

Bog was barrier between two cities

By Jerry Bowen

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I left off in my last column noting that when Fairfield became the County Seat in 1858, Fairfield was still struggling to become the more prominent city, even though it had the increased influence of being the county seat. Suisun was already an important shipping port and business community, and many of the officials made their home in Suisun rather than Fairfield.

But, there was a slight problem related to commuting from Suisun to Fairfield: a swamp between the two communities.

Continued efforts to construct and improve a road between the plaza and the “fields of Fairfield” were made by hauling in dirt, but above-normal tides and winter floods continued to make it a very hazardous undertaking to travel there.

A good illustration of the problem was shown in a notice from the Herald that said, “A carriage containing a man and woman almost went out of sight in the quagmire yesterday.”

The solution to crossing the “bog” was finally achieved by building a mile-long wooden walkway on stilts above the swampy earth that could be used by pedestrians. Use of this “sidewalk on stilts” continued until after the turn of the century.

On Sept. 13, 1858, the IOOF Lodge number 387 was organized and met in the second story of Frank & Co.’s store for eight years. The first funeral conducted by the order was of Samuel McCrory. All members met at the plaza and proceeded on horseback to the Rockville Cemetery for the burial services.

D. D. and C. R. Reeves built the first store on the Plaza in 1858, and it was soon followed by others.

With narrow streets of the time and wooden buildings, the early pioneers of Suisun realized fire would be a problem.

With that in mind, they purchased an 1857 steam engine from San Francisco named the “Spinney.” On Aug. 22, 1861, it arrived on the steamship “Rambler” accompanied by eight members of the San Francisco Fire Department to instruct the local stalwarts in its operation. This still carefully preserved museum piece is held by the Suisun Fire

Department today.

At first, Captain Wing's boat transported most of the cargo to and from the Suisun embarcadero. Competition for the trade soon developed as shown in an advertisement in the Herald in 1863. It stated the steamship "Rambler," under Captain H. P. Hulbert, made scheduled trips to San Francisco every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Two years later, the "Paul Fry," under Captain A. D. Carpenter, advertised scheduled trips from the Suisun embarcadero to San Francisco.

That the embarcadero was still functioning 16 years later was shown by a press item that said "Every foot of Pierce's wharf in Suisun is covered with Bridgeport (the Nelson Hill Quarry) paving stones. Over 3000 tons now await shipment. Schooners are not available to transport the stones to San Francisco as fast as they are quarried from the Rock Hill."

Lewis Pierce, the pioneer, was then a grain broker in San Francisco. Recognizing the need, he built a warehouse early along the embarcadero and exported wheat abroad. In the summer of 1865, the press said he shipped 8,892 tons of wheat and 2,778 tons of barley from his Suisun warehouse.

Another press report said "loads of marble pass through Suisun from Judge Swan's marble quarry, en route to San Francisco, where it will be worked up."

Nearby Cordelia was named a post office in 1865 because it was on the stage route from Benicia to Sacramento, and Suisun received its mail from that source until receiving its own post office in 1887.

In my next column we will take a look at how and when Suisun was incorporated as an official town of Solano County.

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