

Temperance preachers make the rounds

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, July 28, 1996

The Methodist Episcopal Church south of the small village of Rockville was dedicated on April 5, 1857, by the Rev. Mr. Fisher, editor of the Pacific Methodist at Stockton. He was assisted by the Rev. Mr. Bailey, the presiding elder.

The church was completely crowded for the ceremony, and a large number of people from Vallejo and other parts of the county attended. Many from Vallejo had made advance arrangements to rent horses, carriages and buggies from John Brownlie's livery stable for the trip to Rockville.

This excursion was described in some detail by one of the citizens: "The route taken was the road through the Green Valley canyon that opened onto a luxuriant region spotted with neat dwellings. Footpaths were leading one to another. Flocks of horses, oxen, cows and sheep could be seen."

Rockville was not a sizable place, but there had been new construction in the months proceeding the dedication. A hotel nearly completed, several dwellings had gone up, and there was a blacksmith shop. The church, a 40-by-100-foot building, was built with variegated bright blue stone taken from a nearby quarry. There were large windows with green blinds. Inside, a chandelier was suspended from the ceiling, and solar lamps were situated at the altar.

During the proceedings it was stated that the cost of the church came to \$5,000, and a collection was taken to help the parish with the last few dollars owing. The people of Vallejo took notice that a graveyard was attached to the church, while Vallejo still had no graveyard.

It was at this period of time that the citizens of Benicia were conscious of the fact that their town was in need of a face lift. The city hall building was going to ruin and the city streets were impassable except in places where private businessmen were maintaining them. The editors of the Solano County Herald pointed out that it was clearly not the responsibility of these individuals. It was job of city government to provide street improvements such as grading, paving, planking, repair and lighting and to see to the construction of the sidewalks.

In an editorial, it was requested that 1st Street be graded and that A Street be made passable through to 2nd so that there would be a "highway" to the steamboat landing.

The cries of the editors and citizens were apparently heard, because the portion of 1st Street which crossed tule was filled up and graded. Also, H Street was completed as a thoroughfare.

In spite of new roads, accidents occurred. The vehicle carrying a party of three persons riding out on a new road to Pacific Works capsized. Mr. Henry Norton's arm was broken in two places. No one else was injured.

Meanwhile, the Solano County Board of Supervisors was busy addressing roadways as well. It approved locating a road from the house of Long in Vacaville to town and from Vallejo to Brockman's Sulphur Spring House.

In addition for a call for upgraded roads, the editors called for a schoolhouse suited to the city of Benicia; that it was a scandal that the citizens were indebted to private individuals for such a building.

The photographers McKnown and Bishop set up a studio in a room above Gillespie's Store in Vacaville. Only after being in Vacaville for a few days, the flame from a candle leaped to the canvas that lined the walls. The resulting fire nearly destroyed the entire stock of pictures, cases and apparatus. The fire only burned the one room, as the flames were quickly extinguished by the citizens of Vacaville. The loss was about \$400 for Bishop and McKnown; however, Mr. McKnown announced they would be set up for business again within a few days.

In Benicia, a fire broke out in the chimney of Mayor Neville's house on F Street. A few buckets of water extinguished it. However, as the engine was on the ground, the firemen emptied the box a few times just to show what the engine could do if necessary.

At this time, the Benicia Fire Co. obtained a musical triangle instrument, which had decorated Fort Gunny in San Francisco. This triangle was used in Benicia to alert the firemen.

Mare Island was being described as being at its zenith and glory. Several vessels were up for repair, and supplies and materials arriving daily to keep up with the workload.

It was perhaps due to this increased business in the area of Vallejo that Achsa B. Colby, wife of Thomas H. Colby, announced she was now doing business keeping a boarding and lodging house in that town.

C.M. Davis, the former proprietor of the American Hotel, which had been seized and closed, was selling off the livery stable connected with the hotel at a bargain price. In

conjunction with this sale was the stagecoach horses and harness for the stage line between the American Hotel and Sulphur Springs in Napa. It was stated that this would be a desirable business for someone if the route were continued. Also for sales were horses, harness and buggies.

A short time after this announcement, a fire broke out in a house at the rear of the American Hotel. The dwelling was consumed by the flames along with a shed belonging to the hotel. The firemen placed their engine at the rear of the old El Dorado Saloon and worked for two hours before they overtook the flames. The loss was estimated at \$660.

The fire was determined to be the work of an arsonist. That same night there were two other attempts to set houses on fire in other parts of the city, but all were discovered before they could do damage

Temperance was the subject of the day. William B. Taylor of San Francisco delivered a lecture at the Presbyterian Church in Benicia portraying the evils of intemperance in a striking manner. Mr. Jacob Carter of Philadelphia was scheduled to deliver two lectures on temperance at the Methodist Church in Vallejo. His reputation as a great temperance lecturer presided him.

Also giving a lecture, though not relating to temperance, was Judge McKinstry. He gave his lecture in Vallejo at the Library on Books & Reading.

The ladies of Benicia were planning a Calico Party to raise money for the churches in town. Likewise, the ladies of St. Vincent's Church of Vallejo were scheduled to hold a festival at the State House.

There was a major horse race at Vacaville between two celebrated horses, Blue Dick and John Crowder. The purse was \$1,500 for a distance of 350 yards. The track was in good condition and between 800 and 1,000 spectators turned out. There was much enthusiasm and considerable money changed hands. Two to one was offered on J.C., but no takers. John Crowder won the race by two feet.

In Benicia, there was a scrub race on the lower part of 1st Street. After two warmly contested heats, the nags quit even.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/571>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/571/>