

## Solano's arsenals ready for 'Dixie-ites'

By Kristin Delaplane

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In the spring of 1863, the Teacher's Institute of Suisun City was to meet at the Fairfield Courthouse where an examination of teachers would take place.

Mr. W.L. Ragsdale, who had applied to teach in Green Valley, was rejected. His letter of complaint, printed in the newspaper, drew response from the school superintendent, who disputed Mr. Ragsdale's version.

The upshot was that Mr. Ragsdale was not certified, but he could have been an unpaid teacher until certified.

Another letter sent to the paper decried the state of the Fairfield school.

Viewed from the outside it was "disgraceful and inside there was not a seat fit for a child or an adult. The child of four years sits suspended between the heavens and the earth and the larger scholar (is) humped all up in a heap."

If there was a proper facility, "children would not, as now, be seen loafing about the streets and saloons, taking the initiatory lessons in whiskey guzzling, swearing and gambling."

Meanwhile, the Suisun High School started up at the Williamson's Brick Building in Fairfield with Mr. D.T. Truitt as the principal.

Tuition was between \$3 and \$6 per month.

In other school news, a bill was introduced to require the apportioning of money to the Rio Vista school district and an effort was being made to divide the Vacaville school district into two separate districts - Bunker Hill and Senter.

Stage company owner Cutler announced his summer schedule. The stage would leave Suisun at 2 p.m. and arrive at Benicia at 6 a.m. the following day.

The Contra Band (aka Contraband), a popular local singing troupe gave a performance at Wright & Henry's Hall. The hall, the site of many events, was thereafter to be called the Union Hall. The admission for this performance was 50 cents, or \$1.50 for those staying for the dance.

Wright & Henry were turning out a great many wagons. One of their recent jobs were three heavy ox wagons built for J.B. and J.M. Lemon.

A confidence man, J.B. Turner, had been staying at Elijah Silvey's and left without paying his board bill. When Turner was arrested, Silvey obtained a mortgage on Turner's Napa property to cover the bill.

Other news from Silveyville included items about the new "secesh" - secessionist - newspaper. A copy of the "Banner of Liberty" was delivered to the Herald. The editors called it a "treasonable compound of balderdash and a scurrilous abuse of the government." The Banner was published by Pierce, Walker and Miner. Pierce had assaulted Dr. Ogburn the previous fall, a crime for which he was currently out on bail. Walker had been fired from the Herald sometime back because he outraged the public with his treasonable demonstrations. Miner, it was concluded, must have been an equally "dilapidated individual."

Nevertheless, the Solano Press (the Herald's rival) lost three subscribers to the Thunderer, (aka The Banner of Liberty). Elijah Silvey was one of these.

A short time later, the Banner offices were broken into. Forms were tossed about and some type stolen.

In court news, Lawrence Cook was fine \$5 for assault and battery on Vallejo's D. Keefe.

August Hosier's accusation that Jack McDonough stole five \$20 pieces from him resulted in Jack's arrest.

Spring of 1863, Juan Felipe Pena, 73, died at his home in Laguna Valley. He left a widow, five sons and three daughters. He had enjoyed perfect health throughout his life until the end. His remains were taken to Benicia for a proper Catholic burial.

Suisun rancher A.P. Jackson, was raising pigs that were a cross between Berkshire and Grazier. He sold one pig weighing 700 pounds for \$75 to a San Francisco butcher. Jackson had been involved in various business enterprises.

In 1857, he built a brick warehouse at his Suisun wharf. That same year his was the highest assessment for property, about \$32,000. He had a large home, outhouse and stables, eight miles of fence, 2,000 (fruit) trees and 10,000 grape vines.

In 1858, the first courthouse in Fairfield was built by Jackson.

The Planter's House in Fairfield had been refurbished by proprietor F. DeCarllow. Seeing that, in those times of the Civil War, the name was not appropriate, his place became the Monitor Hotel.

The Solano Herald reported that the firm of Ah Mong & Co. of the Celestial Empire (aka China) had commenced the reclamation of tule land in the vicinity of Suisun.

Ah Mong had long been interested in the importance of fisheries in the area and was the owner and captain of the fishing schooner Koang-wan-tse-dam-ye.

While still continuing his life as a fisherman, Ah Mong now intended to raise chickens, ducks and pigs.

Tax records do not list Ah Mong, so it is not clear if his land purchase was finalized.

Mr. Pennel (it is supposed he was a livery owner) was in the process of taming a horse when the animal became unruly. The man beat the horse on the head and it dropped dead.

A reporter took an excursion to Benicia. Shortly a new road was being opened between Benicia and Suisun that was to greatly lessen the travel distance. He wrote his story one Sunday from Dr. Merwin's reception room. The fields of hay and grain on the road to Benicia were excellent. A bunch of grass measuring 8 feet in height was pulled from a ranch near town and was exhibited at Bromley's American Hotel. Sunday was a quiet day in Benicia, though some of the saloons were well patronized.

About 60 pupils from Miss Atkin's Academy provided the choir for the Episcopal Church.

There was little money in circulation in Benicia, though the Pacific Works paid out about \$8,000 in wages every month. Businesses in town included Scott and Danforth's General Store and Mr. Hatch's tinware business. J. Rueger's brewery was successful.

He had added on some new buildings and was capable of putting out 50 barrels of lager per week.

A large blacksmith and machine shop, a two-story building with an iron roof, was near completion at the Arsenal.

The main building measured 157 feet by 50 feet. A wing for blacksmithing was 83 feet by 50 feet. The rifling and turning departments were to occupy the second story.

The lower story was for the engines, bullet presses and heavy machinery. About 370 men were stationed at the Arsenal, including three companies and a number of recruits.

Upon being threatened with attack by a band of Democrats from Napa and Sonoma Counties, a guard was being kept by Capt. McAllister.

Additional infantrymen were being sent from San Francisco. Likewise, Mare Island was being threatened with attack by the "Dixie-ites."

For defense purposes, military batteries were in place and the workers were organized into militia groups.

The workers at Mare Island were protesting the fact that their wages were being paid in greenbacks.

They threatened to strike if their wages were not raised or they were paid in coin. When they did not show up for work, the commodore telegraphed Washington. Immediately, the 400 workers were assured of a pay increase.

An accident occurred in Denverton. The sons of J.A.C. McCune and John Ferrell charged a match box with powder to represent a cannon. When it exploded in young McCune's hand, the boy's clothing and hair caught on fire.

Though George Ferrell was singed by the flames, he had the presence of mind to go for water and put out the flames engulfing his friend, thus saving his life.

A fire in Benicia destroyed three government buildings at the Arsenal: the commissary, storehouse and barracks.

The fire was believed to be the work of an arsonist.

Several farmers in Pleasants Valley were trying their hand at producing sorghum. An estimated 75 acres was to be planted that spring. Those involved were pooling their money to build a steam engine costing \$1,000 to process the sorghum.

For these farmers, the Herald printed a long article on how to produce sorghum.

The farmers of Putah Creek and part of Vaca Valley were complaining about lack of rain and the resulting withering crops.

A traveling correspondent came to Vacaville, bringing rain with him.

An ad was placed by a rancher in Maine Prairie who had 20 head of Sax bucks, merino bucks, for sale as he was about to close down his present business.

Both the landowners and squatters of the Suscol Rancho were holding celebratory barbecues.

The landholders were celebrating the passage of a bill "granting the right of pre-emption to certain purchasers of the Suscol Ranch."

Some 2,500 to 3,000 people attended to dance and feast. The party was held at the Oak Grove, nine miles from Vallejo.

The squatters barbecue was a celebration of the rejection of the Suscol Grant. Some 800 to 1,000 people enjoyed a feast that filled a table 100 feet long. A tent with a floor for dancing was set up.

At the appointed hour, the ladies marched in procession to the dinner table, but large as it was it wasn't large enough to seat all the ladies, much less their gentlemen companions.

A meeting was held in Suisun to organize a Union League, a new political party. This was in opposition to the Democrats

Taxes in Solano County were \$2.95 on each \$100 assessed. Benicia citizens were levied an additional 50 cents.

Bathing was now more readily available to the public at the following locations: Dr. Rosenberg of Vallejo, Clanton at Benicia and the rooms that were to be opened at the Pacific House in Suisun.

People were preparing for Independence Day. Capt. H. Boynton procured a 75-foot liberty pole to fly the flag in the Suisun Valley.

The Washington Lodge I.O.G.T. of Silveyville, together with the lodges at Vacaville and Tremont would be celebrating the Forth of July with a public dinner and orations.

Summer dresses were coming into J. Frank's store.

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