

## **Town of Cordelia launched with high hopes**

**By Kristin Delaplane**

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In 1866, the boundaries of Green Valley Township were laid out. They included the sites of Green Valley and Suisun Valley and the villages Cordelia/Bridgeport, and Rockville.

On record as having lived in the area were grape growers from France, Newfoundland, Vermont, Austria and Germany. A wine and fruit grower from Spain. Stockmen from New York, England, Ireland and Tennessee. Farmers were from Missouri, New Jersey, Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Pennsylvania and New York. A stone cutter came from England. And one man from Maine listed himself as retired.

After Benicia, Cordelia is the oldest town in the county. In 1846, Capt. Robert Henry Waterman purchased land from Archibald Richie, an owner of large tracts of land. The land was part of the Suisun Land Grant.

Waterman's purchase was 8,876 acres, one-third of the grant. Essentially, he and Richie were partners in the grant.

Waterman left the area temporarily to pursue his seafaring career. In 1850, he retired from a life at sea, returned to Solano County with his wife, Cordelia.

Waterman had ambitions. His dream was to become the founder of a great town. He selected the site of Cordelia as being highly suitable to that end.

It was at the time located on the stage route for coaches traveling between Benicia and Sacramento. As importantly, it was at the head of a navigable slough and thus positioned as a shipping port for the farmers of the area.

Waterman filed a town plat and named the new town Bridgeport, apparently in honor of his hometown in Connecticut. However, it must be noted that there was a Bridgeport in the nearby area before Waterman's time, according to historian Bert Hughes of the Vacaville Heritage Council. There has been speculation that possibly the original site was relocated to suit Waterman's ambitions.

Things started off well enough for the new town. It was selected as a meeting place for

several early-day county conventions and, with a wharf in place, was a shipping point for local farmers.

Unfortunately for Waterman, Josiah Wing came along and founded Suisun City. As a shipping port, Suisun City proved to be far superior to Cordelia.

Suisun City was a better navigation port and more centrally located for the farmers. Due to this set of circumstances, Cordelia simply never really took off.

In 1853, Richie died unexpectedly and under “mysterious circumstances.” He left his land, totaling 17,752 acres, to his wife and named Waterman as attorney-in-fact.

This gave Waterman domain over the area that is now Fairfield, which he founded in 1858 as the county seat.

In 1853, the town’s post office was established under the name Cordelia in honor of Waterman’s wife. Although having a town named for her was said to be Cordelia’s fondest wish, the main reason given was that there were too many Bridgeports in California and it was confusing for the Pony Express. Most of the residents resented the change and never used the new name.

Though Cordelia did not become the booming center Waterman had originally envisioned, things were about to change with the coming of the railroad.

Many towns suffered great loss with the advent of steam. Here was a reverse situation, in which the coming of the railroad caused a failing town to prosper.

The railroad selected a site a half-mile from Cordelia for a station. Accordingly, by 1869, the town’s businesses moved half a mile to take advantage of the California Pacific Railroad line. The new site was named Bridgeport and the post office was moved to Rockville.

A substantial railroad depot was built. C.J. Pittman, an Englishman, had arrived in Cordelia in 1855, becoming the proprietor of a town’s hotel. In 1862, he relocated and built the Bridgeport Hotel, a lavish building, in anticipation of the railroad stop.

Pittman died in 1864 before the railroad arrived, and his wife ran the hotel for the next 37 years. At some point she renamed it the Cordelia Hotel. It burned down in 1942.

As the town prospered and the population grew, businesses and services were established. An Episcopal church was erected. A school was built. A livery stable was in place. A wooden-box factory proved quite successful. There were harness shops,

and a boot and shoemaker.

People of the town hailed from various places, but a substantial number were of German descent. The blacksmith and machinist was German, as was the town's butcher. The carriage-maker and operator of the feed mill came from Massachusetts. A housepainter hailed from Missouri.

Curtis Wilson, who had arrived in Suisun Valley in 1850, became the justice of the peace for the Green Valley Township, serving from 1855 through 1879. In 1867, he moved to Cordelia and was appointed the station agent of the California Pacific Railroad and agent for Wells Fargo.

So Bridgeport became fairly prosperous with an eventual population of about 300. And the town remained to some extent a shipping port for some farmers who shipped out hay and grain from the Cordelia Slough.

By all accounts, Cordelia well-deserved its reputation as a wild railroad town. It had drunks lolling in doorways. According to Hazel Scarlett's recollections, the cowboys would come down from Cody Hill where cattle herds grazed. When they arrived, it was with their six-guns blazing as they'd ride in, often bareback, shooting into the air Wild West style.

In 1883, the Green Valley School was built on the north edge of town. And by the late 1800s, Cordelia boasted its own newspaper, the X-ray, a lively paper with all the latest Cordelia news, advertisements and recipes. The paper's legend was as "The only paper published in Beautiful Green Valley." The subscription rate was \$1.50 for a year.

The boom industry for Bridgeport turned out to be the olivine basalt rock quarry, Thomasson Quarry, on Nelson's Hill.

The quarry opened up in 1875 and at its peak in the 1880s, 400,000 tons of rock were quarried each year and the business employed 400 workers of Italian, Greek and Spanish descent. The workers operated in separate groups according to the language they spoke.

Crushed rock was used for the foundations of San Francisco buildings and many streets in San Francisco were paved with Cordelia's cobblestones. The texture of these particular cobblestones was considered best for horse's hoofs.

San Francisco historical accounts tell of sparks flying from the hooves of horses as the powerful animals pulled the fire engines up the hills paved with Cordelia stone. The

cobblestones were carved out by hand and measured 4-by-6-by-8 inches; each stone took a worker four minutes to carve for which he received 2 cents per stone, or 30 cents an hour.

In 1879, a writer arrived by train and took a walking tour of the Green Valley Township. Cordelia was called the metropolis of Green Valley.

It was noted that the postmaster had a stock of general merchandise. Sort of the 7-Eleven of the day. The main store was Behrmeister & Siebe. The railroad station agent, W.J. Jewel, was also the agent for Wells Fargo, as was his predecessor. Jewel served as the town's telegraph operator as well.

The barber shop doubled as a confectionery store. J.G. Valentine operated the carriage- and wagon-painting business.

The wandering writer recorded that the saws and planer were in full operation at the box factory. James Crowley was the proprietor of a saloon and boardinghouse combination. Mrs. C.J. Pittman, proprietor of the Bridgeport Hotel, was praised for her fine dining.

The town was eventually renamed Cordelia. Most historians theorize that it was renamed when it re-established a post office. Because there was already a Bridgeport in Alpine County, the postal service would have demanded the change. Bridgeport remains as the main residential street in Cordelia.

We will never know the truth of these stories passed down, but folklore tells another side of this story.

Cordelia Waterman was a plucky lass. Capt. Waterman was a tough seafarer. He drank too much and was given to beating his wife. She would then seek refuge with a friend until her bruises healed.

Though Fairfield has tried on a number of occasions to annex Cordelia, the townsfolk have held fast. They like the slow pace and small-town atmosphere of a historic town.

But as new housing developments spring up in the area, taking on Cordelia's historic names, there is a feeling of being swallowed up as the 21st century approaches.

In coming weeks, the tales of Green Valley, Suisun Valley and Rockville will be outlined.

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