

Strange medicines and standard crimes

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Sunday, June 09, 1996

Last in a series

In the fall of 1856, several families traveling in wagon trains and with cattle passed through Solano County from Santa Clara County bound for some of the northern counties. A great many families were said to be immigrating to the north.

The Son's of Temperance Ball was anticipated to be the ball of the season. The fairest of the fair were to attend. A band was to be on hand and entertainment was planned throughout the evening. However, a report some weeks later showed the ball was poorly attended. Those who did attend enjoyed the gorgeously decorated hall and an excellent supper. The party broke up at dawn.

Benicia's pioneer E. H. von Pfister was secretary of that Masonic Lodge. In other Masonic news, a ball was being held in Suisun City to benefit the Lodge. Also on that island a horse race was a main event.

Benicia's telegraph office was located in Nurse's jewelry store. The submarine wire had been repaired by now and the city was to be connected to Stockton and Sacramento. A cable was soon to be laid from Oakland to San Francisco, giving Benicia direct communication with the San Francisco.

A number of weeks later, sailing vessels were notified that a cable had been laid from Government Point to Ball Head Point two miles above Benicia. Vessels were requested not to anchor near the points, and if they did they should take care in taking in the anchor so as not to dislodge the cable.

When the North American Circus came to town, it was noted that it had been established at a cost of \$30,000 and was the largest circus to ever appear in California. It featured all the scenic and acrobatic performances. Seats in the dress circle were \$2; the pit, \$1.

In response to the traveling photographers, Benicia's Peter Wright advertised that he took first-rate Ambrotypes and, as Benicia's, own he requested a share of the townsfolk patronage. He took no money if the pictures did not please. Daguerreotype photos were sold from 50 cents upwards. People with children were asked to come in the forenoon.

Dr. A. Verhave, physician, surgeon and accoucheur (one who assists in child birth), had his office next to the Solano Hotel. He advised the poor between 9 and 10 p.m.

All physicians in the county were to meet in Suisun in January to form a medical society.

Hostetter's Celebrated Stomach Bitters was available at the Benicia Drug Store. Put out by Dr. Hostetter, it was purportedly highly acclaimed by almost every paper in the union and had been awarded various diplomas. It was said to be a cure for indigestion, loss of appetite, general debility and a preventative for fever and ague.

Used as a dentifrice, Balm of a Thousand Flowers was a cure for disagreeable breath and left teeth alabaster white. The balm could also remove a tan, pimples and freckles, giving the face a roseate hue. Putting two or three drops on a shaving brush created a lather that helped facilitate the operation of shaving. Also being sold at Jones' Drug Store were pure liquors; Catawba, French brandy and wines; and Wolt's Scheidam Schnapps, for medicinal purposes.

Building additions were made to the Female Seminary that year to accommodate more students.

The U.S. Mail Line stagecoach now operated between Benicia, Vallejo, Napa City and Sulphur Springs.

The U.S. troops at Benicia left for Oregon, the Indians having again become troublesome. These would have been the Rogue River Indians, who had been put on a reservation.

Horse thief Jose Tasso was placed in irons and put in the rickety Benicia jail. Later that day a constable arrested a man on suspicion of petty larceny, and upon reaching the jail with the prisoner, discovered that Jose had his irons off, made a hole in the floor and the wall and was about to escape.

In the Suisun Valley, a stranger on horseback and with a knife went in pursuit of Samuel Martin, who was hunting cattle. Martin escaped, his horse being the fastest. The man then rushed into Barton's Store and would have injured Mr. Cook had not Mr. Barton caught the man and put him out. A Mr. Richardson, who was visiting, got a stick and managed to capture the man, who it turned out was from the "Red Woods" (redwoods). He was carted off to the insane asylum in Stockton.

A political convention was held in Suisun City, where the delegates nominated candidates for various offices. Shortly thereafter there was a barbecue in Suisun Valley

where McDaniels, Frisbee and others spoke. The meeting was not well-attended due to poor weather conditions.

When the rains came, the streets became mud and the men in the towns were seen walking in the streets with heavy boots and their trousers rolled up.

The Rev. Woodbridge of Benicia laid the cornerstone for the Methodist Church that was being built on the site of the campgrounds in the Suisun Valley. (This information would now correct last week's version that the campgrounds were up by Manka's Corner. We must therefore conclude that there were two campground sites.)

There was a brutal murder in Wooden Valley, where John Day stabbed Daniel Quinn. Quinn was herding stock for Mr. Edgerton and was lodging at Day's. Day's 14-year-old son was roused from bed his father, who said he just killed Quinn.

The boy was made to hold a candle while his father dug the grave. Day then got his horse and left. In fear, the boy went to a neighbor to relate the events. Quinn had apparently been attacked in bed for \$500 he had. Day was last seen on the Benicia ferry. The sheriff was in pursuit with a posse.

Mr. Hiram Rowe, aged 23, died at Mr. A. Goodyear 's residence. Rowe had traveled across the plains in 1852 with Goodyear.

As the national election neared, a ballot box was placed in the Knickerbocker Saloon to test the political feelings of townsfolk. At day's end, Buchanan had 29 votes, Fillmore, 31 and Fremont 9. (That year, voters elected Democrat James Buchanan president, running against Republican John Fremont and Fillmore, who ran on the Know-Nothing Movement ticket.)

The ordinance against selling water and tule lands in Benicia was repealed and the sale of such land took place in November with great success. Sales totaled \$18,000, which cleared that amount of the city's debt.

Lost in Suisun City was a promissory note drawn in favor of E. Morton and made payable by R. Barnes in the amount of \$100 with interest at 3.5 percent per month until paid. Liberal reward offered.

There was a political gathering in Enterprise, a new town that had just sprung up in Suisun Valley near the campground.

T.J. White shot an eagle at Cordelia measuring 9 feet, 3 inches from tip to tip. A large eagle for California.

C.E. Wetmore of Vallejo moved his store to Sacramento and Georgia opposite Capt. Frisbee's residence. His general merchandise included dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, hats and caps, stationery, groceries, hardware, crockery, tobacco, cigars, powder and shot, paints and oils, paper hangings, etc.

In Benicia, M. Tobias and Co., a store with gents' and boys' clothing, furnishing goods, hats, caps, boots and shoes, moved to the building formally occupied by D.N. Hastings.

Nathaniel Barstow of Green Valley was killed. He was hauling a load of lumber when his horses became frightened and threw him from his wagon. The wheel rolled over his neck, killing him instantly.

Another accident occurred in Vacaville when a man named Urlick lost his hand when his gun exploded.

The new supervisors were George Levinston of Benicia, Sydney Clark of Green Valley and Richardson Long of Vacaville.

Many small children died in those early days. Such was the fate of Mary Louisa Cole of Green Valley, who died of tonsillitis.

Capt. Wing of Suisun was awarded the contract from the Navy yard for the lime to be used in the construction of the buildings there. Marble from that area was also expected to be represented in the construction.

Mr. T. Pander, a resident of Benicia since 1852 and owner of a men's store, committed suicide. His body came ashore in front of the Bella Union. His friends attested that depression of business was the cause. One day he had settled his business and shown his accounts to his wife. Soon afterwards, his widow Caroline sold the contents in the store at "auction prices and no humbug." Included were an assortment of cigars, tobacco, etc. She was also selling a home 30-by-40 feet.

The editors, in an attempt to rally the citizens to plant trees, ran the following editorial: "Every visitor to Benicia is struck with the almost entire absence of trees and shrubbery, giving a bare and naked appearance to the city. Nothing adds more beauty to a street than a noble line of trees on either side casting their pleasant shade in the noon time heat and pleasing the eye with their green and refreshing appearance. Trees planted around a dwelling not only give it a more cozy, home-like appearance, but actually enhance the value. What say you gentlemen in beautifying and adorning our city with something green. Who will be the first to start the work?"

A sheriff's sale of stock was located at the Sulphur Spring Valley ranch of Thomas J. Bedford. Included were 100 head of American cows, calves and yearlings and 35 head of Spanish mules and colts.

Harvey's ranch, seven miles from Benicia on the road to Suisun, was being offered at a low price for cash.

The county assessor's report included the following facts: 18,710 cattle, including cows, calves, beef cattle and other cattle; 3,689 horses; 100 mules; 15,113 sheep; 7,000 hogs; and 500 goats. Produce raised that year and shipped to different points included: 13,500 tons of hay; 5,470 tons of wheat; 3,812 tons of barley; 500 tons of oats, 50 tons of wool; and 450 tons of corn. It was anticipated that the year would include producing 20,000 barrels of flour, shipping 2,550 barrels of lime and 75 tons marble.

The black cloud that had been hanging over Vallejo had finally broken. Unfinished houses are being completed and new ones are being built. The sectional floating dock, which had been held under a lease by Dankin, Moody, Gilbert and Secor, had been turned over to the government under the charge of Isaiah Hanscom, a naval constructor. Thanksgiving Day passed with all men working, as for the government, this was not a holiday.

The number of schools in the county totaled 11, not including the two female seminaries and the male academy in Benicia and a private school in Vacaville.

Benicia had two public schools. In Green Valley, Mr. Monroe had been conducting the school for the past two years. The school at Barton's was conducted by Mr. Knox and his wife.

Suisun had two other schools. One at Barton's and one Turner's, with Mr. Cushing as teacher. The schools in the Vaca Valley were in session constantly. A commodious building had been erected in Vacaville and a private school was in operation there. The Ulatis Literary Society had been formed and steps were being taken to procure a library. Silva's school, taught by J.N. Smith and a school, had also been established in Montezuma that year.

The students from the Female Benicia Seminary published their own publication, The Wreath. Excerpts were regularly featured in the Herald, such as this excerpt: "One would scarcely believe that 100 years ago, this now beautiful and cultivated country was inhabited by wild and barbarous savages who roamed over the hills chanting the war songs with indisputable rite. We would hardly believe to look at them that in so short a time they would be swept away from their possessions like the leaves before

the autumn wind.

“That one fine seminary would take the place of the rude wigwam, commodious steamboats would move up and down the beautiful bay instead of the little birchen canoe which glided so rapidly over the still waters. Little did they think that the white man would take possession of their lands and drive them away from their homes. It may be that only 20 years ago, Benicia was inhabited by Indians; where our seminary stands their children played. Now instead of a collection of wigwams is a pleasant city composed of beautiful dwellings and a few places of business. Let us cast a look into the future, say 100 years. A magnificent city appears with beautiful squares on the site of our beautiful town, ornamented with shade trees and among the many public buildings the Benicia Female Seminary stands conspicuous . . .”

The elections over there was a Democratic jubilee at Vallejo with booming guns and fireworks. An ox was slaughtered and roasted for the occasion and a ball was held at the Courthouse. All night long was employed in the delightful pastime of “chasing the glowing hours with flying feet.”

There was a notice that: “I will not be responsible for any debts contracted by my wife, Mary Leonard, on or after this date. She has left my bed and board without any cause. All persons are hereby forewarned from harboring her as a law will be enforced against them. Alexander Leonard,” Vallejo, November 1856.

At Putah Creek (Tremont) on the 11th of December, Mr. J. Guthrie was wed to Miss Betsy Judd. They became noted residents in that area.

J.W. Jones had elegant bound and illustrated albums, annuals, poems and fancy goods. Also a fine assortment of toys and books for children at prices cheaper than the cheapest.

The Vallejo Library Association had a ball on Christmas Eve for the benefit of the library. The citizens turned out en masse, and it was reported to be the best-conducted affair ever in that town, as reported by Vallejo's P.K. Yarnell.

That Christmas was a lively week in Benicia with balls, parties and wedding parties, The editors noted that: “Benicia was not far behind any of the larger, more pretentious cities which effect to despise us because we are small and regard it as much in the way as a big dog does a smaller, but more lively. The festivals which Christmas usually brings in its train were added to and heightened by the fact that it was the time chosen for the performance of the marriage ceremony in two instances when two when two lovely accomplished women gave their happiness into the keeping of those who we know will delight to fulfill the scared trust.”

It was also reported that a group of men had gone around town Christmas night with old tin kettles and other noisy instruments, making the night hideous.

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