

## **Patriotism skyrocketed in Vacaville July 4th, 1898**

**By Sabine Goerke-Shrode**

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This week, our communities will celebrate July 4th with a variety of parades, picnics and firework events. Similar celebrations took place more than a century ago, too, bringing residents together in large numbers. One of the more elaborate July 4 celebrations in Vacaville was held in 1898.

On June 25 that year, and again on July 2, The Reporter let its readers know on the front page that a number of committees had been formed and that planning of the program for the day was well in hand.

Many prominent residents of the area served on the various committees. President of the day was Mayor Frank H. Buck. O. H. Allison of Elmira served as the Grand Marshal, supported by 25 aides.

Senator W. B. Parker of Vacaville, D. F. Parker of Elmira, George Steinmiller of Dixon and W. H. Gregory of Winters were selected to be the Judges for the day.

There was a bicycle parade committee, chaired by J. M. Miller, M. C. Cantelow and Ed Donaldson. The invention of the safety bicycle with equally sized wheels had rapidly gained popularity during the 1890s. By 1898, a large enough number of residents owned a bicycle to create this parade entry.

Another popular entry was Dewey's Juvenile Army, organized by Mrs. F. N. Henrich, Miss Effy Eversole and Mrs. Jos. Legler. Dewey's Juvenile Army consisted of a large group of well-dressed children parading in formation.

Most likely this organization was based on educator John Dewey's principles of learning through a variety of activities. At the time, his writings on pedagogy were very influential in changing education in the United States.

No festivity could be without its "Horribles" - costumed entries, often featuring men in women's roles. William Opfer, R. B. Stitts, and George Akerley chaired this committee.

The ladies of the Red Cross were tasked with being the decoration committee. Other committees took care of prizes, grounds maintenance and, most importantly, the fireworks. That particular committee was in the care of Milt Blum and Nate Holt.

July 4th festivities began at 5 a.m. with a 13-gun salute, giving every resident an early warning to scramble out of bed and make ready for the big day.

At 9 a.m., the 16-piece Vacaville Band began its concert on the Main Street bandstand.

Meanwhile, parade entrants assembled on Davis Street. At 9:45 a.m., the parade marched from Davis along Main Street to Parker, continued on Main Street past the residences of F. B. McKeivitt, turned around and went back to Parker. From there it continued on to Merchant Street, back to Main Street, crossed the Ulatis bridge onto College Street and ended on the campus of the Methodist college grounds -today's Andrew's Park.

The parade was headed by the Vacaville Band, followed by the Liberty car, carrying 52 girls representing the states and territories, and the Goddess of Liberty. Other entries included the Elmira Liberty car; the Elmira and Vacaville Home Guards, the Vacaville Fire Department, and floats representing a variety of societies and businesses.

A number of entrants on horseback, in decorated horse-drawn carriages, and in decorated bicycle brigade made for a colorful line of march.

Prizes of \$5 were awarded for the best-decorated bicycle and a whip for the best lady on horseback.

Spectators also knew that "Positively no fire crackers or other explosives will be allowed to be exploded during the parade by any one."

After the parade, a number of programs commenced on the high school grounds at 10:30 a.m. Festivities began with a "grand chorus of fifty voices directed by Mrs. J. M. Miller," followed by a prayer by the Rev. W. C. Driver.

A double quartet sang "Columbia," followed by the reading of the Declaration of Independence, Mrs. L. Peterson singing the "Star Spangled Banner," and an oration. The program concluded with "Red, White and Blue," sung by a chorus.

By now, everybody was hungry enough to enjoy the scheduled basket lunch.

Activities resumed at 1:30 p.m. with the Horribles and a mock parade along Main Street headed by Dewey's Juvenile Army.

A highlight of the day was the dedication of the new high school building at 2 p.m. Speeches and prayers by the Rev. H. E. Jewett and Rev. G.G. Eldrige were followed by Miss Oritta Ferguson who raised the flag, while the band once again played "Red,

White, and Blue.”

The afternoon was filled with games such as “Tug of War” at 3:30, open to the firemen of Winters, Dixon and Vacaville departments. The winning team received a \$15 prize.

At 4:30, the blindfolded wheel barrow contest began, open to men only. The cash prize of \$2.50 went to the gentleman who came nearest to the goal.

There was a 100-yard race for boys under 14 years, a sack race open to everybody; an egg race for girls under 14 years; a contest for the nicest parasol and other competitions.

Sports took place at 5 p.m, including the 50-yard dash, pole vault, broad jump and high jump. Each winner received a gold medal.

Amazingly, everybody had enough energy left that night to enjoy “a grand display of fireworks.’

The day ended with the Firemen’s ball at Walker’s Hall, where the dancing continued until 4 o’clock in the morning.

On July 9, 1898, The Reporter proudly noted: “Our Natal Day - An Immense Crowd Gathered in Vacaville on July Fourth From All The Surrounding Country.

“Monday will be long remembered by the people of Vacaville and those from surrounding towns who visited here. It was one of the best, if not the best, celebration the people of this city have ever witnessed.”

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