

## **Small-town news flourishes amid crash of '29**

**By Nancy Dingler**

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Thumbing through the Solano Republican newspaper of 1929, I expected to find news of the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression.

By September, when the news of the crash made all the "big" city newspapers, I expected to find news on how it might affect the local economy. Instead I found small town life in Solano County continued without so much as a mention of the "crash."

In February, the news was all about "talkies" coming to the local theater. This was a huge technical breakthrough, sort of like the iPod of its day. The local Fairfield baseball teams, Eagles and Red Men squared off on a Sunday.

And a big home exhibition in Suisun was going to run for three days, billed as the "Better Homes Week." By July the new Penny Company store opened its doors to much ballyhoo and anticipation. The store would have the largest line of dry goods on display in the county.

The one thing that Fairfield was aware of on the national level was the great deal of interest and a resurgence in Native American awareness. Clubs sprang up across the country in which men and boys could join, proving a kinship with their Native American brothers.

Large banner headlines in August proclaimed that the local Massasoit Tribe won the state drill competition. The local order was considered one of the "baby tribes" that was barely hanging onto their state charter.

New life was breathed into the local lodge when it was learned that the Great Inchonee, the highest officer of the land in Redmanship, planned to honor California with an official visit. The local lodge launched a massive membership drive.

"Dr. H.V. Clymer . . . was the instigator of the plan that worked out very successfully for the gaining of new members . . . His plan an offer of free medical examination for the first 50 'palefaces' to come in during the drive . . . the genial Doctor was one of the hardest workers . . . He is also the instigator of the Chief Solano Monument movement . . . now is a statewide movement."

The month of October heralded the news that the grave of Chief Solano was found. The

Martin family had homesteaded the chief's land grant and built a home over the chief's old adobe.

When Solano returned from a 10-year absence, he had fallen ill and was buried under a buckeye tree on the Martin ranch. The article went into detail describing how "among the valuable clippings, belonging Sam Martin of Suisun Valley is one carrying the life sketch of his grandfather, Samuel Martin, who died Dec. 15, 1885. Martin was a close personal friend of Chief Solano and helped to nurse him when he was ill and helped bury him when he died."

The editor of the Solano Republican reprinted the article, which sketched the life of Martin, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1813. "When arriving at manhood he emigrated to the then far west state of Indiana, locating in Madison county."

Samuel met and married Miss Jemima Hillis in 1839, the couple left for Kentucky shortly thereafter. They moved from Kentucky to Atchison, Mo., with the idea of a permanent settlement.

However, the discovery of gold in California prompted the young couple to sell everything they "possessed except a team and provisions, he started across the plains in 1849, with his wife and four children, and arrived on Feather River in the fall, and was moderately successful."

Samuel and Jemima decided that the mines were no place to raise the children, so in the spring of 1850 they made their way to the Suisun Valley. "Seeing the splendid growing of Jesus Molino at Rockville he made up his mind to locate upon the vacant land adjoining that of the Indian."

In 1853, according to the Martin record, the Molina grant was to be sold. Martin was the first settler to put a deed upon record as the purchaser. In spite of this legal move, he was arrested by the U.S. Marshall as a squatter and taken to San Francisco. The slipping stated that shortly thereafter, Samuel was released with apologies and returned home to continue expanding and improving his holdings.

In the 1920s the Martin heirs commissioned a young and promising architect, Julia Morgan to design a new home, built from local quarried stone. The home stands, today, across from Solano Community College.

The Solano Republican article, proclaiming the grave of Chief Solano found was perhaps premature, for in actuality the only proof of the grave was Samuel Martin pointing to the buckeye tree to his children and grandchildren and saying that is where the Chief as interred.

Earlier accounts state that when Vallejo came to pay respects to his old friend, Solano, that Martin could not locate the grave because the cairn of rocks marking the spot had been scattered when the field was plowed for farming.

In the 1930s, a new hunt was commenced, hoping to find the Chief's distinctive 6-foot, 7-inch skeleton, but nothing positive was ever identified. In spite of the lack of concrete evidence, the monument to the chief was erected in 1834 near where Samuel Martin had claimed the grave to be.

There was a native American obsession and awareness throughout the country, and especially in Fairfield. Not to be excluded, the ladies of Fairfield formed a local chapter of the Degree of Pocahontas.

At the two-week meeting after forming this organization, Mrs. McCluskey of Vallejo and "the present Great Minnehaha of the State" attended. No surprise that Dr. Clymer's wife, Mrs. H.V. Clymer, was president of the local women's lodge.

The year ended on an upbeat note, with ads appearing in November urging caring husbands to purchase, large and small, the newest electronic gadgets to make life easier at home. Pacific Gas and Electric had a huge ad urging the purchase of the new Hotpoint Electric Christmas Special range that would cost the average homeowner only \$5.76 per month on their electric bill.

You could purchase one of these new ranges for \$213.20, reduced from \$261.65 and they offered payment plans. For \$7.50 down and 18 months to pay, a range could be delivered in time for Christmas.

PG&E is no longer in the appliance business, nor is electricity usage so affordable. Merry Christmas to all.

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