

Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun - People County

By John Rico

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AND AWAY WE GROW- Years ago, in fact in 1910, when Vacaville residents traveled to San Francisco using old Highway 40, they needed to be alert in passing through Fairfield else they would have missed the few buildings there marking that hamlet. The population of Fairfield in 1910 was 834, and although Vacaville at that time was no booming metropolis, it claimed a population of 1177. Many Vacaville resident, seeking merchandise and services in those days gone by, would travel to nearby Suisun, which had more to offer than did Vacaville or Fairfield. But, look what's happened since those days.

The 1980 US Census Bureau figures give Fairfield a total head count of 57,611 (which includes people living on Travis AFB). The bureau tells us Vacaville now has 41,931 residents (counting the inmates, about 2,000, at the California Medical Facility).

Little Vacaville, and smaller Fairfield, with a combined population in 1910 of 2,011 residents, now have blossomed out to a pregnant 99,542, and to add to those figures long dormant Suisun has come to life with another 10,659 residents, making the total in the three communities 110,201.

Robert Waterman, a clipper ship captain who hung his hat around Fairfield, was given the honor, or he took it, and attached the name of Fairfield on a small Solano settlement back in 1859. He had come to the area from Fairfield, Conn., so he felt justified in honoring his birthplace. And on top of that, he honored his wife Cordelia, by naming another small settlement just west of Fairfield.

Fairfield became the county seat back in 1858, after it was decided the county headquarters in Benicia were not centrally located. In an election held in September of that year Fairfield received 1,029 votes to 625 for retaining the seat in Benicia. The top-heavy Fairfield vote resulted from a "stab in the back" by Vallejo voters who were disturbed because Benicia had been named the state capitol.

Sixteen years later, a group of Vallejo residents were of the opinion a mistake had been made in naming Fairfield the county seat because of the lack of adequate facilities there and above all, the lack of people. Without delving too long into the squabble, records show that Vallejo would be satisfied to have a county seat of its own, leaving the other in Fairfield. The Legislature in Sacramento bought the idea, but the governor, in bold terms, told the legislators to "get on the ball" and enact some common sense

legislation which he would sign. The lawmakers approved Fairfield as the county seat, and the governor gave the plan his blessings.

I can well remember back around 1918 when my parents wanted a family portrait, which was to include Ma, Pa and the seven kids. We bought passage on the Northern Electric car, running from Vacaville to Suisun, and ended up in the town by the slough which had the only photography shop in the entire area. Those seven Rico kids mischievously irritated the parents as the group rode in that bumping car all the way from Vacaville to the big town of Suisun.

The 1980 population figure for all of Solano County shows a total of 230,228 residents, up 58,239 from the 1970 total of 171,989. That's a growth rate of almost 6,000 people annually.

The total count in the incorporated areas (cities) in 1980 hit 212,905, up 57,674 from the 1970 count of 155,231.

It is difficult to analyze rural growth in the 10-year span because there have been annexations to cities throughout that period. People who were classified as "rural" have found themselves annexed to incorporated cities.

It is interesting to check back on official census figures for Vacaville and Fairfield. As late as 1950, Vacaville claimed more heads than Fairfield, 3,169 to 3,118. In the 10-year span from 1950 to 1960, Fairfield jumped its count to 14,968 while Vacaville grew at a slower pace, for a total of 10,898. In the span between 1960 and 1970, Fairfield went on a rampage, being credited with a total of 44,146 residents, and although Vacaville's growth was substantial, its total was at 21,690.

In the 10-year period, 1970 to 1980, Fairfield had increased its population to 57,611 while Vacaville went up to 41,931, gaining 20,241 new residents as compared to 13,456 added at Fairfield.

Gazing into the crystal ball, there's every prospect Northern Solano County will continue its growth pattern. Many residents are skeptical about the ultimate success of the multi-million-dollar Solano Mall at Fairfield, but when figures show that Fairfield, Vacaville and Suisun now have a combined population of 110,201, it can be readily agreed the promoters of the project know what they are doing.

In our yesteryear, farmers took advantage of ships and boats available at Suisun to have their products transported to San Francisco. Now that former little town by the slough is the fastest growing city percentage-wise in Solano County, claiming a 1980 count of 10,659 residents. In 1970 there were 2,917 people living there.

Those Vallejo residents, who in 1874 wanted the county seat returned to southern Solano County have all gone to their last rewards, but they would never had predicted that in the year of 1980, Fairfield, Suisun and Vacaville, would have a total population of 110,000. Vallejo and Benicia claim a total of 92,226 residents.

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