

Poor road conditions brought the citizenry together

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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“Good or Poor Roads. - Messrs. Citizens of Vacaville Township, which will you have?” opened the Reporter on Thursday afternoon, Feb. 13, 1890. Deteriorating road conditions and especially the lack of well-designed connector streets, created hardships for many local citizens.

“You know that you cannot haul a pound of fruit or vegetables to ship, unless at great discomfort to yourself and team, and a ridiculous loss of time, compared with what would be the case had we thoroughfares worthy of being called such,” stated the writer. “Don’t forget while you are now worrying with mud and slush, that next Summer this same soil will rise up to becloud your eyes and stifle your breath.”

The writer pointed out that “the wear and tear on your wagons and live-stock is fearful, and that you really will find it a matter of economy to have good roads.”

An earlier writer on Jan. 16 had stated “It is well known that the amount of money annually expended upon the roads of Solano County amounts to fifty thousand dollars and yet we have not one decent highway within its confines.”

Both writers and other citizens like them commented that they needed to find a way to speed up repairs and road expansions.

“It is not to be expected that in one season a great amount can be done, but if several miles can be accomplished, in any one direction, it will be a starter for all leading thoroughfares,” added the article on Feb. 13.

A second article, originally published in the New York Tribune, talked about the town of Sweden, Monroe County, N. Y., which owned a stone crusher. That city appropriated \$2,000, the stone was donated, the city paid to haul it, and “the \$2000 crushed enough stone to make five miles of perfect road.

“Each road district and individual is greedy to get the stone, and I think that money thus extended goes ten times as far as any other in making highways.”

This example inspired a group of citizens, who proposed to adopt a similar system so that “Vacaville Township could soon have, and at nominal cost, every main thoroughfare in it in prime condition. Many orchardists would only be too glad of the

opportunity to haul stone free “

The Reporter took the lead in calling a meeting of all citizens to discuss this proposal on Saturday, Feb. 15. A number of well-known citizens signed the call, including T. H. Buckingham, Will Cantelow, Nathan Rogers and A. Steiger.

The discussion was timely, stated the Reporter on Feb. 20. “That our people are disgusted in total at the conditions of the roads, was clearly attested by the large number in attendance

“Responsible tax payers and citizens were there from every legality on the Township, and not for any idle purpose either.”

The group quickly elected F. B. McKevitt as their chairman and J. McClain as secretary.

McKevitt, Fred Buck and Senator Parker proposed to divide the township to get more work done. In return, J. B. Merchant stated that “according to law the District could not be divided. Having been both Supervisor and Roadmaster, his remarks of course put a damper on the meeting .”

Former Contra Costa resident Smith Ashley then added that in Contra Costa, townships had been subdivided with good results, but was unable to supply information on how to undertake the necessary steps.

In the end, “Senator Parker made a motion, which was promptly seconded, that the Supervisor in the District be requested to secure a rock-crusher for the use of Vacaville Township.” The assembly voted unanimously to accept the proposal.

They then elected a committee consisting of W. C. Fairchild, John Wells and McKevitt to represent their efforts to the Board of Supervisors as soon as possible.

I will finish my story in my next column.

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