

Fire and Bulldozers Erase Our Past

By John Rico

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TIME HAS TAKEN ITS TOLL - In recent years there have been efforts exerted in an attempt to salvage some of the older buildings in the community, both business and residential.

There's a vast field for argument here as to just who should pay to have these building spared from demolition now that growth seems to be an established pattern.

Unquestionably, there are many buildings which could be included in the historical category bank, but the choice of preservation rests completely on the shoulders of the owners. There

are some cities which purchased the old structures, sell them for a minimum fee with the stipulation they be removed to new sites and restored. But let's not get into that phase of a complicated procedure.

In my long years on Main Street, I have seen or read about the many old landmarks here which either burned or were torn down. It would have been impossible to preserve all of these structures.

One of the saddest periods in our recent history was during World War II. Several blocks of antiquated buildings on Dobbins and Kendal Streets, commonly referred to as Japtown and Chinatown, were bulldozed into a heap of rubble following the Japanese evacuation from Vacaville in May 1942. The area was cleared to make way for federal public housing projects. It can be said that the decision to rid the community of these buildings was a wise one.

Unfortunately, included among the buildings, was an ornate Japanese Buddhist Temple, which could have become a monument to the unwise decision to evacuate the Japanese. Following the evacuation, someone ignited the structure and it burned to the ground.

There have been many landmarks in the community, but many have become victims of wrecking crews or fire.

Here are a few: Hotel Raleigh, two-story frame corner of Main and Parker, burned down July 1909; the large Community Church, corner Main and Parker, built in 1892, torn

down to make room for the present Safeway supermarket.

Then there was the Masonic Temple, two-story brick, corner Main and Dobbins, burned down; quaint Vacaville Hotel on Merchant Street, built by public-spirited citizens in 1920; later partially burned and taken over as home for the Saturday Club, then sold to Bank of American, torn down.

Out on Brown Street was the Peters Winery, built before the turn of the century, torn down; the two-story brick Akerly's grocery, corner Main and Davis, torn down.

On Main Street, the Vacaville Garage corrugated iron building, corner Main and Bernard, torn down; across the street the McMillan Garage corrugated iron building, torn down; the Duncan Livery Stable, corner Dobbins and Kendal, torn down, the huge Blum warehouse, taken over by Sperry Flour Co., corner Mason and McClellan, burned down; the home of Senator Parker, torn down to make way for Elm School in 1948; old St. Mary's Church, Wilson Street; burned down in 1925.

Several important landmarks in the community were demolished because they had outlived their usefulness. The original depot for the Vaca Valley and Clear lake Railroad was torn down; a second depot erected by successor Southern Pacific Co., torn down. Both were on Depot Street. The depot serving the Northern Electric Railroad which came into town adjacent to Davis Street, torn down.

Vacaville has seen wrecking crews demolish several school buildings here, all having stood on the present site of Andrews Park and adjacent lands. The original two-story brick grammar school, built in 1884, damaged in the 1892 earthquake here, torn down. A second two-story frame structure, built in 1906, torn down; a third grammar school, Ulati, built in 1924, condemned for structural defects, torn down; the original Vaca High, two-story frame, built in 1898, torn down; a second combination two-story brick classroom and gymnasium, built in 1930, condemned for structural defects, burned down mysteriously in 1953; the old California College, also "on the hill," built shortly after 1850, damaged in the 1892, earthquake, torn down.

A joint venture between the town of Vacaville and the County of Solano, made possible the two-story concrete structure on East Main Street back in 1907. Because of its massive construction, the building remains intact today and is home for the Heritage Council.

The Harbison House at the Nut Tree is an area landmark, and has not only been preserved and maintained, but completely furnished with articles of that era.

The oldest building in the area, the Pena Adobe, has been restored as a California

historical landmark, and is the center of attraction at the Pena Adobe Park, south of Vacaville.

In our yesteryear, Vacaville area fruit growers were rewarded with moderate profits for their products, and were able to build residences which were landmarks, but unfortunately, here again wrecking crews or fires have erased most of the Victorians from the scene.

As the city grows, the bulldozers will keep up their assigned chores, demolishing a home here, a home there.

In today's parlance, call it progress.

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