

War brings some prosperity to Fairfield, region

By Nancy Dingler

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FAIRFIELD—For a decade that started with death and ended in depression, the 1920s brought wealth, culture and development to many of Solano County.

Armistice came in 1919, but President Woodrow Wilson didn't declare the war over for another year. The Solano Republican still ran a page devoted to photos and news of the war front in Europe. And remnants of the influenza epidemic that killed millions remained.

But while the war brought fear and sadness for many, it also brought prosperity for Fairfield and the region which supplied tons of agricultural produce for the war effort. The fertile valleys here helped create wealthy families who could indulge in the latest technology, fashion and travel abroad. A growing middle class also contributed to the prosperity of the area.

The bounty brought new schools and citizens pushed for a public library. Fairfield and Suisun City could boast of running water, and sewage lines to accommodate indoor plumbing. PG&E brought electric lights in homes and streets.

Streets were busy with horse-drawn wagons, motor cars and trucks, and electric trolley wires and tracks. Concrete roads under construction would connect vast expanses of the state. By 1927 the Carquinez bridge was completed. In 1928, Fairfield embarked on a program to plant trees along the residential streets.

The Novelty Theatre featured silent films, a different one each night of the week. Major novels from authors F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis, and children's author, Hugh Lofting, who published "Dr. Doolittle," became necessary reading for the children's librarian, literary societies and ladies book club.

But this sophistication couldn't include a fine bottle of win. The decade of Prohibition brought raids on illegal whisky stills and brandy warehouses. The Internal Revenue Collector, Nelson G. Welburn, seized a touring car belonging to L.B. Brenner of Vallejo, who had a spectacular "accident while driving at night, left the road and turned over three times, hurtling the four occupants from it and spilling 10 gallons of wine over the highway."

Some people questioned what constituted illegal spirits under the law. Many families

produced their own spirituous drinks. But the federal government made it plain: "Under the bureau's construction of the law any and all persons who produce fruit juice or cider for home use, which said juices or cider are intoxicating in fact, will be promptly prosecuted under the law and in addition all double taxes and penalties provided in the revenue laws will be imposed."

Rum running occurred. In one incident, when the feds seized the ship Elma, the bullet pierced body Fred Bettoni was discovered the following Saturday night.

"The Hawk, said to belong to (Paul Rubio) Pane, was captured . . . (at) Bird's Landing and burned by the crew, after 500 cases of liquor was taken from the hold. The Elma, which appeared on the scene, escaped and was captured at Pittsburg."

Cars became more popular, and more affordable. Auto dealers Mayfield and Long of Suisun offered the Cleveland Six for \$1,435, a five-passenger sedan for \$2,445 and a four-passenger coupe for \$2,345.

By 1928 the editor of the Solano Republican wrote in scathing terms the dangers of automobile traffic in a long editorial entitled, "The Dance of Death." He advised motorists to make sure their automobiles were in good condition and included a check list.

But the huge need for manufactured and agricultural goods waned and those who had overextended to meet the growth caused by the war were in trouble. Small businesses began to close, including the Arlington Theatre in Suisun City.

To drum up business, merchants in Fairfield joined with the Solano Theatre to provide free movies to the area's children, so parents might be able to shop at downtown stores. This was the very first "real shopping day that Fairfield has ever offered."

J.C. Penney, "A Nation-Wide Institution," came to Fairfield, placing an ad for their men's spring suits at \$24.75. Evans and Pyle hardware moved from Woodland giving competition to Goosen's hardware. To combat the competition, Goosen touted, "The new white porcelain Perfection Oil Range with 24 models starting at \$17.50 to \$154."

And people still had to pay taxes.

"Collector of Internal Revenue John P. McLaughlin will have a deputy collector stationed at the First National Bank in Fairfield . . . to assist the income taxpayers in the preparation and filing of their income tax returns for the year 1927, their returns are due on March 15, 1928," a notice said.

“All single persons having a net income of \$1,500 or over and all married persons having a net income of \$3,500 or over must file a return. All persons are required to file a return who have a gross income of \$5,000 or over regardless of the net income. Have your figures ready so as to make a little delay as possible as the government time is limited.”

By October 1929 the stock market would crash.

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