

Grant upstages Suisun City's incorporation

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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In 1851, Capt. Josiah Wing purchased land in the Suisun Bay, and sent for his wife, Mercy, and the 10 children from both his first and second marriage from the East Coast.

Their settlement of an embarcadero, a wharf, warehouse and their wood-frame house quickly grew. By 1854, Capt. Wing and John W. Owens laid out plans for a new town, to be called Suisun City.

It took only a few years before the town had grown enough in size and importance for its inhabitants to petition for incorporation.

The big moment came on Oct.. 9, 1868, when the Solano County Board of Supervisors voted to accept the petition. To do so, petitioners had to prove that Suisun had more than 200 residents, all of whom had lived there for more than 30 days, and that a majority of these residents supported the incorporation by signing the petition. The drive to incorporate was spearheaded by Samuel Breck, who was the supervisor representing the area on the Board of Supervisors.

Grant overshadows event

While the incorporation of Suisun as a city certainly was a momentous step forward in its history, the main local newspaper, the Weekly Solano Herald, completely ignored the event.

Overshadowing the event was the campaign to elect Ulysses Grant as president of the United States. The four-page paper was filled with reports on local Republican meetings, the Republican platform was published several times, and voter lists were updated weekly.

Surprisingly, Capt. Wing's name is not among the petitioners recorded in the Board of Supervisors' minutes. Nor is his name among the list of voters for the federal election or the election to form the first Suisun City government, although his son, Chillingsworth Wing, is listed.

Instead of local politics, Josiah's interests had shifted back to the sea. Over the previous decade, he had made changes to his holdings that eventually allowed him to

be gone for much of the year.

By the late 1850s, he sold part of his landholdings in Suisun, including the wharf, although he continued to use it for his business until 1864, when he also sold the Ann Sophia. The family had relocated to the nearby farm purchased in wife Mercy's name in 1857.

In the spring of 1866, at age 67, Josiah Wing went back to sea. This time, the North Pacific beckoned with its highly profitable fishing grounds. For the next five years, he fished the Pacific Northwest, sailing all the way to the Okhotsk Sea, off the Russian Coast. In some years, he would return with nearly 100,000 caught codfish.

Other fishing expeditions took him to New Zealand and the area between Siberia and Alaska. His final voyage ended in November 1871. At age 72, he left the sea for good.

Some of the earlier historical resources sometimes hint at a rivalry between the two local sea captains and city founders, Capt. Robert Waterman of Fairfield and Wing of Suisun. Looking at Wing's life and interests, especially in his later years, I don't see this as a factor in his life.

Both men had very different experiences as captains. Captain Waterman was a clipper ship captain sailing to China, where he met his partner, Capt. Archibald Ritchie. Wing on the other hand was a packet captain sailing along the East Coast. It is doubtful that the two knew each other prior to coming to Solano County.

Wing chanced onto the land in Suisun Bay while sailing between San Francisco and Sacramento and recognized the location as an opportunity to establish a good home base for his business and his family.

Wing passes away

Although this decision resulted in the founding of Suisun, after the first few years, he seemed not to have participated actively in its growth or political formation. Rather, he continued to do what he loved best - raise his family, farm his land, and - foremost - sail the high seas.

Wing died on Oct. 4, 1874, and was mourned by the community as a well-liked member, according to his obituary in the Weekly Solano Republican on Thursday, Oct. 8, 1874.

"The early settlers of this county will regret to learn of the demise of one of their number in the person of Capt. Josiah Wing, of this place, who died on the morning of

the 4th instant, at the age of 76 years and five months, having been born on the 4th day of April 1798, at Brewster, a town on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Capt. Wing came to California in 1850, bringing with him in his vessel the frame and material of a house which he erected in San Francisco, but which was subsequently - 1852 - taken down and brought to this place and occupied by his family (which arrived earlier that year) and is the one now occupied by E. Littrell as a restaurant.

"He was the first person who ever navigated Suisun Slough, and he erected the first dwelling-house and the first warehouse in this place. A few years later he removed to a farm about two miles from town, where his family has ever since resided, though he was usually absent at sea until within the last two years.

'He was a person of a robust constitution and enjoyed excellent health until quite recently, and was able to walk about town within six or eight hours of his death. His genial social qualities made him a favorite with old and young and he was held in the highest estimation by all who knew him. His funeral took place on Wednesday, and was more largely attended than any that has ever occurred here. The flags in town were at half-mast on Wednesday in token of respect for the deceased."

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