Solano County life goes on at its own pace

By Kristin Delaplane

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In 1883, the big fall event was the huge Christian Church state conference at Oiler’s Grove, which lasted for many days and brought in churchmen and followers from many areas. The Davis House in Vacaville, always a hub of activity, hosted Professor Hand of the firm Rham and Hand in Woodland for about a week.

Hand had brought down a square grand piano and two organs to display as samples of what he had for sale.

In December, the Davis House hosted the supper for a dance held at the AOUW Hall. Twenty couples attended and the local Arion Orchestra supplied the music.

The orchestra was also prominent at the holiday at the college featuring vocal and instrumental music, declamations and comedies.

Women were being employed and made money as entrepreneurs.

The Davis House was advertising for a chambermaid. A “respectable middle-aged American woman” was seeking a situation as a housekeeper.

She was a competent cook, nurse and could do dairy work. Fred Hutton’s wife had expanded her bread baking business to included pies and cakes baked to order.

Mrs. P. Lyon reported that her two watch dogs had been shot. This shocking incident was followed by a number of her chickens being stolen. Meanwhile, hens were hatching at Mrs. A. A. Gray’s located two doors from Cernon’s blacksmith shop.

Mrs. A. Garrison requested that those owing her for medical services, pay up.

At a Town Council meeting, the chief of police, Hugh Cernon, was fully supported for firing Tom Good and Jeff Gordon from the police force. Good was fired on account of his name and “habits.” Gordon was out due to his laughter, which tended to happen just when an arrest was to be made.

At this time, D. K. Corn who was in the livery stable and lumber business, was the mayor.
At least one of the Town Council proceedings was held on prominent businessman M. Blum’s warehouse porch.

G. W. Brazelton, who was to have a long history in the fruit business, arrived on the scene in 1883, purchasing 20 acres in the Vaca Valley from Mrs. Decker.

He was busy building a house for his family.

A. J. Bassford had a supply of grape cuttings for sale and he also had a large hot house for raising cucumbers, tomatoes and flowers for sale. F.B. McKevitt was selling standard grape cuttings.

One mile from Vacaville on the Suisun road was Swasey’s nursery where one could purchase trees in dormant bud, roses, grape vines and flowering bulbs.

Businesses in town were thriving. John Ducker, a new arrival, opened a livery stable. W. G. Davis had fresh milk available every morning and evening at a cost of 6 1/2 cents a quart. If not paid for when picked up, the cost went up to 7 1/2 cents. George Weldon had a two-horse wagon draying service and charged between 25 and 50 cents a load. He met all trains and orders could be left at Blum’s store.

Real estate agents Brown and Walter bought and sold large and small ranches. Fruit ranches were their specialty. Real estate agent J. S. Fleet was located on Main Street. B.F. Newport had a closing out sale at his store, Newport’s Bazaar and then apparently went into the real estate business with O.E.H. Garlish. When the two dissolved this partnership a short time later, Garlish joined forces with Fleet.

Housing was available to newcomers. A three room place, furnished if desired, was for rent. It was located near the depot and suitable for a small family. Applications were being accepted by D.G. Scoggins’. Scoggins was 85 years old and had just recovered from falling off a ladder.

On the social scene, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Merchant celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary at F. Hutton’s home. Rev J.D. Beard reunited them in the bonds of holy matrimony and many friends arrived with silver gifts.

Included were six castor cut glass bottles, spoon holders, pickle canopy with fork, sugar bowl with tongs, two napkin rings, bouquet holder, vase, butter dish, butter knife, and card receiver. The couple had four children; one worked at M. Blum’s.

A group of young people called on Miss Sallie Long. One in the party played the piano and another the violin.
The music roused the group to try their talents at the waltz.

In particular, the townsfolk were fond of surprise parties. One was given for William Cantelow Sr. on his move to San Francisco. The Cantelow Ranch was located in Pleasants Valley, 532 acres in the hills.

The greater portion of his land was developed for grazing, but he also had an orchard planted.

His house in the hills boasted a spectacular view of the valley.

Mr. and Mrs. Creighton were surprised by a party at their residence.

In attendance were their 21 grandchildren. A large group of friends went to the W.B. Parker’s residence and gave him and his wife a surprise visit.

Mr. Parker was seated before the fire when they arrived. He shouted upstairs to his wife, who was tucking the children in bed, “Wife, come down here. A mob has taken possession of the house.”

The surprise visitors then set to laying out a large supper on the table.

The holiday season was in full swing and holiday type gifts were in abundance at the local stores.

There was a large Christmas party out at the Thurbers for the children complete with a tree and Santa Claus.

Shooting was a favorite sport.

B.F. Newport got five turkeys at the Thanksgiving turkey shoot in Elmira. The Vacaville Sportsman Club went for a hunt and came back with 25 ducks, 35 geese and a few snipe.

William Butcher killed a fox that was seeking refuge in an apricot tree.

A white deer was being spotted in hills west of town that December.

To practice, a shooting gallery was located on the porch adjacent to John Fergerson’s in town.

It was not appreciated by all.
People complained it was dangerous for those passing in the street as frequently less than adequate marksmen participated in the sport. And accidents occurred.

Abraham Beeler, who was 12 or 14, took a cartridge loaded with buckshot into his hand and in tinkering with the cap it explored tearing his hand.

While the hand was badly wounded, it was supposed complete amputation could be avoided.

A couple of men from Suisun came into the Depot Saloon.

They attempted to leave without paying, but the barkeeper grabbed one man’s hat and stood at the doorway preventing their departure. Constable Parker arrived on the scene and one of the men went out and negotiated a loan of 25 cents to settle the bill.

In news from the rest of the county, Thomas Hooper of Fairfield and old time resident of Solano County, leased the Tolenas Springs and was making extensive improvements in the building and in digging out the springs.

Hooper first arrived in 1857 at 17 years of age and finished up his education at St. Augstine College in Benicia.

After a working a year for as a deputy recorder, he relocated to Collinsville where he took up the merchandising trade. There he was appointed postmaster, a most prestigious position to hold.

In 1875, he was elected county auditor and relocated to Fairfield. After serving his term, he purchased the Fairfield Hotel. His wife was Anna Nichols, daughter of Capt. Moses Nichols of Benicia.

Thomas and Anna had three children.

From Suisun came news that Mrs. P.J. Chrisler had given up farming and was moving back to town. In 1863, Mr. P.J. Chrisler purchased a fruit and confectionery stand in Suisun City. Mrs. Chrisler made news then when her husbands advertised a shell frame she made which he priced at $20.

John Huckins and K.E. Kelley opened a law practice in the old Fairfield courthouse. Huckins son John Jr. was a doctor who was said to be successful with cancers.

Trains tracks were the site of accidents. When a culvert gave way, C.P. train derailed with 14 carloads of grain. The train wreckers spent a week or more cleaning up the
wreckage.

The damage was estimated at $20,000. From Vallejo came tragic news that two young men were fatally hit by the C.P. when attempting to cross the tracks in that place.

The year ended with the Vacaville Reporter’s editor, McClain, making a trip to visit an old mountain pioneer, J. N. Sweeney, who lived in the Vaca hills about six miles from town.

Escorted by Sweeney’s son Joseph, the trip took about two hours on a road that crisscrossed a stream, had sharp turns and steep ascents. When they arrived it was about 6 in the evening.

A fire was going and Mrs. Sweeney had a supper in readiness. Sweeny and McClain talked until one in the morning. The next morning they and a Mr. Barton went for a walk in that rugged country.

Cold streams of water cascaded down deep gorges that were so dense the light of day never penetrated. On reaching the peak of Mount Vaca, two miles away, the group viewed the Gordon Valley which seemed 1,000 feet below, the San Francisco, San Pablo, Suisun bays and the Sacramento River.

Then the men visited Edward Collins’ mineral springs. Collins had forged a good road there and had plans on making this a grand summer health resort. After a long walk, the men returned to.

Sweeney’s, had a dinner with new potatoes and fresh tomatoes and then McClain returned to town.

His message on returning was that a country road should be constructed from Gate’s to a landmark known as Fitch’s Point to help settle the area.