Solano County’s community news from 1870s

By Kristin Delaplane

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In 1873, Dr. G.H. Evans was located in Dixon on the east side of Main Street. An Odd Fellows association was being formed at Vaca Station (Elmira). The Rio Vista Fire Department purchased a bell from one of the Sacramento engine companies.

D.E. Hough, who had a nursery three miles west of Vacaville on the Suisun road, was selling trees and shrubs. He carried almonds, cherry, prune, lemon and orange trees.

Henry Eversole was the undertaker in Vacaville. He was apparently a worthy entrepreneur and had formed a chain business.

He advertised his services could be made of M. Carpenter in Silveyville, J. Smith in Dixon, and J.A. Collier of Vaca Station (Elmira).

The following story appeared in the Yolo Mail. “Mr. A. P. Bernard, a well-known and wealthy citizen of Vacaville claims to have discovered the art of making diamonds of charcoal.

“He went further, claiming to have made a diamond, which successfully stood the severest tests that could be applied. Mr. Bernard was asking $1 million for the secret, which it was concluded diamond dealers and owners of such companies could well afford to pay.”

A consignment of oranges from an orchard on Putah Creek was received in San Francisco and were selling for $5 a hundred.

Mr. Charles A. Kidder of Vallejo, a former county clerk, disappeared mysteriously in April of 1872. In early 1873, he returned to Vallejo. It was reported that he was very gray in appearance and was not talking about where he had been.

A short time later it was reported that he had died in Watsonville at his parents’ residence. His wife was with him. Per the Watsonville paper, Kidder had come to that place, sick with consumption.

Vallejo’s A. Williamson had to give a bond of $1,000 to keep the peace with his wife Catherine. He had threatened to chop her with an ax and to get a shotgun.
The row was over the fact that she had removed his pistol from where he kept it.

R. D. Hobkins, formerly of Vallejo, had type and other materials for a weekly newspaper shipped to Benicia where he intended to publish.

The Vallejo Independence reported that anyone passing the Japanese store in that town, which was owned by E.H. Sawyer, would notice a mummy in a small box in the window. Measuring six inches, it was being touted as the king of China some 3,000 years previous.

One of the “hoodlums” attending school in Vallejo drew a knife on his teacher, Miss Murphy, when she corrected him on some fault.

Another student prevented him from using the knife. The boy with the knife was suspended from school for the rest of the year.

George Edgar, Vallejo’s city marshal and auctioneer, was approached by a stranger to sell a horse. Edgar recognized the animal from a dispatch received from Colusa regarding a stolen horse.

He arrested the man, who admitted his theft and the man was sent back to Colusa with Constable Newcomb. That evening a man arrived in Vallejo demanding the horse. Edgar refused saying he was holding the horse for the owner.

The Navy Department was going to have a public auction of the US Steamship Vanderbilt, with 4,500 tons displacement and the US Steamship Resaca, with 1,165 tons displacement.

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Wilson family’s deep Vacaville roots
This early day postal card was created with a 1907 photograph of the Suisun City Plaza. The Wilson family’s hotel dominated the skyline in Vacaville.

Mason Wilson had deep roots in Solano County and is noted as one of Vacaville’s pioneers. In 1852, he and his wife Luzena, a native of North Carolina, arrived from the gold fields to harvest the wild hay in Solano that was then selling for $150 a ton in San Francisco. Traveling in a covered wagon, they parked their mobile home on Vacaville’s Main street. During the day Mason went out in the fields and cut and bundled oats. Luzena set up a “prairie hotel,” putting up a sign reading “Wilson’s Hotel” to welcome travelers.

By the end of the year, the couple had enough saved to buy lumber in Benicia and build
In 1853, Luzena invited five guests for Christmas dinner. She served onion soup, roast elk and lamb, boiled onions, radishes, lettuce, parsley and dried apple pie and rice pudding. It is now an annual tradition for the Vacaville Museum to serve the citizens onion soup on December 1, the day of the annual tree lighting downtown.

By 1858, Mason Wilson was a prosperous citizen and owned a fair bit of property in Vacaville. That year, when the politicians were deciding where to locate the county court, Mason Wilson offered four blocks of lots in Vacaville and $1,000 to locate in Vacaville. Vacaville was never a serious consideration for this glory and Fairfield won out.

That same year, 1858, Wilson re-entered the hotel trade. This time it was a commodious brick building that not only served as a hotel but also provided ample living quarters for his family. It was named simply “Wilson’s Hotel.”

In 1859, Mason Wilson purchased Vacaville’s triangle lot.

In 1869, the people of Vacaville held a meeting regarding building a line to connect them with the C.P.R.R. Mason Wilson was named the president of the Vaca Valley Railroad. The line was completed that summer making the trips to and from Elmira (Vaca Station).

In 1873, Mason Wilson, formerly of Vacaville, was heard of from southwestern Missouri. He intimated that the reason for his leaving the Solano County area was that there was a plan afoot to send him to the asylum in Stockton.

In 1874, Wilson sold the Wilson Hotel to General E.S. Davis of Oakland.

In 1882, Wilson died in Texas and left his property to his wife Luzena. In 1883, Luzena sold the Triangle lot for $300. It might have been quite a bonanza as later that year the social news included the item that Luzena Wilson was sailing to Europe with her daughter for a six-month grand tour.