

## Writings reveal turn-of-the-century life

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, January 26, 1997

Pearl Fowler and Evelyn Lockie, both born around the turn of the century, wrote about their early days in Cordelia and the Suisun Valley. These writings give a window into their world and what their day-to-day life was like in Solano County.

Fowler lived in the Green Valley Township with the small town of Cordelia the center of her universe.

"I was raised in Green Valley surrounded by a green orchard of pears and apricots. It was three miles to Cordelia where I went to school (the Green Valley school) and church. My brother drove the horse and cart to school for three of us. We put a sack of hay under the seat and tied it on the horse for his lunch. We picked up the neighbor's children, three of them. One hung on behind and one sat on each shaft of the cart. Six children pack into a cart.

"The center in my young world was the old yellow depot with the post office opposite it. And the general store run by Peter Siebe & Son's. The store had groceries and rows of glass jars with candy in them. There was a pot-bellied stove, a coffee grinder, stacks of blue overall and bolts of calico. The warehouse joining it was filled with sacks of beans, rice, sugar, flour, potatoes, chocolate and a stack of daily newspapers. Everyone read the paper. The farmers charged their groceries until the crops came in and then they paid their bill.

"Tall milk cans were perched beside the depot and the boys lounged around on them until the train came in. Then the cans were put on a platform and wheeled into a freight car.

"There were three hotels and four saloons. The two families running the hotels were near the depot had beautiful daughters. They would doll up, put on their hats and come over to the post office at train time. They got their mail and saw their fiends. People of the valley drove down to get the paper and their mail.

"The railroad track ran through the center of Cordelia. There was a graveled road on each side of the tracks and the sidewalks were graveled and narrow. There was a row of houses along the gravel walks. Most of them had white picket fences and luscious gardens with grape arbors. There were fields in back of the houses for cows and chickens and the hidden pig pens.

"Dunkers meat market and a saloon were joined side by side with a room over the top for dances and meetings. I loved Studer's Corner. It too had a dance over it. The men played cards and used it for their social club. There was a small Methodist church and I attended the two-room grammar school.

"There was a winery on the other side of the hill from the school. The wagons drawn by horses brought lug boxes of grapes from Green Valley vineyards. They stopped the horses and let the kids climb on the back of the wagon and get a bunch of grapes. We got beautiful muscats, pinoes, large purple grapes, and one called 'sweet waters.'

"When we graduated from eighth grade there was a gala affair with a speaker and the presentation of diplomas. The following year we could go to high school. We went by train to Armijo High School in Fairfield. We walked from the depot in Suisun to school. We named the train the 'old plug.' Most of the county officers, such as the tax collector, the assessor, the auditor and the district attorney also rode the train."

Evelyn Lockie was born in 1902 in the Suisun Valley on the Woolner Ranch. When she married the undersheriff of the county, she resided in an apartment over the old jail. Evelyn could trace her Solano roots back to her grandmother who worked for Capt. Waterman founder of Fairfield. In her writings, Lockie talked about the simple pleasures of living on the ranch.

"Making vinegar candy was one of the fun highlights of childhood. We made ours in a big iron frying pan. All there was to it was to boil together two cups of sugar, one cup of vinegar and a big lump of butter to the hard stage. When it was just right, it was turned into buttered plates. We would hover over it until it was cool enough to handle.

"Then, with buttered hands, mama would begin to pull the candy. She was an expert with quick, firm-sweeping pulls. The candy was soon shiny white and ready to pull out into a narrow rope which we snipped into individual pieces.

"Once my brother managed to tip a plate of the boiling candy onto the palms of both hands seriously burning himself. I can remember mama getting the sticky candy off his hands. Then rapidly grating raw potatoes, mixing them with oil and applying the mixture to his palms. As soon as one batch warmed up on this hands, she'd replace it with another cold application. I can still see my brother hands upturned on the table and big tears slowly oozing down his cheeks. Mama's remedy worked for the pain soon left and the hands healed."

"We always had such happy times around the supper table at night. We were talkative and I can't remember that there was ever a disagreeable incident happening at our supper table. We ate in the kitchen which was big and comfortable. The table was a

drop-leaf, so when it wasn't in use for meals, there was plenty of room to use as a gathering place. In the corner by the stove was grandma's rocker where she always sat. She was never idle, always peeling vegetables, churning or mending. Sometimes she would knit heavy rag throw rugs.

"Papa sat at the head of the table and served the plates. Mama sat at the other end, so she could get up and down. Often we would have a one-dish meal starting with a pork roast out of the brine barrel on the outside porch. With that would go string beans and potatoes.

"We all loved chowder. I can remember eating bowl after bowl of clam chowder, corn chowder or whatever chowder was available. And, oh, when mustard greens began growing in the orchard, how we loved them cooked with potatoes and hog jowl.

"Quite often mama would pop a pan of graham bread or cornbread into the oven and it was ready by the time we sat down to eat - hot and liberally buttered. Mama often popped a plain cake into the oven just as we sat down and when dessert time came, the cake was ready. Nothing is better than hot cake, well buttered. However, much of the time I would be sent down to the cellar to fetch up a quart of canned fruit; pears, peaches or apricots. The cellar was amply stocked. Papa's remark to everyone was, 'Back up your little carts if you want more.'

"I loved that big old roomy barn. Papa used to say, 'When Charlie Barnes builds a barn, it stays built.' It was a huge old building, gray with age and studded with knot holes, and patches in the roof. On the west side was a workshop with a loft above. On the other side was the stable with the solid-floored straw-loft above.

"Big old sliding doors, so heavy I couldn't budge them, were on each end of the workshop. Every kind of tool could be found there, plus little cabinets full of nails, screws and gadgets needed in carpentry.

"I never tired of putting sticks, slats and other things in the vise that could be sawed. And I loved to hammer and nail, making boxes and other things that struck my fancy.

"We had a cider press and in the fall boxes and boxes of apples were stacked around it. During the winter we must have drunk gallons of freshly pressed cider.

"Above the workshop was an open loft, the planks being laid six inches apart. All kinds of things were kept up there; unused farm equipment and broken furniture. There was also a pigeon cote there for when my brothers had a brief fling at raising pigeons. The box had been taken over by a pair of barn owls. Each springtime they returned to hatch and raise a family. The female owl lay two eggs. Then a week later she would lay a

couple more, until there were eight or 10 eggs in the next. The owls hatched in rotation. Two, then two more and so on. The parents were in continual search of food for the little ones. Sometimes there would be as many as 50 or more carcasses of gophers and other small varmints in that box from a night's foraging. Papa said they were one of this greatest assets on the farm.

"The tiny owls were about the ugliest birds you could imagine covered with a white cottony down with enormous piercing eyes. They emitted a loud hissing sound whenever we lifted the lid to the cote to look at them. For more than 20 years the owls lived there, leaving in the fall and returning in the spring.

"A wide hinged door opened on the stable side where there were seven stalls. Each had a manger and individual grain box with slotted hay racks above. On the wall there were harness hooks, where the heavy collars, and leather trappings, halters, breech straps and lines all hung.

"The pony occupied the first stall. In all the years, it never acquired a name. It was a tough, wiry little beast and it carried the three of us children to Gormer School, three miles by road one mile across the fields. The pony's saddle, blanket and bridle hung on the wall of its stall and on the ledge were its curry comb and brush. We children had to take care of him. He was very gentle and quite used to children. Abrupt galloping, racing, gentle meandering. The wild paths of exploration along the creek, through the brush, as well as the endless hours of waiting for us to catch polliwogs, dig for treasure and build huge mud dams. I don't remember that we loved him passionately or were unduly devoted to him. We simply accepted him as our means of transportation.

"Bess and Queen were the heavy blacks and were expert at heavy loads. They were used for hay wagons and the low-slung fruit wagon that hauled in the boxes of just-picked fruit from the orchards to the cutting shed. The orchard was cultivated, soft dirt, so it was a heavy pull with a loaded wagon. Two reddish bays were the ones that were hitched to the spring wagon to make the trip to Vallejo. The bays also made up the team that went round and round papa's hay press when my father went through the valley bailing hay.

"The two mules were the workingest mules one could imagine. When pulling was needed those two would bear down. During the First World War papa sold them to the Army and always regretted it. Henry one of our neighbors met up with them in France where they hauled ammunition to the trenches. Henry recognized them instantly and greeted them like folks from home. Henry said they were killed by enemy fire. He cried when he told us and we all cried too."

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