

## Bitter Miners Find Golden Harvests in Suisun

By Jerry Bowen

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In 1849 the California gold rush was in full swing with people from all over the world headed to the land that was sure to make them rich. But not all were so inclined when they saw the fertile valleys of the Suisun. Others, not finding the riches they felt they so richly deserved for their arduous labor remembered the lushness of the valleys of Suisun they passed through on their way to the mines.

By 1850 almost all of the original inhabitants, the Suisun Indians, were gone as a result of disease, pacification by the Spanish or had left the area.

Some of the disappointed gold miners settled around the luxuriant valleys including Daniel M. Berry, Landy Alford, Nathan Barbour, Joseph Gordon, Henry Sweitser, John M. Perry, William Taylor and William Ledgewood and were growing wheat and vegetables prior to 1850.

In October of 1850 Curtis Wilson and Dr. John Baker discovered an island that was later to become the City of Suisun. They didn't remain long enough or realize the potential for a settlement on the Island; that honor was later to be held by Captain Josiah Wing. He sailed on the Ann Sophia to the "island" with a natural embarcadero in 1851 and used it as a shipping point to carry supplies and farm produce to San Francisco.

The island was connected with higher ground on the north by a spit of land that was exposed at low tide. One of the first tasks was the cutting of willow branches to shore up the marshy trail so wagons could reach the landing.

It didn't take him long to realize that this could become an active trading center on the embarcadero, so he built a warehouse there, with sleeping quarters. Asa Crocker, a pilot on the "Ann Sophia" started the first eating-house, for hungry teamsters who brought produce to the site.

On Jan. 2, 1854 the first white child was born in Suisun to Thomas Pearce Williams. John Owen and A. W. Hall were the first merchants to offer goods for sale. As trade increased, in 1854 a town was laid out by Josiah Wing and John Owen, and called Suisun, the local Indian word for west wind. It wasn't until 1868 that the town was incorporated, as we shall see in this series.

Family tradition says Captain Wing paid \$500 for much of the island, which was just outside of the south boundary of the Suisun Rancho. The first map showed the town extended south from Common Street to Cordelia Street and west from the embarcadero to Washington Avenue. In true Spanish style, a plaza was laid out between Main Street and the waterfront as the business center.

By 1854 stores and hotels were built near the plaza and Suisun quickly became a central wheat-shipping center. By Oct. 1, 1854, J. G. Edwards and S. C. Reed erected a steam-powered flourmill to accommodate the local population. Four years later the mill was doubled in size and proudly advertised "commercial work only".

In 1855 the "Solano County Herald," was established in Benicia. But when Fairfield became the County Seat in 1858 it was moved to Suisun and operated in a new building south of the Plaza. William J. Hooten was the editor. In 1869 the name changed to "Solano Republican." (The Daily Republic today).

Suisun was fast becoming the dominant city and shipping center. In 1856 when pioneer Hiram Rush was in process of erecting a two-story brick mercantile building on Main Street, he was asked by his brother Masons to add a third story at their expense. Rush deeded the third story to Masonic Lodge no. 65 for the sum of \$10.00. Hiram was the father of Benjamin F. Rush who later served as U. S Senator for 24 years.

In 1858, Fairfield was voted the county seat and it's interesting to note that the officials made their homes in Suisun.

As we continue this series in later installments we will watch Suisun grow and the many problems it faced.

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