

## Suisun City grows roots around it's businesses

By Kristin Delaplane

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Suisun City had its roots in the 1850s. Credit for the discovery of the area dates back to 1850, when Curtis Wilson and Dr. John Baker happened to sail up the winding Suisun Slough and they recorded their finding. The environment was mainly tule land populated with mud hens and a herd of elk.

A year later, in 1851, William Moody and Morgan Hart acquired the rights to build a wharf at Suisun, but it appears they never proceeded with their plans. That same year, Capt. Josiah Wing navigated his schooner Ann Sophia up the slough. From that site or a nearby site, he made at least two trips hauling hay to Sacramento.

In 1852, his wife Mercy and their children arrived in San Francisco and after their arrival Wing purchased the wharf rights from Moody and Hart plus 600 acres of land, all for \$500. He moved a home he had built in San Francisco to the island. The family didn't move from that house until 1862 when Wing built a rather grand house in the town.

The first business venture in Suisun City began when Wing built a warehouse and wharf primarily for the purpose of storing and shipping grain. Additionally, the warehouse was set up with primitive overnight accommodations for the farmers, who may have traveled all day hauling their harvest. One of the earliest shipments in 1852 was a boatload of potatoes. For the next 14 years, Wing's schooner, Ann Sophia, was constantly on the move carrying grain to Sacramento and San Francisco.

Following the construction of the wharf and warehouse, a smattering of commercial businesses started up. John W. Owens became a major figure in town. In partnership with A.W. Hall, he opened a store. In 1854, John Owens and Wing laid out the plans for the town, a Spanish-style town plaza surrounded by businesses with the embarcadero at the front and center. At some point Owens began to operate a livery stable and in 1856, a fire burned the stable. In 1857, voting took place at John W. Owens' house. Owens rebuilt his business and in 1858, it was noted that "J.W. Owens' Livery & Feed & Sale Stable was at the Old Stand on Main Street at a corner of the Plaza." They had horses and carriages for hire and horses were boarded and groomed by the day, week or month. In 1857, J.W. Owens supplied a buggy from its livery stable to take the editors of the newspaper, then published in Benicia, farther up county for a sightseeing excursion.

Asa Crocker, a pilot on the Ann Sophia, opened the first eatery in 1854. By 1855

Suisun City had three stores and a steam flour mill in the center of town. By 1858, the Suisun City Mills, operated by partners Reed and Edwards, was in a three-story brick building with a tin roof. It was situated on the east side of the plaza, just a little north of the old wooden mill.

In 1856, Hiram Rush built a three-story brick mercantile building to be occupied as a store by McCrory and Ballard. The upper portion was to be the Masonic Hall. Mr. Reeves put up another brick building and the Lemon brothers were constructing a building to be occupied as a store by them. The Brookshire Hotel opened for business and the City Hotel also opened its doors. Morton & De Castro were the proprietors of the latter, a "commodious and popular hotel."

In 1857, John B. Lemon ran a dry goods store and was named the town's first postmaster.

In those early days, J. Carroll Owen was a prominent citizen. In 1857, he wed Bella Rush. J.C. Owen was in the livery business for a time. In 1857, J.C. Owen and V. Wilson advertised their livery stable business.

Thomas M. Swan, attorney and counselor-at-law in Suisun City, made a new ad for the paper featuring his business card to solicit business.

In 1857, Bishop and McKnown, producers of those Ambrotype photographs, were last mentioned as operating out of Suisun City, but shortly they returned to Benicia. Another Benicia business tried the waters in Suisun: Benicia's Samuel J. Agnew, who had a stove store, sheet iron and tinware manufactory in Benicia, operated the Suisun Tin Shop.

A brick warehouse was built by A.P. Jackson about a quarter of mile past the main part of town - brick being a better construction for preventing rats from getting into the grain.

Frame buildings were going up and another large brick building had been built, this one for Merrill & Marston. In 1858, the partnership in a mercantile business dissolved. J.H. Marston planned to carry on alone.

Other businesses included blacksmith shops, saddle shops, carpenter shops and many other industries. Suisun City was becoming a mercantile center.

Dr. D.E. Stockmon operated a drugstore and news depot.

T.M. Swan, attorney and counselor-at-law, soon took in a partner, McMurty, and they were in an office on Main Street over Lemon's Store.

John Cornwell & Co. were listed as wholesale dealers in wines, liquors and cigars. He also carried soda from the Suisun Soda Factory.

In 1858, the publisher of the Solano County Herald relocated to Suisun City so as to be closer to the courthouse in Fairfield. The printing equipment was put in offices in a new building on the south side of the plaza. This building had been designated as the future courthouse if the vote for county seat had favored Suisun City.

The Confectioner and Fruit Store at the corner of Main and California streets was operated by William T. Kennedy. J. Frank and Co. were the successors to McCory & Ballard, operating a dry goods store. Cutler & Anderson's Livery and Feed Stable was at Suisun and Solano streets. They added a spacious carriage house to their growing operation. Cutler operated the stage and the company had horses and buggies for hire.

Godfrey and Mead located a photography establishment in rooms on the south corner of Main and California streets.

The Western Hotel, Dan T. Day, proprietor, was on Main Street near Solano Street.

Lawyers Witman & Wells were doing business from the Lemon Building. J.G. Lawton Jr., attorney and justice of the peace, had an office at the corner of Suisun and Solano streets. Chrysler & Bartlett ran the Suisun City Billiard Saloon.

In 1858, The Suisun Water Works was set up and "prepared to furnish wholesome, fresh water to the inhabitants of the Suisun City and Fairfield." Water could be introduced in any part of a building by pipe. J.C. Owen and Robert B. Cannon, who was in the livery stable business, were partners in the Water Works. V. Wilson, who had been Owen's partner in the livery business, was also a partner, at least initially.

Knorp and Doughty's furniture and bedding store was on the plaza opposite the American Hotel. Pressey and Roberts ran the American Hotel. The pair put it up for sale in 1858.

J.B. Lemon and Co. were located in the post office building at the "old stand" and were dealers in dry goods, groceries, boots and shoes and hardware. M.C. Tibbets was a house and sign painter, and was also in the paper hanging, graining and glazing business. He was located in the Excelsior Block which was opposite the plaza. Mr. J.J. Peko was the local dealer in fresh produce. He raised most of the vegetables on his own ranch. Hoping for a free plug, he presented a 10-pound sweet potato to the newspaper. He not only got his plug, but made the paper again when he brought in another potato weighing 13 1/2 pounds.

S.A. McMeans was a physician and surgeon for Suisun City and Fairfield.

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