

Commerce ebbs, expands in Solano past

By Kristin Delaplane

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In 1873, Suisun City was enjoying its place as the hub of activity in the county. In that town, it was tradition to welcome in the New Year and ring out the old by ringing both the church and fire bells.

The occasion was celebrated in fashion as some of the local young men gave a New Year's Ball at the Union Hall. The hall was filled with people. The gay music was supplied by Gorham's Band, a popular group from Vallejo.

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Several businesses moved to establish long-term status.

The Weekly Solano Republican published by O.B. Powers was located in Turner's brick building on the west side of the plaza.

Perkins & Co. still had a grocery, cash store carrying groceries, provisions, queensware, etc. They bought poultry, butter, eggs and fresh produce from the farmers, and delivered to customers in Fairfield and Suisun free of charge.

A.F. Knorp was still the proprietor at the Pacific Hotel where C.A. Gibson had his shaving saloon. Knorp was going to give a ball on Feb. 21 for Washington's Birthday.

T.H. White's paint shop and hardware goods in Jacobs building was thriving.

D.M. Stockmon still had his drug store.

Since 1866, S.G. Palmer was the news dealer in Suisun. He also carried stationery, pipes, cigars and tobacco.

Ridgely (a k a Ridgeley) still proudly operated his hack service. He conveyed passengers to and from the railway station and the steamer docks in Suisun. He advertised reduced fares and increased speed.

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Saloons were aplenty.

Asa Crocker, who had retired, re-opened his Office Saloon on Solano Street. The

Oriole tavern operated by S.S. Suits & Co. carried Kentucky bourbon, Blackburn's OK, Marshall's AA and Groff's rye.

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S.D. Campbell was still acting as a local physician and surgeon. He was called to the scene when long-time resident P.J. Chrisler needed help. His son had a lump thrown at him by another boy. In the end, the boy's eye had to be removed.

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A sprinkling of new businesses were on the scene.

George Eiken had the New Butcher Shop in Suisun.

Frank Michel was making boots and shoes on Main Street. He employed a workman there and also carried a stock of goods.

There was a Dolly Varden shop next to the post office. Johnny Norman carried candles, nuts, fruits cigars and tobacco (Dolly Varden was a character known for her colorful costume in the novel "Barnaby Rudge" by Charles Dickens, and as a fish.)

E.P. Hilborn & Co. had moved into a new line of business operating the Suisun City Mills where they ground "family flour," graham flour, corn meal, middlings, barley and feed.

In 1871, the flour mill was being operated by Marston and Porter. That year Marston left the partnership, leaving the business to George Porter, who apparently sold out to Hilborn.

Hilborn was married to Josiah Wing's daughter, Mary. He had long been known as one of the area's prominent shippers, operating a large warehouse and from Hilborn's Wharf.

Dr. E.A. Eaton had established a practice as a dentist in Suisun on Main Street over Hammond's store. John P. Hammond was also the local Notary Public.

Mr. John P. Gross, a deaf mute, sent the newspaper a notice that he would be in Solano County to canvass some books door-to-door.

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Some businesses were closing down.

Professor R. Rogers was closing down his photographic gallery to move to Davisville

and establish a gallery there.

Charles E. Barnes, owner of the roller skating rink, said it no longer paid and was demolishing the building to construct a handsome residence for himself. It was going to be a two-story home, 16 by 24 with a 20-foot wing on the east side.

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Building was booming. Two schooners arrived in Suisun with lumber amounting to 55,187 feet.

During the month of January, the library of the public school reported 25 books taken on loan: one on travel, three on history, five on science, and 16 were stories.

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The winter of 1873 was an extremely wet one. By February, the amount of rain that had fallen since the first of January was 10.40 inches.

This was good weather for hunters. The Saucelito (later Sausalito) Herald reported that Jim Washington, a hunter from Suisun, had bagged 66 ducks in two days.

Another hunter was not as lucky. John Kinlock was hunting in the slough when he attempted to cross a ditch via a board. He fell in the water wearing his heavy gun boots, which prevented him from swimming. The boots kept wanting to rise to the surface, which meant his head would go under. A companion pulled him out and he recovered his gun from the mud.

Another hunter met a sad fate. Walter Breckwith, 40, had been a hunter in the Suisun Marsh for at least 12 years. His sloop was found in Suisun Creek with the main sail set. It was supposed the boom had knocked him overboard.

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On a happier note, the state Board of Education awarded a life certificate to William H. Fry, superintendent of common schools for Solano County.

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The town of Suisun was full of noise and clatter. On a Saturday evening, while waiting for passengers to come on the Vallejo train, the team attached to A.F. Knorp's hotel coach took fright at the sound of the steam escaping from the engine and ran from the depot. The driver caught them just as they got to the schoolhouse in Fairfield.

In early February, the Chinese were celebrating the Chinese New Year. Knorp's hotel coach once again began frightened, this time at the sound of firecrackers fired by the

Chinese community.

Fairfield's hub of activity centered around the courthouse and legal proceedings. To accommodate those traveling from afar, a new hotel was established near the courthouse, the Brooklyn Hotel run by Frederick and A.L. White.

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A new law, the Sunday Law, required all businesses to be closed on Sundays. It was in effect January 1873.

The first Sunday the stores all obliged, but the saloons were open part of the day and were to answer to Judge Brower. The court failed to come to any agreement, so the next Sunday the saloons were in full blast.

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The outer door of W.K. Hoyt's kitchen was open when a rifle ball came whistling into the room, making its mark in the wall. The Chinese servant in the room escaped injury, but he remarked that he thought it was mighty careless shooting.

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Preparations were under way for the Jan. 31 execution of Pancho Valencia, who had been found guilty of shooting Joseph Hewitt of Pleasants Valley. The gallows were constructed at the rear of the courthouse where an enclosure formed by a board fence 20 feet high on three sides and the wall of the courthouse on the other. In one corner, a gallows was erected with a crossbeam 20 feet from the ground and a scaffold half that height reached by flight of stairs.

At 12:15, the doomed man, attended by two priests, was brought from the jail to the sheriff's office where he received the last rites of the Catholic religion. At his request, he was supplied with a cup of hot tea. He had been shaved and had his hair cut. He was wearing a new suit; black coat, vest and pants. He was calm and composed.

At 12:30, he emerged carrying a crucifix and leaning on the arm of the deputy sheriff. The priest, chanting a requiem, preceded him.

Valencia climbed the scaffold with a firm step.

The sheriff read the death warrant and asked if he had anything to say. The man spoke a few words in Spanish. He said he was innocent and that if life and liberty were offered him as a condition of confessing his guilt, he would not accept because he was not guilty.

He forgave all who had wronged him and hoped all whom he had wronged would forgive him.

He was placed on the drop. His face was covered with a handkerchief and a black cap was drawn over his head.

The fatal noose was adjusted and, at a signal, the cord, which held the drop in its place, was cut by the sheriff. The drop fell and Pancho Valencia dangled in the air.

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