

Prosperity causes changes in Vacaville

By Kristin Delaplane

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In the summer of 1883, Sen. Buck, a prosperous fruit rancher and state politician, was having a large fruit wagon built by blacksmith and wagonmaker Hugh Cernon. Buck had just been elected to be one of the vice presidents of the State Horticultural Society.

Dr. U. Gregory, who was operating a home on the hill near town as a boarding house, was not a full-time resident. He worked in Phoenix, Arizona Territory, but apparently came to Vacaville beginning in the month of June for the summer months.

Thomas Kinsmill started out the fall with a move to his new residence. Kinsmill and Williams, his partner in the saddle and harness shop, were also in the process of seeing the completion of the construction of a 30-by-40 foot, two-story building at Main and Dobbins streets which cost them \$1,500. Local milliners Mrs. Wiley and Miss Long were moving from Robinson's Building into rooms at the new Kinsmill and Williams Building. In December, Kinsmill's life took a new turn. He dissolved his partnership with Williams due to failing health. Williams was to carry on with the saddle and harness business.

The ladies, Wiley and Long, were soon to have competition. Mrs. A.C. Middlesworth and Mrs. H.D. Cargrill were doing dressmaking. The ladies could be reached at Dr. Cargrill's on Davis Street. Also, Mrs. A. Williams of San Francisco opened a ladies dress shop on Main Street. One of her specialties was having underwear made to order. She was going to rent one of Mr. Miller's houses as her place of residence. M.R. Miller, one of the area's pioneers, had recently moved from his ranch to town and had set about building a series of rentals consisting of five or six rooms each.

Carl Roskie was having a 12-by-20 foot addition built onto his tin shop. Perhaps Roskie did the tin work for the Reporter building situated on the Triangle lot. The building, just completed by contractor J.M. Daggett, was painted and some ornamental tin work was prominently displayed on the front of the building.

Oscar Garlish was going to build a house similar in style to I.F. Davis,' but it was going to be larger. I.F. Davis was the former proprietor of the Davis Hotel and had built a luxury home near the hotel.

During this building boom era, there were so many contractors in Vacaville that it was suggested more privates were needed and fewer captains. A. B. Ellis was one of these contractors. He also did bricklaying and plastering. Orders for his work were taken at

the Davis House.

Building materials were a constant problem, but this was somewhat solved when M. Blum opened a large lumber yard near the depot having made arrangements with a source in Puget Sound. He also had on hand doors, windows, lime, cement and coal. F. Hutton was the manger.

The pastor for the Catholic Church, M. McNaboe, announced that contractors could view the plans for the church at Morgenstern & Milzner's. Two bids would be taken; one for furnishing the building materials and one for the actual construction.

For all its fruit raising, Vacaville lacked blackberries in abundance. Having a taste for some, Jeff Gordon took off for Napa with his two-horse wagon and returned home with 150 pounds of the fresh berries.

Mrs. L. Troutman purchased an incubator and was looking forward to hatching chickens. Perhaps she was related to G. Troutman who had purchased 105 acres in about 1877. He had built a cozy cottage and Mrs. Troutman had planted an extensive flower garden in their front yard. Later in the fall of 1883, Mrs. E.L. Troutman's name came up again when she purchased 350 acres north of Vacaville. She was a lady respected for her business acumen and it was presumed she would resell a portion of the land.

Another savvy lady appeared on the scene when Demetrio Pena sold his Lagoon Valley ranch, 200 acres, principally in grain, to Mrs. Elisa P. Buckingham for \$22,500. In a month or so she granted H.A. Bassford the contract to set out 60 of those acres in fruit trees and 40 in grape vines. This surprised a great number of people who had originally thought the lady was going to parcel out the land and resell it.

The Hodgins House, a boarding house in town, was put up for sale. The present owner W.C. Hodgins had plans to return to Canada. To draw buyers, the building had been freshly painted. The buyer would be purchasing two lots; one 50-by-120, the other 30-by-75. The main boarding house, with a bar connected, had 13 rooms and cleared over \$200 a month. There were three other buildings on the property which rented for \$38.

Shortly after the building was put on the market, the sheriff came to town to line up witnesses in the case against G. Lawson for the attempted murder of W.C. Hodgins. A few months before Lawson's "wife" had been fired from Hodgins' employ for having relations with some of his boarders. At that, Lawson arrived from San Francisco, went to the Hodgins' House bar and fired a shot at Hodgins. It was after this incident that Hodgins decided to sell. It is unclear why at this juncture he reportedly purchased a lot

from just beyond Hay Sing's wash house.

J.P. Watson signed a two-year lease for the Hodgins House. He had plans to build a large addition to the main structure. He renamed it the Windsor House, erected a cheerful sign over the premises and set his prices: Meals were 25 cents. Board and lodging, \$5 a week. Lodging without meals, 25 to 50 cents a night.

Of course, fruit raising was the preoccupation of the day as the town of Vacaville virtually revolved around the industry. An article was submitted by an "old settler" regarding the virtues of dry-fruit farming:

"All well informed men know that grapes grown on hill land produces the finest wine, contains more sugar than grapes raised on low land. It is well known that all fruit grown in a dry climate without irrigation is of a brighter color and of a far superior quality. . . . S. Wolfskill in 1861 had a large irrigating ditch near Winters. The result was the fruit was colorless, very sour and inferior to fruit grown without irrigation. Hence he discarded it and today grows as fine a fruit as is produced in the state. This incidence and many others could be cited, proves without a doubt that irrigation is detrimental to the production of fine fruit. There is not a ten year old boy or girl in the Western states that knows that overflows and stagnant water, whether produced by irrigating ditches or poured out on the earth from the winds of heaven produce malaria."

That Christmas W.E. Lawrence, the local watchmaker and jeweler was selling the Whaltham Watch Co.'s patent dust-proof watch. Lawrence advertised that the correct time arrived in his shop every day at noon by telegraph. This might indicate the Telegraph Co. was located in this shop.

Drugstores a part of Vacaville life

Sometime before 1883, J.M. Miller opened the Criterion Drug Store on Main Street. Here the locals could purchase their drugs and medicines, fancy goods, toilet articles, cigars and smokers' articles. Dr. Barbour, a homeopathic physician and surgeon, also occupied space in Miller's.

At some point, Miller renamed his establishment the Vacaville Pharmacy or Vacaville Drugstore. In 1895, he transferred ownership to J. Warren Stitt, a Vacaville physician and surgeon. Miller's reasons for giving up the drugstore were that his duties as postmaster required the greater portion of his attention and what time was left was needed on his ranch.

In 1888, M. Sobol, watchmaker and jeweler, was located in the old post office building. In 1889, Samuel Sumner Hewitt arrived from Los Angeles and took over Sobol's business. In 1897, a deed was recorded conveying to S.S. Hewitt by Mr. and Mrs. M.

Blum a lot facing Main Street next to Michael's butcher shop. By now the business was Hewitt & Son; the son was Trent Logee Hewitt.

It was in this year, 1897, that Dr. J.W. Stitt sold the Vacaville Pharmacy to R.L. Reid. Reid arrived from Berkeley (or Visalia) and was acknowledged as a thoroughly skilled druggist. Hewitt and Reid ran their separate businesses in a shared shop space in S.C. Walker's building. Walker had the front of this building extensively remodeled for his tenants.

Many businesses were under one roof. S.S. Hewitt and his son were not only skilled as watchmakers and jewelers, but they were also skilled as opticians. In 1899, R.L. Reid fitted up the room formerly used as the telephone office and the one adjoining as an ice cream parlor.

In 1900, Reid had the floor treated with a coat of oil. This was standard practice and prevented dust from rising from the floor. It was at this time that Sam Hewitt began contemplating in earnest building his own store on the property he had purchased from Blum back in 1897. His plans called for a one-story brick building. However, these plans were put on hold that year when his wife, Nellie Estella, passed away at their residence on West Main Street.

In 1901, S.S. Hewitt was suffering from foot tumor. Though an operation for its removal was deemed successful, Hewitt did not improve and, in fact, his situation worsened. He was confined to his room and was a very sick man. He died May 11, 1901. Trent Hewitt took over the business.

T.L. Hewitt decided to begin construction of the building his father had planned. Meanwhile, the telegraph office was located at the drugstore when R.L. Reid was appointed agent of the Postal Telegraph Co. Also, dentist T.J. Sullivan was available to patients at the drugstore on Tuesdays.

In 1902, reports were constant on the progress of Hewitt's building which was being built by local contractor George Sharpe. It was deemed one of the prettiest buildings in Vacaville with ". . . a neat and tasty front, resplendent with plate glass." That spring the building was occupied by T.L. Hewitt and R.L. Reid.

The original building at 438 Main Street has been completely restored by the current owners, the Mahmoud Karaouni family and is the site of the business Silks-N-Crafts.

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