

Hotels flourished during Gold Rush period

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, February 18, 1996

One of the county's first hotels was owned by Capt. Edward von Pfister, who had purchased a whole line of goods for a general store in Hawaii.

In 1846, he moved to Benicia and set up a general store in a 40-by-25-foot adobe. His store became a gathering place by day and bar/hotel at night, the store's floor providing the sleeping quarters.

It was in von Pfister's hotel that the first word of the discovery of gold was leaked.

Charley Bennett, Sutter's courier, stopped in at the bar on his way to Monterey with news of the gold strike. After a few drinks, he let the cat out of the bag, telling one and all about the gold "in them thar hills."

In 1847, Benicia's founder, Robert Semple, married Frances Cooper in the town's new hotel, the California House, a large two-story adobe. The proprietor of the hotel was Maj. Cooper, the father of the bride.

In later years, von Pfister took over operation of the California House.

Once the Gold Rush was on, various accommodations sprang up along the stage roads to accommodate travelers going to and from the gold fields.

The historic Fischer-Hanlon residence in Benicia was originally a hotel on First Street during the Gold Rush era. Fire struck the hotel in 1856, at which time it was purchased, moved and turned into a residence.

Benicia's Washington House was built in 1850 and was a hotel during its early history.

It was about 1850 that a 10-by-10-foot building with an iron roof was erected in Vallejo as a small general store with bare-bones accommodations for travelers.

In 1851, in anticipation of Vallejo becoming the state Capitol, the Central Hotel was erected at Marin and Maine. As it turned out, the Central Hotel was built in too much haste and the accommodations were far from acceptable. The politicians ended up being accommodated on a steamer in port.

The Solano House was located at a stage stop on the wagon road between Benicia and

Sacramento and was just across the Putah Creek from current-day Davis.

Rockville was also a stagecoach stop, and in the early 1850s a modest hotel was erected with an accompanying trading store to accommodate the traveling public.

In 1851, the second building to be constructed in Vacaville was a hotel built by James McGuire. McGuire died in 1852, and it was noted that he had owned "a house of entertainment in the village."

In 1852, Christley Manka settled in the Suisun Valley at the point where the overland stage stopped. In time he fitted out a building on his ranch with sleeping accommodations featuring a featherbed.

In 1852, when Josiah Wing settled at the head of Suisun Slough, the first order of business was to build a big warehouse.

This warehouse was outfitted with simple sleeping quarters for the farmers who would travel some distance to store and ship their grain from Wing's Suisun City port. Also, we may imagine, sailors may have found these accommodations favorable on overnight stays.

That same year, 1852, Elijah Silvey founded his accommodations three miles from Dixon along the stagecoach road and built a way station consisting of a tavern and a corral, these areas providing rough overnight accommodations.

To make certain the miners - men traveling by foot, wagon, and horse - could find his place, Silvey hoisted a lantern up a pole every night. Thus his place could be tracked even over the high oats.

In 1852, Mason Wilson and his wife, Luzena, came down from the gold fields to harvest the wild hay that was selling for a high price in those days. Traveling in a covered wagon, they parked their mobile home on Main Street in Vacaville, which was also located on the well-traveled trail of the day. Mason spent his day in the fields cutting and bundling oats. Luzena, meanwhile, set up a "prairie hotel," putting up a sign reading "Wilson's Hotel" to welcome travelers.

Luzena's provided her guests home-cooked campfire meals and the comfort of a haystack for sleeping. In 1856 or 1858, the couple re-entered the hotel business when they built and ran Wilson's Hotel, then one of the few commercial buildings in town and certainly the most predominant.

The American Hotel in Benicia took out the following advertisement in the newspaper in

the early 1850s: "This house is built in the most modern style, with plastered walls throughout and everything adapted for the comfort of the travelers or pleasure parties. A carriage is always in attendance, upon arrival of the boats, to carry people to and from the same free. Napa, Sonoma, and Suisun Stages start from this House every morning. Connected with the House is a 'Livery Stable' furnished with all kinds of vehicles and good saddle horses, with large and roomy stables and yard for staling stock, etc. C.M. Davis, proprietor."

Boardinghouses usually accommodated travelers as well as their regular renters. Mrs. Frisbee's Boarding House was situated next to the American Hotel. Her advertisement is as follows: "The subscriber having fitted up her house in the most comfortable manner is prepared to accommodate travelers and regular boarders with well-furnished rooms on liberal terms. Her table will be supplied with the best the markets afford. Napa, Sonoma, and Suisun Stages start from this house every morning. E.H. Frisbee. December 31, 1853." Benicia's Solano Hotel, Sawyer House and Mrs. Gate's Select Boarding House all carried similar advertisements.

In 1855, a full-blown storm hit Vallejo with wild winds and snow. The winds turned so vicious and overpowering that they swept the iron roof off the Union House, sending it rumbling down the street.

It was in that year, 1855, that C.J. Pittman, an Englishman, arrived in Cordelia and became the proprietor of Pittman's Hotel, noted as a lavish building.

In anticipation of the railroad stop, he relocated the building in 1862 and named it the Bridgeport Hotel. Pittman died in 1864 before the railroad arrived, and his wife ran the hotel for the next 37 years. Mrs. C.J. Pittman was praised for her fine dining.

At some point she renamed her hotel the Cordelia Hotel. It burned down in 1942.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/548>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/548/>