

## **Solano enjoyed glorious spring in 1856**

**By Kristin Delaplane**

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Second in a series

Springtime 1856: gardening chores were on people's minds. The editors of the Solano County Herald approvingly noted that citizens were taking advantage of the pleasant weather to improve their lots by planting trees and flower and vegetable gardens. Garden Seeds were the hot item at the Benicia Drug Store and Judge & Co. at the Bunker Hill House was set to do business gardening, teaming, well digging and whitewashing.

A call was issued for those who signed up for Solano Engine Co. No. 1 to meet to officially organize the company. A No. 1 Hunneman engine arrived at the steamboat landing that April. In a following week, the Benicia fire company was encouraged by the editors to throw a little energy into their practice drill.

There was a notice that people in town could purchase stock in the proposed railroad company.

A bill was passed regulating steamboat fares, putting them at 3 1/2 cents per mile. This was intended to knock down the monopoly, the California Steam Navigation Co.

Another bill was passed repealing an act that exempted Solano County firemen from the militia and jury duty.

A memorial to Congress for the construction of a wagon road across the plains was located at the Moore Allen & Co. store for signatures.

The fair held on Washington's Birthday to benefit Benicia's Catholic Church brought in \$2,623; expenses came to \$758, leaving a profit of \$1,865.

A new cemetery was being sought for Benicia. Up to then, land donated by a private individual had been used for this purpose. However, the place was bleak, so the Odd Fellows and Masons had taken up the cause.

It was at this time that Beverly Wells murdered his friend James Dunn on Benicia's wharfside. The parents, brothers and sisters of the late Dunn took an ad out thanking the officers and crew of the steamship Golden Gate and the citizens of Benicia for their kind services rendered to the deceased before and after his death.

Seeking work, a young man put in the the following ad: “. . . owner of a light wagon and a pair carriage horses wants employment of any kind where he can use his team.”

The Sawyer House, the saloon that had been E.H. von Pfister's, had been turned over to W.S. Wells, who was advertising that it was available to let. Meanwhile, von Pfister was running for city marshall.

The Knickerbocker Saloon went into business at the steamboat landing in Benicia with Robert Stone as proprietor. He advertised that ice was constantly on hand.

In May, the Solano Hotel was robbed of \$8 to \$10. The proprietor said he was sure he knew the thief and was looking forward to seeing he was given lodging in the Martinez jail.

Burkhardt's Restaurant offered a special Sunday, a famous turtle soup.

Hatch and Co., a major variety store in a brick building, was selling fresh Oregon cranberries and superior Boston hams.

Thomas Farmer, architect and builder, was set to draft plans for plain or ornamental architecture as well as build, remove or repair houses.

Samuel C. Gray expanded his store, as was reflected in his new ad. “Dealer in staple and fancy dry goods. Hats and caps. Ladies and misses bonnets. Men and boys clothings of every description. Men, boys, youth, women's, misses, children's and infants boots and shoes. Crockery & hardware, carpeting. Clocks. Looking glasses. Cooking stoves. Parlor and office stoves. Trunks and valises. Books and stationery.”

Nearby, the Benicia Book and Drug Store was advertising “Important ironers. A few of those patented selfheating SAD irons that save 1/2 the labor, 7/8 the fuel and nearly all the vexation of ordinary smoothing irons.”

It was also selling fresh tamarinds and 100 pounds of pure honey that had been put up on a farm especially for the store. Also sold on the premises were items that had just arrived from New York: 50 reams writing paper, 10,000 assorted envelopes, 10 dozen slates, 20 dozen copy books, five gross playing cards from \$1.50 to \$15 per dozen, blank books a large variety, pass books, tuck memorandums, water colors, portfolios, pens, inks.

Homes were being painted and decorated with wallpaper. Mr. Hayman was in the paper-glazing and paper-hanging business and also offered an assortment of paints, oil glass and paper hangings. The premises he occupied were formally occupied by Wright

& Mathews. John Wright moved elsewhere to offer painting and paper-hanging services. He was prepared to do plain and ornamental painting, signs and writing.

Proposals for supplying fresh beef to the Benicia barracks were being accepted. The contract was to be for one year with deliveries three times a week.

D.N. Hastings was moving a house to the corner of First and D streets. It was to be divided into three sections; one section was to be his butcher shop, one for the Herald office and the third for a dry goods store. The upper portion of the building was for offices.

The Pacific Mail Steamship Co. suspended operations at its foundry and machine shop.

Michael Farrell painted coaches, carriages, buggies and stages. Meanwhile, a new stage line sprang up, making daily trips to Sulphur Springs in Napa County.

George H. Riddell, the justice of peace and notary public, was also a real estate agent, accountant and conveyance. Located at No. 5 Semple Slip, he offered his services in commercial writings, acknowledgements, extending protests, collection of rent, leasing and managing real estate, examining accounts, drawing deeds, mortgages and all other instruments pertaining to real estate.

Capt. E Robbins lost a team of horses that backed off McKay's Wharf and drowned. The citizens of Benicia raised \$350 to cover his loss.

A horse harnessed to Mr. Fisher's butcher cart ran away and tore down two posts near the American Hotel.

C.M. Davis, proprietor of the American Hotel, reported a stolen horse and Spanish saddle. S.S. Garrett hired the outfit to go to Suisun and had not returned.

For horse breeders, a celebrated buck-kneed stud was available every alternate three days at Sulphur Springs and Napa.

Joseph W. Bassford had 70 American bucks on his ranch, which he wanted to exchange for ewes.

More than 1,000 head of Spanish cattle had been driven from Los Angeles and crossed on the Martinez ferry on their way to A.M. Stevenson and Ed McGarry in the Suisun Valley. The prices generally paid in Los Angeles were \$16 to \$18 for large cattle and \$9 for young cattle. The editors suggested readers go out to the ranch to see the cattle

being branded.

A wild Spanish cow made its way to the streets of Benicia and gave chase to anyone it saw. Col. Leslie was about at the time and the cow charged, knocking him over. The cow was shot.

One day in May, a drove of Spanish horses passed through Benicia with about 15 Mexican vaqueros. Their destination was Berryessa Valley.

Mr. Berryman was hooked by a steer at the ranch of Young and Hobbs in the Montezuma Townwhip. The hook proved fatal for this 22-year-old.

Another drove of cattle passed through Benicia on their way to Mr. Kincaid's in Green Valley.

The editors of the Solano County Herald solicited news from other parts of the county.

The Washington Hotel, located on Georgia Street near the steamboat landing, was run by John McElroy, who was ready to accommodate families and guests in spacious and convenient apartments. He promised every exertion was made to provide the table with the best substantials and luxuries to be found at rates that corresponded with the times.

The funds appropriated for the Navy yard were nearly exhausted. Mechanics and laborers were discharged, reducing the force to about 25 men. The Dry Dock Co. remained busy, however. It employed about 125 men, and a few mechanics had been put on to construct a sea wall bordering on Napa Creek.

Margaret White, wife of David White, placed an announcement that she was in business operating a saloon and restaurant in the town of Vallejo together with a baking business at a place on Georgia Street known as the Live Oak Restaurant and Bakery.

There was a public auction of land near Vacaville: 125 acres occupied by Larkin Richardson; 113 acres near the farms of Bennett and Hawkins; 318 acres north of Vacaville known as Markwood Track; and 120 acres in the town itself.

In the Vacaville township, a man named Perry, while shooting some cattle, was shot and killed by parties unknown.

The newly formed Suisun Lime and Quarry Co. was up and running, and having manufactured an excellent lime, was making preparations to do a heavy business.

The people of Suisun City were lobbying to have a post office and branch express office. Considering that a large amount of shipping business was conducted on the island, the townfolk felt a post office was justified.

A social ball was given at Mr. Chrysler's Cordelia house attended by a number of judges, generals, colonels and doctors.

There was a fire in Suisun City that burned the livery stable of J.W. Owens. Lee and Marshall's circus had been performing on the island and on retiring had taken candles into the hayloft. Three of the horses belonging to the circus died and most of the company's harnesses were lost.

A farmer in the Suisun Valley planted a large crop of peanuts for market. Meanwhile, livery stable keepers, farmers and others in Vallejo and the Suisun Valley vicinity were busy cutting hay.

The San Francisco papers had reported that the drought had killed off the young grain, but the following is edited from a correspondence from Cordelia: "At present everybody, men, women and children, are busily engaged in haying, housework and other toil which farmers are required to do at this season. The hay crop looks as well if not better than we had anticipated and our farmers are going to make the most of it. The barley and wheat crop look exceedingly well and the enclosed hay and barley field of J.M. Thompson could look no better. On every hillside and valley one will see men mowing and where there is a patch of grass it falls by the reaper's scythe. In a few years, Cordelia and vicinity will be no insignificant place as it is now settling very fast and will continue to do so as the soil is as rich here as any portion of the county." In the next week or so late rains came, damaging a good percentage of the hay crop."

The Brookshire Hotel opened in Suisun City. The City Hotel (a k a the Farmer's House) also opened its doors. Morton & De Castro were the proprietors of this "commodious and popular hotel."

The Benicia High School was established. Formerly called the Collegiate Institute, the school was conducted by Cornelius J. Flatt, a graduate of N.Y. State Normal School. Students were taught moral philosophy, ancient and modern languages, physical sciences, mathematics and natural sciences. The cost of board, washing and tuition in the English branches was \$200 for a five-month session.

The cost of attending the Female Seminary for five months for a day scholar taking common English studies was \$30; for higher English studies, \$40. To study music with a piano one had to pay \$50, without a piano \$40. Latin, modern languages, drawing, and embroidery were an additional \$15.

The county superintendent of common schools visited schools to ascertain their progress and examine the teachers' qualifications. He visited the nine schools in the Vaca Valley; the two public schools, one private school; and a female seminary in Suisun; and the school in Green Valley. There were two schools in Vallejo. The public school was taught in a church building with 25 to 30 students. A private school was taught in a home with 10 to 15 students.

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