

Main Street Keeps Rolling Along

By John Rico

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MAIN STREET - AN ORIGINAL NAME - The task of designating street names at times may be an arduous chore, but when Main Street received that title about 125 years ago there was no problem. It was the only business thoroughfare in Vacaville and it was the main one.

Throughout those 125 years Main Street has seen some radical changes. Old photos show all of the original business buildings being constructed of lumber, later being replaced by brick.

Many of those original brick structures are standing today. The two-story Odd Fellows building dates back to 1889; the Triangle Building 1897. In fact, all of the two story brick buildings now standing on Main Street were constructed before the turn of the century.

In recent years there have been feeble efforts pointed toward modernization of this downtown thoroughfare, and although there has been some measure of success, it is interesting to note that practically all of the original brick buildings are still standing, and being used.

Erased from the scene by fire in May 1939, was the huge two-story Masonic Temple building at the corner of Main and Dobbins Streets.

When earthquake struck the community on the morning of April 19, 1892, many of the brick buildings were heavily damaged by the tremor. But, persistent property owners had all the damage repaired in less than six months. The fronts of many of those buildings are a part of the Main Street scene today.

On the south side of Main Street, between Parker to the west, and Davis to the east, there has been only one new building constructed in the past 53 years. That was the Clark Theatre (now Vacaville Theatre) built in 1926. On the north side there have been several. Following the burning of the Masonic Temple, a new one-story stucco building was built there and occupied in 1941 by Safeway Stores. Today that building is being used by Shock's Furniture. The entire portion of Main on the north side, between Parker and Dobbins, represents modernization by the razing of frame structures which occupied that portion of the downtown thoroughfare.

Jack Hume, co-owner of Basic Vegetable Products in Vacaville, attempted to agitate

property owners in a modernization program for Main Street. He had drawings made which showed how the area would look with a concentrated face-lifting program. He had very little success.

In the late 1950 period, when Al Porter was mayor of Vacaville, the town council established the Vacaville Redevelopment Agency, composed of a group of business and professional men who would exert their efforts in gaining federal assistance to modernize a portion of the downtown business area. The grandiose plan envisioned the total revamping of an 11-acre area bounded by Main, Merchant, Mason and Davis Streets.

The plan progressed through Porter's term; through the four-year term of Mayor Roy Cobble; but then ran into a snag when Noland Bagley was named councilman and mayor. After having spent \$80,000 of federal grants in preliminary planning, the project was dumped into the wastebasket.

The blame for failure of the plan can be placed on many shouldees. First, federal bureaucracy moved too slow, second, the Bagley council was not of a frame of mind for this routine of modernization and third, the property owners in the area were lethargic in their enthusiasm for city-government participation in a revolutionary endeavor.

When most of the present Main Street structures were constructed, Vacaville boasted of a population of around the 1000 mark. As more people moved into the area, methods of doing business radically changed. Safeway had its start here as Skagg's Safeway back in 1928, in small quarters at the corner of Main and Merchant; later moved east a few hundred feet to a new location on Main. The store then moved into the new structure at the corner of Main and Dobbins, and in 1962 bought an entire block, consisting of the Community Presbyterian Church, the Solano Soda and Ice Works, and seven homes, razed the entire lot, and constructed Vacaville's first super-market.

Today huge letters are painted across the front of a Main Street store, proclaiming Lloyd Chandler Furniture Co. When a fire destroyed Schaefer's Country Store on Main Street in 1937, it tossed Lloyd Chandler out of a job, so he jumped from laborer to proprietor by opening a hole-in-the-wall furniture store on lower Main Street. Chandler parlayed that feeble beginning into one of Main Street's most successful business ventures.

There's a bit of nostalgia in looking back in our yesteryear, and to the many men and women who toiled long hours in their efforts of trying to make a living serving the public.

Who will forget S. P. Dobbins grocery and the cracker barrels; Aubrey Collier and his hardware store; Jim Miller and his drug store; Eli Manuel and his soda fountain; Louis

Martell and his Buick agency; Beelard & Burton service station; Brehme and Werner's Vaca Valley Creamery?

Today there is not only speculation, but anticipation, that Main Street will some day radically change. It has not in over a century, so keep your fingers crossed for the possibilities of a massive new look down this thoroughfare where horses, men and machines have traveled for more than 125 years.

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