

## Cost of business in 1857 Benicia lowered

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, July 14, 1996

Just before New Year's 1857, there was a snowstorm in Benicia that lasted four to five hours and left 2 inches of snow on the ground. To citizens' knowledge, it was the first snowfall since the city was founded.

Hatch, Brackett & Co., proprietors of the Brick Store at 1st and E, celebrated New Year's Eve with an old-fashioned housewarming to thank customers for their patronage. Business was apparently so brisk the owners had just completed an extensive addition to the store. The public was treated to a viands on a bountifully spread table, champagne and other choice liquors. They left after an hour or two of dancing.

The editors of the Solano County Herald started off the New Year with a campaign proposing that the citizens do away with their present form of city government in favor of three elected trustees. Their reasoning was that the taxpayers were paying needlessly for this "city government" and the resulting high taxes were perhaps deterring people from moving to the town.

Perhaps the City Council paid attention. Soon after the cost of business in Benicia went down. Where livery stables were to pay \$30 per quarter, they were now charged \$5 per quarter. Public exhibitions were reduced from \$20 for the first show to \$10 and from \$10 for subsequent shows to \$5. Tavern fees were adjusted from \$32 to \$20 per quarter. Billiards, etc. were reduced from \$25 per table to \$10. Restaurants paid \$6. A two-horse jobbing vehicle went from \$10 to \$6, a one-horse from \$6 to \$3, water carts or wagons from \$10 to \$5 and drays from \$6 to \$3.

Solomon Altmark began advertising his Benicia shop, the Cheap Store on 1st Street. His was a gents' and boys' store featuring clothing, hats and caps, Conrad and Banker boots and shoes of the finest quality. His line of luggage included trunks, valises and carpet-bags. He promised his goods were cheaper than the same goods could be bought elsewhere.

Also in stock were "segars," tobacco, snuff and pipes. The ad closed as follows: "... thankful to his friends and the public for their liberal patronage heretofore and he would respectfully solicit a continuance of the same during the year A.D. 1857."

Altmark's competition was M. Tobias and Co. at 1st and D streets. In addition to

carrying a line of gents' and boys' clothing and accessories, Tobias made garments to order and had a cleaning service. He also carried a line of baggage and tobacco goods were featured as well.

New ads to appear included C.A. Cellers, justice of the peace, located in the Hastings Building on Front Street near D. Samuel S. Swasey's painting, glazing and paper hanging shop was located next C.B. Houghton & Co.'s lumberyard at 1st and C streets. The shop also carried paints, oil, glass and paper hangings for sale.

James A. McDonell was a manufacturer and importer of carriages and wagons and he carried a line of carriage materials and stock for wagons. He also did carriage repairing. His shop was situated near the corner of Main and E streets.

The editors noted that Benicia offered ample opportunity for lovers of fast horses and neat "turn-outs" (a k a buggies). There were two livery stables well-stocked: Neville's stables on 1st, and Charley Fores' place near the Solano Hotel.

Martin Berryessa left his roan-colored Mexican horse at the Solano Hotel's stable and an ad in the paper warned if he didn't claim the horse, it would be sold.

There was a move on the part of Solano County's farmers to form an agriculture society. These societies gave farmers the opportunity to meet and compare notes in the management of ranches and to find ways to exhibit and promote their wares.

The newspaper implored the city fathers to take immediate steps to repair the roof of the State House, as it had given way in places as could be seen by the plaster on the floor of the second story.

Meanwhile, Vallejo's Capitol building was enjoying a renewal, though that was not evidenced by the lower hall, which had apparently had its day as a barroom and at this time was a place for storing hay bales.

The upper hall, however, was established as the library and reading room and was where the Debating Society met. Vallejo's culture also extended to the formation of a singing school. The Capitol was still useful for parties and such a soiree took place the beginning of the year, the people dancing until 1 a.m.

Benicia's populace was considering a suggestion that the young men of that town form a debating club for their mutual improvement.

The Benicia Amateur Ethiopian Serenaders gave performances in Benicia and Vallejo and a free concert at the barracks. The nine performers were believed to be attached to

a garrison at the Benicia Arsenal.

After the initial performance in Benicia which was well-attended despite the rain, the critic came out with a notice. "...selections were of negro melodies interspersed with a large number of conundrums, witty sayings, burlesques ... there was frequent applause. As far as regards the instrumental portion, we considered it excellent, equal to anything we have heard in the way of negro minstrelsy, but with the vocalism we were not so well pleased. Lacking in several points. The principal defect - a want of correct time - can however be remedied by more frequent practice."

News came that in Sulphur Springs Valley the only daughter of the Thomas Bedfords died at 3 months.

Members of the Solano Engine Co. No. 1 were to meet at their house in January for the purpose of electing their officers. In 1856, it had been determined that the Fire Department would consist of one engine company and one hook and ladder company or two engine companies. No company was to exceed 65 people each, those numbers including a foreman, an assistant and a secretary/treasurer.

A Fireman's First Anniversary Ball to benefit the fire department was held Feb. 12 at a cost of \$5 a person. The ball was a big success. Though it was raining and the streets muddy, a large number of Benicians showed up and even ladies and gentlemen from Martinez, Suisun Valley and San Francisco attended.

Activity for the fire department the first few months of 1857 included putting out fires that had been purposely set in tar barrels.

A \$10 reward was offered from the Singleton Vaughn ranch, two miles east of Benicia, for the recovery of a strayed or stolen black American mule. The mule had been missing since the previous November.

Jose Antonio Berryessa was married to Miss S. Martinez in the Catholic church in Benicia. The Rev. James Woods married Carrol Owen to Bella Rush in Suisun.

When the Berryessa marriage was reported in the San Francisco papers, there was a wail from the Solano Herald editors that San Francisco papers seem inclined to ignore the existence of Benicia. As proof it was pointed out that marriages performed in Benicia were reported as having occurred in Marysville.

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