

Death, intrigue, scandal part of the times

By Kristin Delaplane

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In the first part of 1871, three deaths were reported out of Vacaville. From the start of the year, things took a bad turn for Joseph Hewitt of Pleasants Valley. His barn, along 20 tons of hay and four valuable horses, were all destroyed in a fire.

Many believed the fire had been deliberately set because there were hard feelings after Hewitt was acquitted of the murder of Parker Adams.

By spring, Joseph Hewitt's obituary appeared in the paper. He had been murdered at the age of 38. The Valencia brothers, Guadalupe and Ponsha (later spelled as "Pancho"), were captured and arrested for Hewitt's murder.

Fifteen witnesses testified. It was confirmed that the brothers were in Pleasants Valley the day before the murder, but neither the Hewitts nor the Hunts could positively identify the men as the murders.

The day after the murder, the brothers were seen in Silveyville and from there they were traced to the ferry at Collinsville.

They told the court they could not speak English, but witnesses testified that Ponsha Valencia spoke the language freely. Ponsha Valencia was the executed later that year, the second man executed in Solano County.

Fortunately for his wife, Mary Columbia Hewitt, Hewitt had two life insurance policies that totaled \$6,000. After the death, she moved to Suisun City where she built a home on Sacramento Street.

James Pedie, who owned land near Vacaville and was known for eccentricities and miserly ways, died in San Francisco at age 56.

S.G. Myers and family of Silveyville and Mrs. Nicholas and children were returning from a picnic in Longmire's Grove in the hills north of Vacaville. In passing through Gibson Canyon, Myers lost control of the mules when the reins became entangled. The mules took off in a panic on a downgrade.

Nearing a narrow place in the road, with a perpendicular precipice on one side, Myers anticipated the result and told all to jump. The women and children were too locked in

fear to take action, when Myers himself jumped and the mules, wagon and women and children all went over the embankment.

Mrs. Myers died in the fall. The others were injured, but survived. The mules were the least injured.

In other Vacaville area news of the time, the California College had commenced its first session as a Methodist college. There were 14 students in the college and a number of preparatory students.

Word had traveled that D.C. Kingsley's wife and four children were in destitute circumstances after he drove them from their home with threats of violence. For years he was known to be a drinker.

Talks were under way about extending the Vaca Valley Railroad into Pleasants Valley and on up to Putah Creek. This route would not only serve the valley, but also the farmers in Berryessa. Talks were also under way about building a narrow gage railroad to connect Vacaville with Suisun.

Dr. Dobbins was digging for coal near his farm in Vacaville.

The Vacaville Thespian Club gave a performance at the Union Hall in Suisun. Suisun Valley

Five Durham cows from England arrived on the steamer Amelia and were picked up by Lewis Pierce.

Honweil C. Barbour, 63, who had arrived in Solano County in 1846, died at his brother Nathan's residence. When he first came in Solano County, he had settled in Benicia. In these more recent years he had been entirely helpless due to chronic rheumatism.

J.W. Price, considered a champion shot in the area, happened upon an unfortunate Virginia owl on the Suisun Creek. As Price noted after killing it, it was the only one of its kind he had ever seen in California.

Ben H. Brown, 81, claimed he had killed 50 wildcats, foxes and coons in the past year. Often he would rise at 2 in the morning, mount his horse and call his hounds and hunt all day.

Rockville

Several accidents occurred on the road from Green Valley in the Rockville Canyon. It

was considered one of the worst roads in the county.

Suisun grocer E.D. Perkins attended a picnic in Green Valley and on returning home, the kingbolt in his carriage became loose on this rough road and he was thrown from the buggy receiving painful injuries.

Fairfield

The quarterly report for the county hospital in Fairfield came out stating that the number of patients admitted during the quarter was 22 and 11 had been discharged. The hospital was under the charge of H. Ferguson and the doctors Campbell and Pressley were the physicians.

J.B. Lemon had a comfortable house in Fairfield up for sale. It had most recently been occupied by Dr. Howe. In 1866, Dr. P. Howe, electric physician and surgeon, was performing dental surgery upstairs in Capt. Nickerson's building in Suisun City.

After two years James Campbell was finally acquitted on murder charges.

He had been charged along with Annie Robinson with poisoning her husband, Jabez.

Campbell had come to the Robinson home to help in caring for Jabez who had a mild case of smallpox. Jabez was reportedly recovering when he suddenly died. Strychnine was found in his system and both Campbell and Mrs. Robinson were arrested.

Another woman was on trial for murder. Mrs. Fair was charged with killing A.P. Crittenden. It was assumed by all that she did the deed, but being a woman, she would be released.

For several months there was a rash of burglaries and petty thefts in Fairfield.

When Holscher (or Holcher) & Kagee's saloon was entered in the night and various articles stolen, Holscher was given information that some "Negroes," who occupied a room over Williamson's store in Fairfield, were the thieves.

Based on this, a warrant was obtained and a search of the room made where the officers found quantities of stolen goods: canned oysters, whiskey bottles, lemon syrup, tumblers and window blinds. Robert Johnson, Edward Barrill and "the Arab who were in the room at the time were arrested." (The "Arab" was later discharged as it was proven he was only a visitor.)

Holscher identified many of the stolen articles as his. Griffith, whose store also had

been broken into, also identified some articles and John A. Payton claimed the blinds as the property of Lewis Pierce.

Robert Johnson was cleared in the burglary charges, but he was soon rearrested for attempting to pass counterfeit money at the railroad station.

There was an interesting history regarding George Kagee, who was partners in the Fairfield saloon with Holscher since 1866. In 1864, Kagee, who was maintaining a saloon in Fairfield, was seriously injured in a steamer accident. He had a wife and his two sons, and at the time it was deemed that he would likely not recover. Obviously, he did.

In 1866, a story came out about Kagee in the Sacramento paper. (They reported his name as John Kagee, but as they linked him to a saloon in Fairfield, it seems likely it was actually George Kagee).

A married man, Kagee had run away with a 16-year-old girl on a horse belonging to the girl's mother. When they reached Sacramento, they sold the horse at the horse market and boarded a steamer.

Eventually, they made their way to San Jose where Officer Rice, a Sacramento lawman, caught them. Kagee was arrested on a charge of stealing a horse.

In 1869, Kagee's name again was in print. It was noted his wife was living in Sacramento. Again, Kagee ran away with a 16-year-old, this time a Rio Vista girl named Miss Elliott. They were tracked as far as Antioch and the girl was returned to her parents.

Back in 1871 a headline screamed "Ku-Kluxism in Fairfield."

First up was the recognition that the assistant teacher of the Fairfield school, with the consent of the trustees, would teach a half dozen "colored" children only after the dismissal of her regular students.

But the clearest manifestation of racial problems in the area occurred with an incident regarding the Sabbath school. For several years, a little "colored" girl had been permitted to attend the school and no one objected.

But when the pastor's wife arranged a performance of recitations by the students in which this little girl took part, several leading citizens took their children out of the school. The girl was kept in the school and the lack of Christian behavior by the little girl's "self-styled superiors" was strongly editorialized against.

The grounds around the courthouse in Fairfield were being improved. At least 425 evergreens and ornamental trees, consisting of pine, cypress, acacia, gum, locust and poplar, were planted.

Capt. Waterman was fitting up a farm 1 1/4 miles north of Suisun expecting to retire to Solano County. (It is interesting to note that house was eventually built and is for sale today.)

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