

Civil War becomes center of Solano life

By Kristin Delaplane

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The Civil War was the source of much local news in 1863.

Pearon's traveling exhibition, "Mirror of the War," was up for three days in Suisun and allowed citizens to see and hear accounts of the war.

Local militia groups were formed in the event they were needed for the war effort. It was announced that the Vallejo Rifle Co. had a new captain, J.H.K. Barbour. The Suisun Calvary Co. enlisted the aid of the fire company in scheduling a ball for the July 4th festivities. The ball committee, appointed by the Suisun Light Dragoons, procured Ballard & Hilborn's warehouse for the July 3rd ball to benefit the Cavalry Co. Tickets were \$5.

William F. Halsey received a letter from his son that Suisun's Hiram Chrisler died of fever in a hospital in Washington. Undoubtedly, Hiram was the son of the Chrisler who had a local store selling kerosene oil, tobacco, confections and toys. Hiram, a casualty of the war, had joined the Massachusetts Co.

The first recorded military execution on the Pacific Coast occurred at the Benicia Barracks. Conrad Klinehoff, in accordance with a court martial, was sentenced him to death for robbing and attempting to kill a fellow soldier, and for desertion.

For the 8 a.m. execution, a firing squad lined up in the center of a vacant square. The coffin was carried from a wagon and placed about 30 feet from the sharp shooters. The prisoner walked into the square with a jaunty air and seated himself astride his coffin. When the time came, he assisted in tying a bandage over his eyes. Then he kneeled on his coffin and said, "Boys, aim at my heart. I am ready." The signal was given, the guns were fired and the prisoner's body jolted as five balls pierced his heart.

Several soldiers, who were under arrest for desertion, were taken out to witness the execution, which was a possible penalty for desertion under the stringent military laws during the Civil War. Two soldiers were soon transferred to Fort Alcatraz and condemned to hard labor.

Mr. Ring of the Barracks' commissary department shoved his boat into the mud one evening and, on wading back, was caught in the tide and drowned.

Another fatal accident occurred at Mare Island. A man named Howell was knocked from the staging on the steamship Saranac, fell through the wheel into the water, and

was killed instantly.

In working on the steamer Saranac, the commandant directed an attachment of joiners to perform work considered the job of the ship's carpenters department. When the joiners appeared, the 138 carpenters refused to work. As the repairs on the steamship would require the carpenters, it was unclear how this issue would be resolved.

Commodore Selfridge of Mare Island was producing butter on his ranch. Because he was using government labor, he was able to produce it at a low price and so it proved to be a good money-making enterprise for the commodore.

Politics were the talk of the day with the formation of a new party called the Union Party. It claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the union sentiment in the county. It was "in favor of a vigorous prosecution of the war to suppress the Rebellion. . . . In favor of maintaining the national Union intact."

Notable names on the local Union Committee were store owners John Ferrell of Suisun City and E.F. Gillespie of Vacaville and flour mill operator George Dingley of Green Valley. The committee's job was to elect delegates at the Union County Convention.

A ruckus grew when R.H. Waterman and E.P. Hilborn tied in a vote for delegate. They signed a proxy over to Deputy Sheriff R.M. Apgar. However, after much heated debate, the members of the convention ruled Apgar out. That aggravated many and led Apgar to quarrel with Vallejo's Cornelius Martin, ending with Martin striking Apgar. The meeting hall was in an uproar. Friends and foes alike came to stop Apgar from using his arms against Martin. A knife drawn against Martin was taken away by Apgar. After a while the sheriff and undersheriff subdued Apgar and convinced him to leave.

A couple of Solano County residents were named to be on the Union Party's state ticket: J.F. Houghton for surveyor general and William K. Weston of Fairfield for county judge. Suisun's coroner and furniture man, A.F. Knorp, was nominated for coroner and Vacaville's general store owner, E.F. Gillespie, was nominated for sheriff.

As a sidelight, the person who drew the knife was from the Democrat newspaper, the Solano Press. There was an unfriendly history between the publisher of the Press and the Herald. Both had run for office on opposing tickets in the same election. O.P. Powers, the Herald's publisher, made a successful bid as county senator. The editor of the Press lost in a run for judge. Following the incident at the convention, the two editors began a serious insult campaign. In a not-so-subtle dig at the Press's publisher, Powers published the number of votes in the judge's race where the opposing publisher had ended up an embarrassing last.

Later, the Press got hold of an incriminating letter written by Powers, which they published. Powers had written to Vacaville's Gillespie who was on the Union ticket for sheriff.

The letter read: "Since you were here on Friday last, propositions for supporting an Independent ticket have been made to us: Also, to make the Herald a Democrat paper; and, as (the) . . . entire patronage of the sheriff's office is one of the inducements held out in both cases and as that patronage of a essential advantage to the paper that obtains it, I desire to be informed if I conclude to support you for sheriff (that) you enter into an obligation to employ the Solano Herald to do a portion of the sheriff's printing (state what portion) in case you are elected to that office. An early and explicit answer to the foregoing inquiry will greatly oblige. O.B. Powers."

Powers responded in an editorial that there was nothing unusual about his proposal and that it was essentially an accepted practice of the day.

While out campaigning near Rio Vista, Lemon & Beveridge, candidates on the Copperhead ticket, came near to drowning when their boat was rammed and swamped. Copperheads were Northerners who sympathized with the South. D.F. Beveridge was the owner of a livery stable, Forbes and Beveridge's, and was city Marshall. John B. Lemon's large brick building in Suisun was home of his dry goods store, Lemon & Co. Upstairs rooms were rented to different attorneys.

Upon retiring, tax collector Rankin was given a silver plate and a gold-headed cane.

Business in the Solano County was ongoing.

Proposals were being solicited for the construction of a cistern for the county buildings at Union Square in Fairfield. A number of weeks went by with no proposals.

Charles H. Miner was in the market for poultry from farmers paying the highest price for market. Farmers could inquire at D.F. Beveridge's in Fairfield.

Butcher shop owners John A. Peyton of the Meat Market (a.k.a. New Meat Market) and J. Carroll Owen, who leased the Suisun Meat Market, announced they would be closing at 10 a.m. on Sundays. That summer John A. Peyton renamed his establishment the Washington Market.

J. Carroll Owen's first business had been a livery stable. In 1858, he established the Suisun Water Works with partner V. Wilson and they provided fresh water through pipes for the citizens. They proposed to furnish the county buildings with water for the next five years for \$300 in advance and a rate of \$400 a year.

A.F. Knorp, local furniture dealer and undertaker, attempted to sell off his business. He was offering his entire inventory of furniture at cost for cash. Also for sale was the entire business. Included was the machinery, tools, hearse, his dwelling and a lot with his stable and shop. He originally planned to hold the offer open two weeks, but with stock still on hand, he extended the sale for 30 more days.

Finally, when no takers appeared to buy the business, he determined to close the furniture store and devote himself to the manufacturing and repairing of furniture, spring beds and mattresses. He would also continue the undertaking business, manufacturing all manner of coffins, providing his services as an undertaker and having a hearse always in readiness.

William S. Wells appears to have been the local real estate agent. He was currently seeking pasture land on a tule ranch for 300 to 500 cattle.

In hopes that their crops would be mentioned with high praise, it was a common practice for farmers to send local produce to the newspapers. Josiah Allison of the Vaca Valley delivered a 25- to 30-pound box of figs and apricots. J.S. Pierce supplied some peaches. John Huckins of the Yankee Ranch (this may have been located in the Silveyville area) had the emblems of the nation painted on his wagon and presented a box of the "finest looking" peaches.

Building continued in Suisun City. Lewis Pierce put on an addition to his already extensive warehouse. The three-story Suisun Mills, a steam flouring mill, had been down for six weeks while improvements and repairs were being made. Up and running, it was now able to better accommodate the local farmers.

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