

Transportation major part of county

By Kristin Delaplane

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In 1868, Benicia's local industry was important to the economy. The Cement Works was turning out about 100 barrels a day and three kilns were kept going day and night. There were two tanneries in town. One of the tanneries employed as many as 14 men.

During 1868, with the advent of the railroad, things were bustling in Vallejo, and the Vallejo Central Homestead Association was having a big sale of town lots.

The New World steamer was traveling to and from San Francisco twice a day. The trip took an hour and 20 minutes

In south Vallejo, four or five stores had been built and about a half dozen more were being constructed. Mr. J.W. Haskin had a large hotel built at the wharf.

Among the many new businesses in town were the following: Pettis & Bros. on Georgia Street was an emporium of women's fashions. Men's fashions were featured at Farnham & Voorhees at Georgia and Santa Clara streets. The Capitol Hotel run by proprietor William Likins was at Virginia and Branciforte streets. D.W. Harrier was the butcher at the Union Market and he furnished his customers with stall-fed beef, mutton, pork, bacon and hams.

Customers in Suisun could have their meat orders delivered. F. Michaelis was the agent for San Francisco's Philadelphia Brewery. Saloonkeepers could also order bottles of ale, porter and cider. H.B. Bell was a dealer in grain and was an agent for Benicia Flouring Mills. J.E. Williston was in Bachellor's building operating a grocery store. Besides carrying groceries and provisions, wines and liquors and cigars and tobacco and country produce, 002 . 0000.00he provided sportsmen with gunpowder, shot, shot pouches, game bags, liquor flasks, etc.

Thieves entered E. McGettigan's residence. When the noise awoke him, the thieves fled before they had a chance to make off with any goods.

J. Fueg's jewelry store was burglarized, the thief making off with all the watches and jewelry in sight, valued at \$400.

The Department of Agriculture's October 1868 report noted the following: "The wheat crop in Solano County this year is immense. According to our assessors, we have

harvested 74,989 acres of wheat, averaging 30 bushels to the acre. Wheat is our staple and Solano now leads the other counties of the state in its production. The principle varieties raised are Australian and Club and some Chili and very little Sonora. This immense crop is transported in wagons by railroad to the various shipping ports of the county on the Sacramento River and Suisun Bay and is then carried in sloops and schooners to San Francisco and by rail to Vallejo and then loaded at the Vallejo wharves on ships bound for Liverpool."

In early 1869, E.D. Perkins, who operated a major grocery store in town, was presented with a gold watch with chain valued at \$275. He had just been voted W.M. of the Masonic Lodge for the fourth time running. The watch was described as full-jeweled American, 18-carat fine gold with an inscription on the back inside the case.

002 . 0000.00There was a major railroad excursion to Calistoga. One train started in Sacramento, picking up passengers in Suisun and Fairfield. The train consisted of three elegant passenger cars and one baggage car.

From Suisun the train traveled across the plain, through the tunnel and over the summit reaching a junction in an hour's time. There the passengers waited to join up with a train from Vallejo. When it arrived an hour later, it consisted of two engines pulling 11 cars filled to capacity with men, women and children. A number of the passengers originated in San Francisco. It was said the steamer carried 625 people and an equal number were left at the pier as there was not even standing room left on the steamer.

The two trains proceeded on their way to Calistoga, arriving at their destination at 2 p.m. Sam Brannan, who operated a local hotel and 30 or 40 dormitories (neat little cottages) for the comfort and convenience of those visiting the spa for their health. He served the crowd a lunch and after a satisfying meal, the travelers were on their way by 3:15 p.m. The Sacramento train took the lead on the return trip home, arriving back in Suisun at 7 p.m.

The price of passage on the Amelia between San Francisco and Suisun and Benicia was reduced to \$1. Meanwhile, the sloop Villa, loaded with material for the railroad, capsized in a squall in the Suisun Bay. There were no human casualties. Oliver Denny opened a picture gallery and dentist F.B. Ross Lewin opened a practice in an office with Dr. Cushing in Wright's new block opposite Robert's Hotel.

An individual calling himself J.L. Smith turned to Rev. S. Turner for a loan of \$10 to "enable him to travel to his sick wife in Sacramento." Turner did not have that much money and so Smith went to Rev. Anderson, who was more solvent. Smith promised to return the money the next day. He then turned around and obtained \$5 from Rev. Brown of Petaluma, who was visiting in the vicinity. Nothing was heard of

Smith after that, but word was he traveled to Stockton where he “borrowed” \$10 from another minister. Next he was said to have traveled to San Francisco where he approached to other Methodist ministers for money.

The meat market in Suisun was once again burglarized for the contents in the safe. This time the thieves were more successful than in a previous attempt in 1865. Back then two men made off with the butcher shop safe, dragging it across the rocky street.

Acitizen, upon hearing the commotion, gave the alarm and the robbers fled leaving the tools with which they presumably were going to crack the safe. This time the safe was found in front of the market with a large hole in the bottom cut by an axe. Mr. Griffith contracted to care for Solano County’s indigent sick at a charge of \$1,400 per year. Per the contract, he was to take his chances on the number of patients he might be responsible for. Nevertheless, he applied to the Board of Supervisors for relief in the sum of \$1,000.

In response to J.W. Howard building a new wagon shop, Mr. James and William Johnson built a large wagon shop at the cost of hundreds of dollars. Their business was called Johnson & Bros. John Drennen, a native of Kilkenny, Ireland, and about 33 years of age, had been in the employ of Johnson & Bros. as a blacksmith for the past 27 months when he died suddenly. He was said to be an expert in his business and to have “more of an attractive element in his nature than the repulsive.” It was remarked that he sang so well that a crowd would often collect about him to hear his fine tenor voice.

Nickerson was selling his brick building, which was located on the corner of Main and Solano streets and Nickerson & Clarke dissolved their partnership. In 1867, Byron Nickerson and Robert M. Clarke had formed this partnership to go into the lumber business, selling lumber, doors, windows, blinds, laths, lime, etc.

Another partnership dissolved, this one between David H. Pierce and M. Van Owen who jointly ran Dave & Van’s Taproom. Pierce stayed in the business and renamed the saloon the Grecian Bend.

James Nelson was arrested when bootmaker Maurice Meehan put out a complaint against him. According to Meehan, Nelson had entered his home carrying a concealed weapon. (As Nelson was traveling, the weapons charge would not hold.) Mr. and Mrs. Meehan maintained that Nelson came to their house, locked the door and was generally abusive. The judge detained Nelson, until he could leave by train. However, when Nelson was released, he failed to board the train and instead he sought out Meehan and a fight ensued. Locals surmised that the quarrel was the result of an old business transaction.

Velocipeding - any of several early bicycles having pedals attached to the front wheel or an early bicycle propelled by pushing the feet along the ground while straddling the vehicle - was all the rage in Suisun. There was only one in town, but as soon as the rains ended, it was expected that two-wheeled and three-wheeled velocipedes would be seen everywhere.

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, or e-mail her at ohistory@masterpiecememoirs.com. Also read the column by clicking on The Reporter web site at 63.192.157.117 or the California Historical Society web site at www.calhist.org.

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