair a variety of committees. Besides developing the fair with its multitude of booths and exhibits, a call went out in February 1930 for an essay contest to be used in the development of a pageant including more than 200 participants.

Booth spaces were advertised and part of the revenue was to be dedicated as a fundraiser to construct a new home for the Solano Free Library.

The first combined meeting for the different committees took place in February. One important outcome was the choice of the official colors blue and gold to reflect "the glories of California ... in harmony with that of the state."

Weir mused on the importance of the exposition in an editorial on Feb. 13, 1930 "There is something of unusual power in the name of this golden state which will find extraordinary expression on the colorful pageant and pageant play, the Vallejo water carnival preceding the opening of the exposition being restaged in miniature for the entire nine days of this first event in the history of Solano county going forth as The Exposition Ideal and The County Fair Supreme.

"Never in the history of the state has an attempt of this magnitude been born and raised to maturity in such a short time, but the result is really due to the farreaching interest shown throughout the county and in other parts of the state.

"It has been conceded by hundreds of men and women that Solano county has long needed a plan that would sell its resources not only to the people of the world, but to its home folks where its fundamental strength must be unified for the benefit of county development."

Weir attributed much credit to then-county horticulture commissioner, Carl H. Spurlock,

who “saw the opportunity of acquainting the people of foreign lands with the marvelous products of this county ... ” and who “was able to create a sentiment among the purchasing agents of far eastern lands who are likely to vie with the powers behind the throne of eastern states of the nation in an effort to secure Solano county products for their markets.”

Solano farmers were at a crossroad at the time. The country had just entered the Great Depression era. One mainstay of farming, the orchard industry, was fast-declining, and efforts were under way to help develop new markets overseas and bring new and diversified farm crops and methods to the county.

Weir alludes to the Solano County Board of Supervisors sending Mr. Spurlock on a marketing mission throughout the United States and overseas. Projects to improve agriculture and living conditions were discussed, including a new port near Vallejo, a mosquito eradication program, and new farming methods.

The importance of these projects and the need to promote Solano County and its various industries, were driving forces behind “The Bells of Solano County.”

Again and again, the newspapers reported on the success of publicizing the event throughout the United States. “That the spirit of enterprise merely needed an awakening is already evidenced,” continued Weir in his editorial on Feb. 13, 1930, “and the inquiries for exhibit space from manufacturers and distributors everywhere, as well as from many Solano County retailers and hundreds of others, indicate that the radio announcer at The Bells of Solano County Exposition grounds in May will have a farreaching audience throughout the United States, as he will set forth the events and exhibits that are destined to reflect the glories of Solano County as an important unit of the Golden State, day by day ... “

Not content with organizing the large exposition and the elaborate pageant, the committees added another feature, according to the Solano Republican headline of Feb. 20, 1930. No event could be successful without a stirring music program. For the Bells of Solano, a national music search contest would draw further attention.

“Special Music Is Planned ... Farreaching Contest Invites Talent Thruout The Nation,” ran the title, followed by a reminder that the pageant play was open to all writers. “Confident that the ideal of The Bells of Solano County Exposition May 24 to June 1, in aiming for its theme of the Pageant and Play, will attract nationwide attention, the contests for two features, upon which the gigantic attraction is to be built, have been opened to all who are interested. For this reason also ceremonies for the dedication of the arch in front of the courthouse are being planned to fittingly open the campaign quickly for the Exposition.”

The attraction of the event was thought to bring forth sufficient musical talent. "When there is music in the air, there is always attention everywhere, and it is certain that "The Bells of Solano" will offer a theme worth while for lyric specialists and composers generally," announced the Solano Republican.

"For the best words to feature 'The Bells of Solano County' in voice, orchestral and bandmusic, a prize of fifty dollars is offered. For the best musical composition to fit words another fifty dollars is offered."

With time running short, certain incentives were added. Other tasks, such as the selection of the judging panel, had not even been started yet.

"If the composition is accepted complete, in words and music from writer or writers, a beautiful trophy to the value of \$100.00 will be added, and engraved with the insignia of the exposition, to which inscription the name of the winner will be added in time for presentation.

"In the event that the award of this composer or two collaborators by the seven judges of prominence in the world of music, to be named soon, the winner or winners will become honor guests of The Bells of Solano County Exposition if they can devote the time to such a trip. Suitable royalties will also be arranged for separate or joint winners."

The even bigger task was the selection of the pageant play essay, from which the full performance with more than 200 expected participants, text, music, costumes, rehearsals, still had to be developed. While the newspaper professed complete faith that this feat could indeed be achieved, the prize incentives were carefully formulated to bring in as finished a play as possible.

"For the best idea on The Bells of Solano County Pageant Play the first prize is a Dirigold trophy cup with \$20.00 in gold. The cup is engraved with the insignia of the exposition, and to it will be added the name of the winner. If the treatise may be adopted without extensive revision, and includes suggestions for costumes and music, a special prize of a diamond ring, valued at \$150.00, will be added, thus making the first prize a grand prize. If no changes in the essay are necessary, the winner of this first prize will become an honor guest of the exposition and receive \$50.00 in gold instead of \$20.00. Suitable royalties will be arranged for the winner.

"The second prize is a portable typewriter of well known make, late model, and \$10.00 in gold. The third prize is also a portable typewriter."

Young writers were also encouraged to enter with their own winning categories. "The

fourth prize is for suggestions from pupils of public and parochial grade schools to permit participation of the junior element in the Pageant Play. It is a beautiful Dirigold flagstaff and silk flag, to which is added a bank book opening a five dollar savings account near the winner's home. The fifth prize is for the same purpose and brings a five dollar savings account at a bank near the winner's home."

All this sounded very ambitious already, but another competitive event was announced on March 27, eight weeks before the opening of the exposition: "The Belle of Solano To Be Chosen In Belles Of Solano Popularity Contest."

I will continue this story in my next column.

My thanks go to Richard Hales who loaned the composition book for the accompanying photo from his private collection.

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