

## **‘Tapeworm ticket’ hurts intestines of election**

**By Sabine Goerke-Shrode**

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My last column looked at local elections in the 1860s and 1870s and their tumultuous proceedings. One of the most memorable elections occurred in 1871, when Vallejo gained national fame for the invention of the so-called “tapeworm ticket.” The main information for the events surrounding this ballot ticket can be found in “Recollections of a Newspaperman,” written by Frank A. Leach in 1917.

Leach arrived in California with his parents in 1852 as a young child. He worked in a printing office and started the Napa Daily Reporter. In 1867, he sold this paper and moved to Vallejo where he then started the Vallejo Chronicle.

A stout Republican, he was active in local politics, including being nominated as an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention of 1880. He also was elected as a member of the California State Assembly for the 19th district, serving from 1870 to 1881.

He served as postmaster in Vallejo from 1882 to 1884. President McKinley appointed him as superintendent of the mint in San Francisco in 1897.

Eventually, he became the president and manager of the People’s Water Company in Oakland.

According to Leach, prior to the introduction of registration laws, each party furnished its own ballot tickets for an election. These distinctive tickets carried only the names of the candidates for one party. The selected ballot for each party was kept a secret as long as possible to prevent the opposing party from printing false ballot tickets.

In the general state election of 1871, Vallejo Republicans split in regard to their choice of a candidate for Congress.

In the years 1868 to 1871, population in Vallejo had tripled. Many new residents had only lived in town for a few months, but had brought their political experience and affiliations with them. Dubbed the “carpetbaggers,” they quickly outnumbered the old-time resident Republicans and captured the county convention, nominating the entire county ticket.

Tickets generally were printed on colored paper and were between five and seven

inches long and two to three inches wide. The type size was easy to read and well-spaced. This allowed voters to paste narrow strips of gummed paper with names of opposing candidates over sections of the original type, or, alternatively, scratch out a name and insert the name of choice.

To prevent this kind of selective choice, the "carpetbagger" party managers came up with the idea of the "tapeworm ticket," five and one-eighth inches long and only half an inch wide. The ticket was printed on thin cardboard stock, using the smallest known font in the printer's set. The text was printed so small and so tightly spaced that it was impossible to paste, erase, scratch out, or insert another name.

Voters could only vote for the ticket in its entirety or choose not to vote at all.

The tickets were printed at a printing office in San Francisco. Tickets went to one of the committee members, whose name Frank Leach refused to reveal. On the eve of the election, he gave the tickets to the principal county candidate, who in turn distributed them to the foremen of the navy yard and other political workers.

Eventually, the voters got their ticket, too. A storm of indignation broke out, especially among the old-timer faction, when voters realized that they could not add the candidate of their choice to the ticket.

A group of old-timer Republicans gathered in the law offices of the Honorable S.G. Hilborn. After heated discussion, all swore not to vote for this ticket. Frank Leach, one of the Republicans present at this meeting, then offered his printing presses to print a new ticket with the candidate of their choice included.

He promised to have the ticket printed and distributed within 30 minutes at his own expense.

Printers or rather, compositors, as they were then called, were called together at the Vallejo Chronicle to typeset parts of the ticket in small "takes," in the quickest way possible. While the type was put together, the presses were readied.

The Chronicle had white book paper ready, cut in strips of four inches in width, so that only cuts at 12-inch length had to be made for printing.

As promised, the tickets were on the street in 30 minutes, and voters could add, scratch and paste the names of their favored candidate.

Despite these efforts, the original ticket got elected.

These election manipulations drew statewide attention, with demands to void the Vallejo votes altogether. The discussion eventually led to the introduction of a uniform ballot law passed and approved by the Governor in the session following the 1871 election.

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