

Never-Ending Problems - Sewage and Trash

By John Rico

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THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL - A friend of mine asked me one day if there were any problems in compiling this article, once each week, year-in, year-out for more than 30 years. My immediate reply was: "Oh, there's always something to write about." Well, this is one week when I will scrape the bottom of the barrel for a subject. Let's talk about our environmental problems of Yesteryear.

Let's forget inflation, the price of gold, Carter and Fonda. Let's disregard our oil shortage, and the Shah's illness. Let's bypass any criticisms or accolades for the City Council and Planning Commission. We will take as today's subject "Sewerage." So, just relax and I'll tell you a bit about our past problems with sewage and trash.

In my research into the living habits of Chief Solano and his followers, never has there been any mention of indoor toilets being installed in tepees. In fact, when the Vacas and the Penas came to these parts from Mexico, their adobe huts were also minus such conveniences. And as history progressed, newer methods of construction were inaugurated, yet an inside toilet was unheard of.

Around the turn of the century Vacaville had increased its population to the 1000 mark. Progressive residents of the growing community envisioned the need of disposing of effluent, so a make-shift system was installed in 1895 which carried the raw sewage into Ulatis Creek, east of Vacaville.

In those days, legislators in Sacramento were not to be bothered about Vacaville's sewage. In fact, the water and solids, were permitted to be used for orchard irrigation in the present Fairmont area.

That practice was to draw criticism from area residents, and the order went out: "You are spreading disease."

Faced with an ultimatum, proponents of a new disposal system were able to place the issue on a ballot in 1901, seeking about \$10,000. Local residents were not too enthused by such a radical departure in their mode of living, thus a 122 to 68 vote killed the proposal.

Again, in 1904, the issue went back on the ballot, and for the second time, by a vote of 134 to 91, sewers for Vacaville were rejected.

In 1906, a concentrated community effort was able to sell the proposal to the taxpayers in a 218 to 15 vote. The bonds issued, in the sum of \$25,000, were sufficient to purchase 32 acres of land out Brown Street for \$1500, and provided the necessary funds to continue the main lines to that point where open ponds took care of the effluent.

In 1911, an improved method of treating the effluent had been perfected. It consisted of underground concrete tanks, into which the sewage was stirred a bit, and then permitted to flow into the open ponds nearby.

During all the years of the pro and con debates about sewage, no mention had ever been made about proper disposal of garbage and trash. It was every man for himself, and dump wherever convenient. Ulatis and Alamo Creeks were the most prominent sites, and that's just where the garbage and trash ended up, later to be washed away by heavy winter rains.

The practice of using the creeks as dump sites was practical, but unsanitary, so what better place to dump was there than the town's sewer farm on Browns Valley Road. That gave the town a concentrated site for sewage, garbage, rubbish and rats.

As Vacaville grew, so did the quantity of discards. The Brown Street dump site had outlived its usefulness and capacity. But just how do you pick up a dump site and move it? It was not an easy chore, but a special committee named by the town council selected the present site on Hay Road back in 1965.

People were discovering Vacaville as a convenient and favorable place to reside. In 1959 the population was nearing the 10,000 mark. That antiquated sewage disposal plant on Brown Street was bursting at the seams.

In 1959, voters of Vacaville were asked: "Do you want to buy the water distribution system from the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and also want a new sewerage plant?"

Proponents and opponents went to work, and to the surprise of most local residents, a \$2,450,000 revenue bond issue to acquire the water distribution system received a landslide positive approval, 1778 to 467.

A \$990,000, general obligation bonding proposal for a new sewer plant was an even greater surprise when voters cast a positive favorable vote of 1874 to 362.

Despite objections from residents 'of the small hamlet of Elmira, the new treatment plant was installed contiguous to their properties.

Modern and adequate sewerage facilities go hand in hand with every progressive city. Fairfield is a prime example, because without adequate sewerage facilities the multi-million dollar AnheuserBusch Brewery could not have been constructed there.

So, there you have it, it may seem insignificant when you trip that handle on your toilet flush tank, but without that convenience you and your family would be in embarrassing situations.

The dictionary explains "john" as being a nickname for a toilet, and a restroom is a toilet in a public building, and a bathroom is a toilet at home. Quite confusing.

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