

Silkworms, name 'Davisville' meet their fate

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Fourth in a series.

A school was somewhat established in Davisville's first year when the children attended classes in a small building. As there were more students than would fit in this structure, the students took turns learning their lessons; thus, half the students would be standing outside. In bad weather, they all huddled in the close quarters of the one room. Shortly, a larger room was made available and was in use until 1870.

In that year, a grocery store was given over the school. Unfortunately, in a month's time the building was sold and removed to a new location for another purpose. It was reported the students carried their chairs and tables to another building that stood as the schoolroom until the end of the year, when a permanent, two-story schoolhouse, the Yolo School of Davisville, was constructed at a cost of \$2,500.

Social life was important for hard-working farmers and ranchers. Saturday night dances were a frequent event. Many Davisville residents frequented the dances held in Tremont. In 1892, the Davis Social Club was organized and they held many dances. The town was proud of its musicians who made up the Davisville Band. It was noted that a "full orchestra" played at the Fourth of July parade in 1878. The Fourth of July festivities were the big event of the year.

Sports figured prominently. Horse racing was popular, but baseball was the favorite. A team was formed and they played all the nearby communities, Dixon being the big rival.

In 1875, the Marysville branch of the C.P. railroad extended north, losing Davisville a large portion of business and depreciating land values in town somewhat. When the Vaca Valley Railroad extended its line, Davisville lost more business. Now the town had to rely on solid steady growth and its productive farms.

By 1870, the lands fronting Putah Creek were well-dotted with prosperous farms, with wheat and barley being the main harvest. There were 140 farmers in the area and 100 laborers, plus many businesses and skilled tradesmen. Between 20,000 to 30,000 tons of grain were shipped yearly. California wheat was shipped almost exclusively to Liverpool, England, where it commanded a premium price.

At this juncture in history, the silkworm operation at Davisville was producing 2 million cocoons yearly. Back in 1869, I.N. Hoag introduced this profitable enterprise when he planted 200,000 mulberry trees on the Sacramento River and had silkworm eggs shipped to him. In 1871, this lucrative enterprise came to a dramatic end when the temperature reached 100 degrees in the shade for 10 days straight. Despite gallant efforts to save the worms, they bit the dust.

In 1879, the town recorded the following businesses: Two general merchandise stores, a grocery store, drugstore, hardware store, vegetable and fruit store, meat market, cigar and confectionery stand, and two boot and shoe shops. There was a lumberyard, two town blacksmiths, two livery stables, four warehouses. A brewery was also in operation.

There were two barbers and six saloons. Only two hotels were listed, but there were probably more like three or four. A restaurant was built in 1875. It was purchased by a Mr. Gafford from England, who enlarged the building into a two-story hotel with 30 rooms.

In 1884, telephone service reached Davisville when the Sunset Telephone and Telegraph Co. (later Pacific Sunset Telephone and Telegraph) established a station of one phone. A call to Sacramento cost 25 cents for five minutes. By 1899 there were 13 phones at various locations including the Davisville Cash Store, Hunt's Hotel, the Palace Stables and Tufts' Cash Store.

Newspapers didn't fare well in Davisville. The Weekly Advertiser appeared as early as 1869 for a population of 400, but it folded within six months. In 1878, The Facts issued a weekly, but it also folded within a year.

In the 1880s, the Signal hit the presses, but it was not sustained as a regular publication. In 1892, the Weekly Advertiser again appeared on the scene. It was a short-lived appearance.

Finally, the Davisville Enterprise was founded in 1898 by a Mr. Eicher, who had formerly been with the Cordelia X-ray, a thriving little paper. Under Eicher, a newspaper finally found roots in Davisville. The paper is publishing to this day.

The library system fared better than the newspaper business. In 1872, two women whose husbands were in the hotel business established a library with a small collection of books.

The lending library was located in a room on an upper floor of the Marden House hotel. The Marden House was the original American House. In 1878, Gen. Marden bought it.

He enlarged the building into a two-story building with 28 guest rooms.

At the same time, he also purchased the Empire Saloon that had been built in 1869. He also had an interest in the first meat market and the hardware store. Between 1868 and 1888, Marden bought 30 lots, always paying in gold coin.

In 1897, 70-plus almond growers gathered in Davis to form the Davisville Almond Growers' Association to designate Davis as the collection point for the annual almond crop in the surrounding area. This called for the building of an appropriate warehouse and shipping facilities.

The organization was a success, winning international recognition for the area's growers.

In 1907, when Davisville was selected as the site for the University State Farm, the Enterprise dropped the "ville" from its masthead and the editor encouraged the post office to do likewise. It did.

Davis started the new century with a new image. No longer a small town with small ideas.

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