

# The fight for Suscol land turns deadly

**By Kristin Delaplane**

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In 1863, news from Mare Island included the arrival of the Paul Pray, which had been damaged when it ran up on the rocks at Alcatraz. A no-tice also was issued that four U.S. Marines deserted when they arrived at Mare Island. A \$15 reward was offered for their arrest.

Workers at Mare Island had their pay cut from \$2.50 a day to \$2. The editors of the newspaper strongly objected, pointing out it was scandalous when considering that the government daily allowed itself to be swindled out of money that could maintain a dozen Navy yards.

The workers' pay was soon reinstated by Capt. Selfridge. Nevertheless, Selfridge did not receive high praise from some sources. Opinion was that his recent appointment had not been a wise one. According to sources, he lacked ship-building expertise and so was unable to properly organize work crews. He also had an arbitrary and ignorant personality, it was said.

The Vallejo Rifle Co. gave a military ball in honor of Washington's Birthday. With the Civil War on, young men were enlisting for the cause. Ben F. Hoxie of Suisun enlisted with the Massachusetts Battalion as did John McKinney, Amos Howard and John Taylor.

There was an effort to start publishing a "Secech" newspaper - short for Secessionist - in Silveyville. The pending publisher stated he already had 30,000 subscription orders and that he was setting up a printing shop in Jews' Stable. The paper's name was to be The Secesh Ventilator, Pacific Thunderer & Poetical Luminary.

Attorneys were flourishing in Solano County. R. H. Williams' office was in Suisun City on Main Street, three doors from the Pacific House. Thomas Swan and his new partner, I.C. Hays, had offices in the Old Court House in Fairfield. S.G. Hilborn had a practice in Vallejo.

Suisun City was becoming a prosperous little town. J.J. Peko's vegetable depot was still going strong in Suisun City. He promised to have fresh vegetables of every description and variety. Rather than growing these crops, they arrived daily from San Fran-cisco by steamer.

Also selling vegetables was A.F. Lapham. He also carried canned oysters, candies, raisins, prunes, dates and English cheeses.

Ferrell, Miller & Co. was a general store. In 1863, they announced they would only be doing business on a cash basis as "one bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The exception would be that country produce would be taken in exchange for goods.

Lady readers were urged to coax their husbands to purchase a shell frame made by P.J. Chrysler's wife. The frame was selling for \$20 at his establishment.

J. Frank and Co. offered the largest stock of "cheap goods": Fall and winter goods; clothing in the latest styles; poplins, merinos, challis, lawns, tarlatans, calicoes, silk alpacas and organdies; lace and silk mantillas; new style shawls; linen and poplin dusters; French and English merinos; ladies' and gents' handkerchiefs; valencian, chantilly and thread laces; English hosiery; gloves; ribbons; embroideries as collars, bands, edging, and insertions; housekeeping goods; groceries; new styles carpets and oil cloths; Brussels 30-ply and ingrain stair and hall carpets; mats and druggets; floor oil cloths; Cornices; table oil cloths and damask; and drills. J. Frank and M. Dinkelspiel were listed as the owners.

Ehrman & Bachman carried a line of dry and domestic goods and fashionable dress goods, such as new style clothing, boots and shoes, groceries, hardware, crockery, liquors, drugs and tobacco.

A.F. Knorp operated the furniture "wareroom" and undertakers establishment at the Old Stand. Furniture and bedding were made to order and repairs made. Having put in a steam engine, he was able to do plain and scroll work, sawing iron, ivory, brass and wood. After a 30-day billing period, two percent interest would be added.

The Suisun Bakery, owned by F.W. Hemsath, provided the citizenry with freshly baked breads, cakes, pies and confections. Crackers of every kind also were always on hand. With a large and improved oven, he was able to bake up cakes for large balls and wedding parties.

John B. Shields performed wagon-making and black-smithing at the Old Stand.

These businesses and professional ads were the paper's bread and butter, and the editors weren't above notifying the public when a business failed to advertise: "Bob Clarke's new lumber stand is open and he sells a board or shingle now and then. When he goes to advertising, he'll do better."

Not all business ventures called for a store front. Many peddlers traveled by foot, wagon-hawking their goods. One peddler had his horse and wagon seized for refusing to show the assessor his license. He quickly came to his senses and pulled out his certificate and had his animal and wagon returned.

The Suisun Valley Nursery, operated by D.C. Rumsey in Rockville, was four miles from Fairfield on the old telegraph road to Benicia and Napa City at the crossing of Suisun Creek. A large choice of plantings were offered: apple, pear, plum and cherry trees. Grape roots, native and for-eign, and all other fruit trees and shrubs for a family orchard were available.

A Mr. Smith operated the Suisun Dairy and Milk Ranch and was advising all parties that they settle up their accounts.

Someone in Solano County wanted sheep; to be exact, 1,-000 American ewes and merino bucks.

W.W. Fitch was offering a cottage for sale in Fairfield for \$750. The house was nearly new, measuring 14 feet by 34 feet. It was painted and papered throughout, the outbuildings were in good shape. There was a well and a large variety of fruit-bearing trees and shrubbery on the property, comprised of a half-acre, equal to three town lots. The terms were \$300 down, the remainder within one year.

There were 18 school districts in Solano County with 17 schools. One was made of brick, 14 were wooden. Nine of the schools were mixed, eight were primary. Three of the schools were open three months, four were open less than six months, and five were open six months. Two were open less than nine months and two were open nine months or more. Three of the schools had less than 25 pupils, six had between 25 and 50 students, six had between 50 and 100 and two had more than 100.

There were 3,466 children under 21 years old. Of those, 2,149 were between four and 18, 1,220 were four and under, and 97 were over 18. Of these numbers, 999 attended public school, and there were eight private schools with 350 students. Three children who were deaf. There were 16 male teachers and eight women. An average salary was \$63.92.

There was squatter action on Suscol Grant, which included Green Valley and Vallejo, and parts of Napa and Sonoma counties. The squatters view was that there was no "Suscol Grant," but rather a tract of government land called the "Suscol Rancho," on which they had a perfect right to homestead. In the first incident, a party of 25 men belonging to the "Squatters League on the Suscol Grant" left their headquarters at the American-Suscol Nurseries - probably in the American Canyon area. They arrived at a

field and quickly erected a build-ing in the name of one of the settlers. When the grant owners arrived on the scene, they were told they would be shot if they interfered. The grant holders cocked their pistols in response and charged, driving the squatters from the field. The building was soon kindling.

The second incident did not end so well. Some 17 squatters ate their meal at the Suscol House and then joined a settler named Cox in building a home to lay claim on land on the Suscol Grant; land that happened to be on his uncle Simpson Thompson's claim. Soon seven of the landowners arrived with 26 working hands.

The landowners claimed Cox drew a fire arm against them. The squatters swore Cox had no shooting iron and seeing that Cox was not going to fight the old man, they dispersed. The building was torn down.

A short time later, Cox was involved in trying to establish a claim with Joseph Elliot. They built the house and Cox stayed the night.

In the morning Thompson and others pulled up. One had a double barreled shotgun and Cox and Elliot were ordered to leave. Cox turned to do so, hands in his pockets, when the shotgun went off right at his head. This report was sent to the Solano Herald was signed "Squatter."

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