School, church, musical activities abound

By Kristin Delaplane

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One hundred years ago, the schools in the Dixon area were running smoothly. Miss Mary Kirby was the teacher at the Silveyville school. Pitts School was where Miss Blanche Holly taught, and Miss Mercy Tucke headed up Currey School. A number of activities were taking place at the high school. Books from the Parmalee library, which had been in the Tribune office for years, were taken over to the high school library.

A gramophone concert was being held at the high school hall. This “improved” talking machine could be heard throughout the entire hall. The gramophone program included of music, solos and quartets. The proceeds went towards the purchase of a school organ.

Other activities at the school included a series of speakers sponsored by the Dixon Lecture Association.

Several church groups flourished, as well. Rev. Acton’s congregation presented him with a swinging chair for his porch. Mrs. DeSilva, who was a physician and missionary, gave a series of lectures at the Presbyterian church. Dr. DeSilva was Chinese and from China, but had been educated in the United States and was married to an Italian. A fund-raising pie social was given by the Presbyterian Church’s Ladies Aid Society. Admission was 15 cents. Rev. R. T. Gray’s Baptist Church was remodeled at the cost of about $500, which included new stained glass windows, carpet and a light oak coloring for seats and woodwork.

There was a constant flow of entertainment in town. The local Newby’s Cornet Band was highly thought of and accompanied most of the traveling shows and played for all the local balls. W.C. Beach was the leader of the band. When the Thomson Stock Co. came to town, the band furnished music for their comedies and melodramas. The I.S. Perkiness Co. arrived with a comedy act and a dancer who performed during the intermission. Later that spring Barrette’s Musical Farce Comedy and Specialty Co. appeared at the Vendome Hall.

W.S. Van Sant designed and made a musical instrument he dubbed the “panderina.” It was gong to be used in the performance given by Van Sant & Power’s Specialty Concert. This concert would feature 27 people comprising of Dixon’s local talent.
A group of young gentlemen and ladies issued an invitation for a Tuesday evening dance. Twenty-five couples attended with Newby’s Orchestra furnishing the music. The Native Sons and Daughters ball at the Opera House was attended by 50 couples.

Jesse Brandt and his wife, who had been residents since the town was founded in 1868, were taken to the county hospital where it was presumed they would end their days. The couple had been growing feeble for many months, but this move was finally determined when Jesse was recently paralyzed. Neighbors had been seeing to their food needs until Supervisor Buckingham gave his consent for them to enter the hospital.

The railroad tracks was the site of a few accidents. Mrs. Adam, sister of merchant Van Sant, was in a buggy with her brother-in-law J.M. Hood. As he was crossing the tracks, he realized a freight train was speeding toward their buggy. He pulled on the horse harness in an attempt to turn off the tracks but the sharp movement caused both passengers to be thrown out. Mrs. Adam was not expected to survive.

William Hyland was heading for home in his spring wagon, when he started across the tracks. Just then a train started backing up. The engineer brought the cars to a stop, but as Hyland became aware of the danger, he pulled up the reins to his team sharply causing the wagon to tip over. He was whisked off to the Arcade Hotel to be seen by a doctor. He remained there several days being treated for fractured ribs.

In an accident not related to the train tracks, little Forrester Millar was riding in a four-horse wagon heavily loaded with seed wheat. He fell off the wagon and the back wheel ran directly over him. The wagon was backed up to release him. The driver was sure he would find his back broken, but the boy jumped up and brushed himself off. It seems he must have fallen where there was an indention in the ground, so that the full weight of the wagon did not press on him.

Nightstands proved to be a danger as well. Mrs. H.E. McCune was accustomed to pouring herself a wine glass full of medicinal water before retiring. Unfortunately, she kept a bottle of spirits of ammonia next to her water. One night she poured from the wrong bottle. Luckily, she spontaneously reacted from the burn of the poison and spit instead of swallowing, else the episode would surely have proved fatal.

Newby, the town’s constable, and Joseph Staton, the night watchman, were plagued with a number of burglaries. In January, John Casey was robbed. The take was $1.25 in change. Casey, who lived upstairs heard a noise, but assumed it was a lodger. The lodger, also hearing the noise, assumed it was Mr. Casey. The thieves then went to S. Goodman’s house, but when they tried to break in the family was alerted. Their call for help awoke Mrs. L.P. Cooper who got a pistol and fired it in the air several times. The
thieves took off.

Four hoboes were arrested by Staton and sentenced to 40 days in jail. Before locking them up, they were given an hour to leave town - which they wisely did. A while later, Staton arrested three more hoboes who were sleeping in McCune's barn. Charged with vagrancy, they were sentenced to 20 days in jail.

Some unscrupulous peddlers were making calls on local farmers. Too often traveling salesmen offered goods which would later be shipped out by train. When the goods arrived, they often did not meet the quality to the samples that had been shown by the peddlers.

Six sheep, four ewes and two rams that had strayed from H. Robben's pasture were missing. And Annie Reddick was frantically seeking her black sow that weighed 200 pounds. George D. Parish found a white mare and placed a notice in the paper.

A special train carrying Shriners from San Francisco to Sacramento made the trip from Elmira to Dixon at the high speed of 79 mph. There was more excitement when the Overland from Sacramento came through with Fitzsimmons the boxing champion, who waved at the excited crowd.

Meanwhile, at the depot, telegraph agent Grady was entering the modern age and becoming quite proficient with the typewriter, which he found a great aid in sending telegraph messages, copying reports and a number of other writing tasks. Catching the fit spring cleaning that had spread throughout the town, Grady painted his office.

The Twilight Club, a fishing club, sponsored local outings for their members. They fished and then the fish were immediately cooked in a variety of styles. Meanwhile, not so happy fishermen were accused of violating the law by setting nets with half-inch meshes across Putah Creek and by using fish berries. They were warned arrest was possible.

Coursing was a popular local sport for which the Rising Sun Gun Club was organized each year. A firing range was set up at the Driving Park, the horse race track. Then the hunters would take their speedy dogs in the fields just outside of town to chase down rabbits.

By May hay cutting had begun. Many of the wheat farmers had purchased prison-made grain bags well in advance of the harvest, which was fortunate as there was a scarcity of bags that year and the price was skyrocketing. Already bags were at five cents apiece. The year before five boats from India arrived with grain bags, but only three vessels arrived in 1897. When the grain was bagged, Eppinger & Co. chartered the
Swannilda to take a good deal of the wheat to Liverpool, England.

A number of farmers were planting sugar beets and familiarizing themselves with its cultivation.

N. Neilson was about to embark on an expanded enterprise. He had been raising hay and barley for the local market for a number of years. The products were cheap at harvest time, but increased in value as winter approached. If one could keep the grain until the time, they would realize a good profit. Neilson had always lacked the storage facilities to do so. He was now building a 35 foot by 15 foot warehouse and was anticipating building another storehouse if profits indicated such a move.

But the talk of the town had to be the Holmstrom Case, which was centered around a 4-year-old girl, Effie. On Feb. 1, Effie arrived in town from San Francisco with Mrs. A.P. d'Artenay, the blacksmith’s wife. Mrs. d'Artenay claimed she had adopted the child, however, it was alleged by Mrs. Holmstrom, the child's foster mother, that Effie had actually been abducted. About a month later, on a Friday afternoon, a “tramp” appeared at the d'Artenay home. Mrs. d'Artenay went to prepare some food and the man snatched up the child. Thinking Effie was being kidnapped, Mrs. d'Artenay yelled for help while chasing him. When he reached the Hotel Vendome, he met up with a well-dressed man and woman. They turned out to be a detective and Mrs. Holmstrom. The supposed “tramp” was Holmstrom’s brother. The local authorities ascertained there was a court order which allowed them to take the child and they left on the train. Mrs. d'Artenay followed on the next train and stayed in San Francisco until the case came to court.

Before the child was to go to court, an officer found someone attempting to flee to Fresno with the child. Effie was dressed in boy’s clothing and she was denying her identity.

The court gave Mrs. d'Artenay custody and on April 23 she and Effie returned to Dixon. However, Mrs. Holmstrom and her attorney came by the same train and tried to find new evidence to ask for a new trial. Meanwhile, the case went to the Supreme Court.

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