

Wagons, buggies accent life in Suisun City

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, August 25, 1996

A new advertisement in the Solano County Herald in 1857 was for Charles P. Goff, a Vacaville attorney and counselor at law, and solicitor in Chancery. Another new ad announced that photographers McKown & Bishop were now producing melanotype-positive pictures on glass and iron. Tinted in colors, these portraits or miniatures produced an artistic effect. They also resisted corroding influences and, it was supposed, would last for ages.

Sands' Sarsaparilla, which could be purchased through Dr. A. Verhave of Benicia, was the latest cure-all, said to cure all the diseases arising from an impure state of the blood.

The election polls closed that September. After they closed, there was a drunken "fracas" resulting in one party receiving a serious wound about the head from a blunt billet of wood.

Awhile later, of notice to the citizens of Benicia, California's Gov.-elect John B. Weller passed through the city on his way to Napa. The official count of all the precincts in the county were in except those from the Tremont Township. As it was concluded, those votes would make no great difference in any case, the official count stood without Tremont in the mix.

Tradition has it that "Bottle Hill" in Benicia was so called because it was a spot where locals gathered to drink and where they carelessly dispersed their receptacles.

It was here that a house was occupied by a Mrs. Flynn. A piece of coal had dropped from her furnace that she used to heat her flat iron. The house burned completely, as did the house next door, which had just been occupied by its renter that very day. The fire brigade was unsuccessful in putting out the fire due to a lack of water. Total value of the loss of the two houses came to \$1,000.

The Suisun and Vallejo Stage Co. operated by Mr. A. Williamson began service. It left Suisun City for Vallejo every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7 a.m. by way of Barton's Store, Rockville, and Cordelia arriving in Vallejo in time to connect with the steamer Guadalupe headed for San Francisco. The return stage left Vallejo Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 1 p.m., arriving at Suisun City at 5 p.m.

An auction of a buggy, saddle and buggy horses, double and single harnesses, bridles and saddles, spurs, etc. was held in front of the Solano Hotel. Another public sale included household furniture and was held at the Centre Cottage of the "Old Barracks" on the premises of Dr. B.M. Bryrne.

Benicia's graveyard was on a hill behind town. It was remarked that it really did not have the appearance of a proper cemetery, not being properly laid out or fenced in. The people of Vallejo proposed to lay out a public, fenced-in cemetery on donated located between Vallejo and Benicia. Capt. Frisbee deeded the land for this purpose and the ladies of Vallejo held a fair to raise money for the effort.

Meanwhile, the city fathers of Benicia voted to sell more tule and water property to pay off the city's debt.

The Solano County Herald editors took an excursion to the upper regions of Solano County. They left Benicia for Suisun City on Mr. Culter's stage. They arrived at Green Valley where ". . . the land lay beautifully and the winds blew constantly." It was noted that a great number of cattle covered the plain. The road passed through a gap in the hills opening to Cordelia where there was a post office, hotel and some other buildings.

From there the stage made its way to Rockville, which consisted of a store, several other buildings and the church made of native stone. The editors wrote that the rugged hills of Benicia and the wild prairie of Green valley gave way to a domesticated scene of fenced farms and neatly built houses.

Teams crowded the road with produce all indicating "the hand of thrifty husbandry." They journeyed through this settled valley for two to three miles. This was the first the group had seen in California where fences were run regularly for some distance.

Upon leaving, the stage passed meadowlands where stock grazed, and soon, Suisun City was in sight. To the editors' astonishment, it was nothing more than a point of high land in the tules reached only by canals and bridges. They were struck by the amount of business being transacted.

"The whole length of the town don't appear to be more than that of one block of Benicia while its width about double that of First Street." Wagons, carts, buggies, cattle, horses and men were so closely packed together it was almost impossible for the stage to move along.

The principle business in Suisun City was the sale of grain. It was the shipping point for the very productive Vaca, Suisun and Green valleys. Wheat and barley were stacked on the landings seven or eight feet high and as much as 20 feet deep.

Schooners were constantly loading for San Francisco and Sacramento. The buildings in the city indicated its mercantile prosperity, including the large brick stores of McClory & Ballard, J.B. Lemon & Co. and Merrill & Maston.

A new brick warehouse had been recently built by A.P. Jackson about a quarter-mile past the main part of town. To better accommodate his customers, Jackson was preparing a couple of basins in which the small craft that navigated the slough could lie while being loaded from his warehouse.

Located in the center of town was a flour mill that was constantly operating. There were also blacksmith shops, tin shops, saddleries, carpenter shops and many other industries in operation. The editors boldly declared Suisun City the mercantile center of Solano County.

About four miles from town in the hills between the Suisun and Laguna valleys was a marble quarry. The stone was used for building or ornamental purposes, and what was not suitable for that was turned into lime.

The company employed some 10 or 15 men, mostly Chinese, in the quarry. The day the editors were there, a chunk of marble was removed measuring 800 cubic feet and weighing 7 tons. At first it was hauled with four yoke of oxen, but this proved insufficient and five more oxen were hitched to the wagon.

It was brought into the town and placed on a San Francisco schooner. From there it was to be shipped to New York. The value there was about \$800. It was used for table tops, sideboards and mantles giving them a variegated appearance - the white marble being variegated with gray lines. In evidence in town was a piece that had been cut into the shape of a column and polished. It was made to adorn a soda fountain in an apothecary's shop.

Mr. Owens, who had a livery stable in Suisun City, supplied a buggy to take the editors farther up county. On this stretch of road they encountered a sprinkling of immigrants newly arrived from crossing the plains.

On entering Laguna Valley, oval-shaped with a lake in the middle, they viewed hundreds of young horses and cattle belonging to Senor Pena. Sufficient trees had been planted to give the valley a romantic appearance, and the only residence to be seen was that of a single squatter.

Turning a "corner," the buggy made way for the tranquil Vaca Valley. From here, thriving farms lined the road all the way into the town of Vacaville where a cluster of houses stood. The town appeared to be well-settled, and the editors remarked that if

they were ready to retire in a place of quiet repose, they would select the Vaca Valley.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/575>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/575/>