

## **Solano County communities busy in 1884**

**By Kristin Delaplane**

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The popular saloon owned by A.B. Miller, at the corner of Bush and Depot streets in Vacaville, was the scene of a major shooting in December 1884.

Louis Sohn was killed - most felt deservedly so.

Sohn was greatly angered when Nap Broughton's widow married J. Walter A. Gilmore, because Sohn had been determined to run her ranch himself.

It was alleged that prior to the shooting incident, Sohn had gone to San Francisco to kill Gilmore.

At that time, he was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, but was not prosecuted on a promise that he would stay off the ranch.

As Sohn had shot a Chinese man the year before, when he still threatened the lives of members of the family, his threats were not taken lightly. The family members sought refuge in Elmira.

Then, one Sunday night, Sohn was at Miller's Saloon when Gilmore entered the barroom from an adjacent card room. It was a small one-story building, the barroom opening onto Depot Street.

Almost immediately, several shots were fired between Gilmore and Sohn. Others joined in and everybody in the saloon was dodging bullets. Altogether at least 12 shots were fired.

Sohn was wounded fatally. He made a dying will on the saloon floor when the attending physician, Dr. Stitt, told him he was dying.

He willed \$3,000 to his sister in Germany, and the note he held against A.B. Miller for \$500 was cut in half. The remainder was to be paid to Caroline Miller.

Locals did not appreciate strangers committing suicide in their town, so when I.E. McBroom went to leading merchant M. Blum's barn and found a man in the process of hanging himself, he reacted in anger.

First, he gave an alarm and Constable Nat Holt came and quickly cut the man down.

When the man recovered from the 10-foot drop, McBroom charged at him with a pitchfork and told him to get. The man, 5 feet 4 inches and wearing a gray coat and overalls, fled.

Solano County lost another pioneer when S.G. McMahon died. He had crossed the plains in 1841 and settled on Putah Creek. At that early date, there was but one other Anglo-Saxon there, John Wolfskill.

McMahon, "like most of the pioneers, possessed a vigorous body with an iron constitution, until the 1880s when his health began to fail." He was survived by his wife and grown children, all of whom lived in the area.

Fairfield news:

The founder of Cordelia and Fairfield, Capt. R.H. Waterman, was 76 years old and reportedly quite ill.

There was a complaint that the tramps in jail were fed the same meals as those staying at a first-class boarding house in town.

Suisun City news:

A.L. White was a funeral director in town and G.P. Plaisted was a real estate agent.

The Masons were talking about buying Col. P. Reeve's large hall and turning it into a theater and concert hall. Meanwhile, the colonel was building two cottage homes on the corner of Suisun and Morgan streets.

J.D. Pena fell down a flight of stairs at the Roberts Hotel and broke his arm. Likely, this took place during the celebration of Solano County's pioneers, Pena being a leader of that group. The Pioneers of Solano County held their second annual reunion in Suisun. Vacaville's Jeff Owen was the flag bearer for their grand parade. The day's festivities ended with a grand ball.

The editors remarked that perhaps the first act of the new Town Board would be to pass an ordinance concerning the houses of ill fame that existed in the town.

Suisun Valley news:

Davis D. Reeves' death was recorded. He died at age 69.

Reeves was an early settler in the Suisun Valley, arriving in 1852. He started up a

blacksmith shop at Barton's Store shortly after his arrival.

He had been a member of the Masonic Hall in Vacaville, was declared a man of good judgment and very frugal.

He had accumulated an estate valued at between \$80,000 and \$100,000. He was survived by a daughter and two grandsons.

Her married name was likely Haile, as a Mrs. V. Haile was named as inheriting Reeves' estate.

One of the questions that was coming to the fore was whether or not the hills were suitable for growing fruit. Mr. Kimball planted a peach orchard a number of years ago on the eastern slope of the Twin Sisters and the fruit was reportedly of a fine flavor, good size and was ripening even earlier than the fruit in Vacaville, which was renowned for its early ripening.

Another farmer who was trying his luck on the hills was Mr. Reams, who had a place at the confluence of the Gordon and Wooden creeks. He had planted two orchards in 1882, one on the valley land and one on the hillside.

Mrs. C. Chrisler sold some land in the valley to George and Beecher Bassford for \$7,500. They soon set in a large number of fruit trees.

G.A. Wagner was a proprietor of Mankas Corner and had a pigeon and glass ball-shooting match. H.A. Bassford was the clear winner of the pigeon match.

Nathan Barnes was killed in a runaway team accident. Though a poor man, he was insured for \$3,000, which was a godsend for his family.

Green Valley news:

E.D. Smith, former owner of the Green Valley Wine Cellar, had just finished the year's vintage, which he had produced from grapes grown in Batavia, Woodland, Davisville, Vacaville, Suisun Valley and Green Valley. He produced 140,000 gallons of dry wine, white and claret.

Three partners had just purchased the winery and distillery: A.J. Sweetzer, C.E. Shillber and Charles B. Elliott.

They announced that they planned to increase the capacity by the next year, making it one of the largest in the state.

Tolenas Springs news:

The directors of a new corporation, the Tolenas Mineral Water & Onyx Co., were talking of building a steam works at the springs.

This steam works would be set up to saw out the slabs of onyx at that location for shipment to New York, Boston and Cincinnati.

A traveling threshing machine capsized on the road, wrecking it completely.

There was going to be picnic at the springs, which was a popular spot for such events.

Vallejo news:

The wheat warehouses and shipping wharves of Starr and Co. at Wheatport near the Vallejo junction were near completion. They were being built under the supervision of A.B. Starr, who operated the flourishing flour mill, Starr Mills.

Meanwhile, more than 60 men were at work excavating and grading the building site of Selby's Lead Works, also a short distance below Vallejo junction.

J.B. Waltenbaugh was advertising his domestic rag carpet manufactory business. His retail business location for his rag carpets was 412 Georgia St.

Peter Peterson, who had been residing at the Astor House, cut his throat and was taken to the county hospital.

Several members of the Good Templers withdrew from the lodge due to the fact that the Temperance Party was mixing in national politics, which was against their credo.

Vallejo outlawed stud-horse poker within its limits.

Dixon news:

The Dixon Soda Works was in operation with F.J. Cane as the proprietor. The company made lemon soda, sarsaparilla, ginger ale and cider. In 1884, the foundation of the building gave way and Peter Timm and a number of workmen were busy repairing it.

The Pythian Hall, the Odd Fellows building, was dedicated with a ceremony.

The "miserable jug" used as a calaboose was in "wretched, filthy condition," noted the editor of the Tribune. "The vilest criminal in the land ought not to be thrust in such a

foul place.”

George Watson and Prof. Hand began a dancing school.

Batavia news:

Paul Sheppa, mayor, city councilman and chief of police, reported catching 34 fish, which was considered quite a haul. He also received a shipment of 31 butternut (aka white walnut) trees to plant. The trees were said to bear an excellent product.

The grape shipment from Batavia amounted to a fraction more than 389 tons.

Benicia news:

The New Era reported that Benicia seemed likely to sustain her reputation as an important fresh-water anchorage for both deep-water and river craft.

The ocean ships came for removal of barnacles, which the fresh water cut, leaving the bottoms clean. At one time in 1884, there were four barges, two steamers off the railroad wharf and at the shipyard men were tending to a full-rigged ship and barkentine.

Suggestions and local historical information for this column are welcome. Write biographer-historian Kristin Delaplane in care of The Reporter, 916 Cotting Lane, Vacaville 95688.

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