

Twists and turns on the trail of bygone days

By Jerry Bowen

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History is a dynamic subject with many traps regarding accuracy along the way. A lot of items related to history in Solano County have popped up lately, so, I thought that I would take the opportunity to talk about some of those bits and pieces.

First of all I'm happy to announce that the Santa Eulalia Mission that we at the Vacaville Heritage Council researched has been verified. After I wrote the series in this column about it, we asked that an archaeological survey be made to verify whether our findings of the structure on Suisun Valley Road were indeed the old mission building built in 1824 by Father Altimira.

The survey was conducted by the Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University. Undergraduate student, Kate Erickson and her team, under the direction of Dr. Adrian Praetzelis, director of the Anthropological Studies Center, conducted the survey and verified our findings as correct. It is a very significant find since the structure is about 85 percent intact thanks to the family that owns the property.

Also, the stone structure located in the middle of the new "Pony Express Business Center" will be saved and protected thanks to developer partner, Joseph McNeill, III, of the Headwaters Development Company. It will be on exhibit in the parking lot. I suspect this building will date back further than the current research that showed it was used as a stagecoach watering stop. That research is yet to come.

In another direction, the Stilts adobe and wooden shell home have been destroyed. It was all done legally by permit issued by Solano County.

Green Valley residents are quite upset about it and much of the anger could have been made unnecessary if one of the many historical organizations or museums had been allowed to take photographs and retrieve any historical items before it was destroyed. It dated to the 1830s.

The historic Green Valley School at Cordelia was also legally destroyed under a county permit a few months back. Again, much of the controversy and anger by the residents of Cordelia could have been avoided had one of the locals been able to at least move the building to her property.

A suggestion to the county powers in charge: Use the many publications such as "The

Heritage Collection” that lists most of the historic structures in Fairfield and the vicinity as a guide and contact historical organizations as part of the permit process.

I see that Greta Neil Magers, in a letter to the editor of The Reporter, has noticed that not all the “Historic Highway 40” signs correctly designate the route, and she is correct. The route used to be along School Street onto Merchant Street, not along East Main Street to Main Street.

But I believe there was a reason the signs were placed where they are. The original route won’t allow for travel by tourist buses; the signs where they are today will.

Also in Greta’s letter to the editor she stated that the old Japanese temple was not located across the street from today’s Senior Center but “on the block where Shocks Furniture store is.”

Sorry Greta, that one isn’t correct. I can understand the confusion as the town undergoes many physical changes. I even have a hard time remembering just where Ulati Street and Bernard Street were located. “Tak” Tsujita did his homework and he was one of the many Japanese who were living in Vacaville when they were interned in the camps during World War II.

One more item that may or may not come to pass; there are still persistent rumors flying around town that the old Elizabeth Street Hospital will be destroyed to make room for a parking lot. If it does come to pass, you can bet many of the old-timers of the area will be very unhappy. The old house is in great shape but is not on any historic register though it does have a plaque in front noting its historic character.

Vacaville has grown by many times since the 1950s and of course newby’s (including me; I’ve only been here 30 years) far outnumber the old-timers. But that is no excuse for not learning and cherishing our past local history. It took a lot for Vacaville to become the fine city it is today and there is much to learn from our past.

One lesson comes to mind about when several of the then-city council members were pushing hard to tear down what we today know as the “Historic Downtown District” and replace it with a development plan that today would have absolutely no character. Those members were removed during the election and replaced with folks that were in step with their roots in the town.

We have a good City Council today and I find it hard to believe that the above could come to pass but who knows!

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