

Newspaper editor gives scene of Vacaville

By Kristin Delaplane

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The first issue of the first newspaper out of Vacaville was dated March 15, 1883. The subscription price was \$2 a year and the publisher was James D. McClain: "The Reporter will deal with the present and future. . . . not the dead past."

The Times in St. Helena reported that "James D. McClain, formerly connected with the Times as a foreman of the mercantile department is about to start a new weekly paper in Vacaville. We do not know to what extent of field there is there to justify such an enterprise but . . . he is certain to make a success of the venture if it is possible."

As the editor of the newspaper, McClain was in an ideal position to act as the local real estate agent, a fact he wasted no time in establishing. For starters there was a house with 11 rooms and 2 acres of fruit land on the market.

Vacaville had become quite the bustling center by 1883. The Main Street bridge was stressed with all the traffic in town. The editor suggested fining those who drove too fast over the bridge \$5 or \$10. The businesses that drew people to town included three general stores, six saloons, a hotel and one boarding house. Other businesses included a livery stable, lumber yard, butcher shop, millinery store, tailor, watchmaker and jeweler, a tinner, saddler and an undertaker. Services were offered by two draymen, two notaries, a dentist and several physicians. There was also a large fruit cannery in town, Broghman's Cannery House, which canned 336,000 cans of fruit in 1863. In addition, a train was running through town with the Vaca Valley and Clear Lake railroad operating between Elmira and Madison in Yolo County.

Henry Eversole, who had the undertaking establishment with a branch in Winters advertised a full supply of metallic cases and coffins.

Miss Zilla Rogers, 21, and who had been in the millinery business with Mrs. Fulton died, of consumption at her family home two miles east of Vacaville. Zilla had been born and raised in the vicinity and was well liked. About 100 buggies, carriages and spring wagons accompanied her coffin to the cemetery. Her father J.R. Rogers had 200 acres in wheat, barley and orchard.

The meat market was run by Wooderson & Scarlette, who sold fresh beef, pork, mutton, smoked hams and side meats.

A.S. McKay, who had previously been in Suisun, opened a custom boot and shoe shop

where he labeled himself a “practical” boot and shoemaker.

Merchant tailor John F. Noble made gent’s garments to order “in an artistic manner.”

The Criterion Drug Store on Main Street was operated by J.M. Miller. Here the locals could purchase their drugs and medicines, fancy goods, toilet articles, cigars and smokers’ articles. Presumably they could also stop in for an annual check up as Dr. Barbour, a homeopathic physician and surgeon, had located at Miller’s.

The local watchmaker and jeweler was W.E. Lawrence who featured a full stock of watches, clocks and jewelry.

Sam Sing ran the local laundry business doing all washing and ironing.

Carl Roske was a dealer in stoves, pumps, pipes, copper, tin and sheet ironware. He did a variety of job work including plumbing and tinning.

J.G. Gordon had a carriage painting shop across the street from the Davis Hotel. His offices were on the second floor.

The painting firm of Murray & Nelson, housed in Cernon’s building, specialized as sign carriage and ornamental painters. Hugh Cernon was a blacksmith and wagon maker. Spring wagons were made to order and general repair was done.

J.S. and W.C. Donoho were competing blacksmiths and wagon makers. They built to order buggies, carriages and spring wagons and also did all kind of repair work.

Corn’s Livery Stable on Main supplied saddle horses as well as “splendid” single or double turn-outs. Drivers could be supplied upon request. Particular attention was paid to the care of transient horses.

D.K. Corn was a dealer in lumber and had in stock doors, windows, blinds and moldings.

The saddle shop was operated by T.E. Kinsmill who carried saddles and everything else related to harness apparatus.

The firm of Fleet, Stice & Co. had folded and a notice was issued declaring the formation of a new partnership, Platt, Stice & Co. The lineup of new partners for a general store included G.N. Platt, H.P. Stice, D.K. Corn and David Dutton. Advertising as a “New Firm with New Goods,” Platt, Stice & Co. was “The One Price Store.” They carried dry goods, notions, clothing, boots and shoes, ladies’ and gentlemen’s

underwear, gloves and hosiery, hardware, furniture, agricultural implements and groceries and provisions, such as fresh and dried fruits, butter, eggs, vegetables in season and canned goods. A five percent discount if payment was in cash.

Morgenstern & Milzner also had a large general merchandise store and had recently enlarged their premises. Their inventory included an assortment of freshly stocked dry goods, clothing, boots and shoes, groceries and hardware. The Odd Fellows were in the process of building a warehouse adjoining their storeroom for Morgenstern & Milzner. It was to measure 14-by-70 feet and be one story high. The editor suggested they make it a two-story as the day of the one-story business was over.

Blum's large general merchandise store was getting a new paint job. M. Blum had the most original ad for his business. "For goodness sake don't say I told you that M. Blum keeps the largest and finest stock of general merchandise in the county." Farming implements were a specialty. He also bought local produce. "The highest prices paid for grain, dried fruit and produce." His ad closed with "Wait till the clouds roll by and see my new spring goods to arrive in about two weeks."

Edward Fisher, Notary Public, conveyancer and fire insurance agent, had his office at M. Blum's.

The Acme Harrow was being sold through local agent F.J. Bassford. It was advertised as a harrow, clod crusher and leveler; it pulverized the soil, crushed the lumps and leveled the ground.

By now the Davis Hotel boasted a beautiful 2-acre park. A two-story bank building being constructed next to the hotel was benefiting the hotel with additional rooms, giving the hotel a total of 27 rooms upstairs. The bank's was to be one of the largest in the county and the building was to be fitted with a commodious bathroom, a fact the dusty traveler was sure to appreciate as here he could apparently actually bathe. Eugene Eisele was the local banker.

The B & P Saloon and Billiard Hall was located on Main Street. Proprietor R. Bennett had choice wines, liquors, beers and cigars on hand and advertised that good order was maintained.

Other entertainment was the "Melican Man's talking machine. (Best guess: A cylinder that was able to record voice vibrations.) The biggest fans were the Chinese, who flocked there almost daily.

The one business missing in town was a bakery. The editor advised those interested should not come with the expectation of getting rich, but to make an honorable and

decent living.

Several church congregations were going strong. There were the Presbyterian, Christian and Methodist-Episcopal church groups. The Catholic Church held services in the A.O.U.W. Hall, but it was announced that they were to soon build a church. The Seventh Day Advent Church met at the M.E. Church on Saturdays. Temperance lectures were also sometimes held at the M.E. Church.

In addition the Masonic Lodge, Odd Fellows and Templars, there was the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association and the Vacaville Sportsmen's Club, the latter being only 1-year-old. Arrangements were being made for a free-for-all shoot for the 23 members, which was to be conducted under the Forester Gun Club rules.

Rooms were wanted for Normal School boarders. The California Normal and Scientific School was an independent school that was set up to fulfill a young man or woman's desire to receive a good, practical education in the shortest time for the least money possible. In addition to the "practical," lessons in sketching from nature and painting in oils and watercolors were offered. These classes were taught by Suisun's Miss Mable Hoyt. Examples of her work were hanging in the Vacaville post office.

Mr. F. Hutton of Vallejo moved to Vacaville in 1883 to give his children the benefit of the school facility. Mr. Hutton would become well known in later years for building the Triangle Building.

The seniors were obliged to write public essays. Ella Merchant wrote one titled "Who Shall Succeed?" Belle Blum's was entitled "American Character."

The Vacaville public library had a total of 500 books. Fifty dollars a year was allowed for the purchase of books.

Mrs. M. Blum took her two daughters with her to spend a Saturday and Sunday in the city.

The people of Vacaville were informed that the St. Patrick's Benevolent Society of Suisun was giving a grand ball and all were invited.

A newsy item was that Miss Lizzie Long was going to build two dwelling houses in town. Also that Patrick and Ellen Reardon had seven children; triplets once and twins twice. All were living save one of the triplets.

J.M. Elliot purchased 8 acres below the depot to plant a variety of grape vines. He also had a large sheep enterprise with 1,400 head of sheep to shear that spring.

A gentleman from San Francisco had purchased a number of sheep from William Pleasants, who was herding them through town out to Elmira where they were to be shipped.

C. Martell of Pleasants Valley bought in an orange measuring 13 inches in circumference. He was reported to have 300 orange trees and was receiving \$60 per ton. Martell, the editor reported, had been in the business 10 years and made as much as \$3,200 in a season.

In other farm news, G.W. Thissell of Pleasants Valley had patented an invention for trapping and destroying the Codlin moth. This moth trap was constructed with a piece of tin and holes for the moth to enter.

O.E.H. Garlisch rented out his ranch for \$2,000 and was offered \$3,000 in rent for the next year.

Farming wasn't without its perils. A Chinese worker, Jap A. H. Clayo was killed in a blasting accident at E.P. Williams' ranch, one mile north of town. A group of Chinese ranch hands were cutting a tree for stove wood. They brought in powder to get at the root end of the tree. Jap lit the fuse, but a flying chunk crushed his skull as he was running from it.

Nathan Holt was the town's constable. Holt worked as a drayman, advertising that he would haul produce and goods to and from the depot. He was also always on hand for moving household goods. Orders could be left at Blum's. Holt appeared in town one day on his dray with an awning rigged over his head. He said he was "son struck" about a month ago when his son was born and had not recovered yet.

Mrs. N. Hodgins, mother and wife, had been causing some commotion about town. For several days she had "got up a steam" and had been making things uncomfortable for her husband and those she came in contact with. As she was normally a pleasant and amiable being, it was hoped she would come to her good senses.

Her husband ran the boarding house, Hodgins House, and thus it was inferred he made a fairly good living and so the editor concluded "as far as we know she has no cause for complaining."

It was learned that Mrs. Hodgins had called in a lawyer to prosecute Constable Hoyt for ill treatment in putting handcuffs on her. As there was no jail in Vacaville, he had handcuffed and guarded her instead. His action was endorsed by all acquainted with the circumstances and her conduct was deemed disgraceful.

John Wolfskill, always a newsworthy item as he was by now a legend in the area, was quoted as saying that he lived in isolation for the first 12 years (1842-1854). The first three years he herded stock bare-headed and barefooted.

Another oldtimer was D. Creighton who had been a resident for over 20 years. At age 71-years he was selling his place and moving to town. Twenty years before he had landed in San Francisco with \$1.50. He was forced to deposit half of this for bed and breakfast that first day. He immediately made his way to Vacaville where he remained. In that time he kept a diary of every event that transpired in the vicinity. Later it was reported that John Merchant leased Creighton's fruit orchard for a year.

W.G. Jepson, Willis Jepson's father, had been a resident for 14 years had 200 acres under cultivation. The year before he had suffered a severe loss when two children sneaking cigarettes caused a fire in his wheat stables.

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