

The 'Hill' That's Always in the News

By John Rico

Friday, March 16, 1979

PARK SITE, A CONTINUING CONVERSATION SUBJECT - Perhaps no other geographical area in Vacaville has received more attention throughout the years than has Andrews Park.

The "hill," which accommodated Vacaville's educational facilities for more than half a century, first came into print back in 1866, when a Methodist College was constructed there, facing College Street.

Leading to the college subject, we find that back in 1855 a private college had been started on Catherine Street. In later years it was taken over as a Methodist College. During its existence at that site, "for political reasons," one of the original college buildings. was burned to the ground. To counteract a reoccurrence of such a tragedy, it was decided to construct a new building, to be made of concrete. Much of the fresh concrete had been poured, a corner-stone box inserted, and the new building was on its way, but again tragedy struck, this time in the shape of exceptional rains. The fresh concrete flowed away like spoiled cream.

Proponents of the college had become discouraged with the continuing adversity at that location, so they were on the look-out for a new site. Mason Wilson, an extensive landowner in Vacaville, had a 10-acre parcel north of Ulatis Creek, which he offered in trade for lands on the south bank. This was acceptable, and the new college finally found a home.

In the years following, the college building found several uses, meeting its doom in the 1892 earthquake here which badly damaged the structure, forcing its removal.

In later years, the site was to become "home" for Vaca High, with the first building going up in 1898 (cost \$10,000) and later in 1930 a combination classroom-gym building (cost \$63,000) went up.

The contour of the terrain adjacent to Vaca High was such that athletic events were confined because of lack of level land. In the early 1920 period, school trustees hired Max Brazelton and Monte Gates, to undertake a leveling job of much of the site.

Powerful earth moving equipment was in its infancy in those days, so Brazelton and Gates harnessed teams of mules, rounded up a quantity of scrapers, and tore into the

chore of giving Vaca High a flat piece of land. It was necessary to use large quantities of black blasting powder to crumble the mountain of sandstone before it could be removed, but through persistence the job was completed. It was also necessary to remove many huge eucalyptus trees growing on the site, which had been a continuing nuisance because of the shedding of leaves and pods.

That ornate new classroom-gym building was to be declared structurally unsound in only a few short years. The steel roof-supporting beams in the gym, were found resting on brick pillars. The vacant building, awaiting disposition for other uses, came to its end by fire in 1953.

In 1952, Vaca High had moved to a new plant on Monte Vista Avenue, leaving as surplus the old site and the original frame two-story Vaca High and the abandoned brick structure. School and town trustees were in negotiations for sale of the property to the city, but in the meantime the gym building had burned, greatly reducing the value of the property. The city offered \$2,500 for the site; said it would remove old Vaca High and the burned-out structure, and would earmark the area as a park site.

For 38 years (1904 to 1942) Edward Andrews had been co-publisher of the Vacaville Reporter. Shortly after his death on November 27, 1946, it was revealed in his will that he had bequeathed the sum of \$2500 to be earmarked for park use. Shortly after the park had been established, Andrews was honored by the designation of Andrews Park.

In the early struggling years of short cash with which to develop the park, members of the Vacaville Volunteer Fire Department accepted the job of installing the initial sprinkler system. This was accomplished at a savings to the city treasury and also earned "pin money" for the local firemen.

Andrews Park has been an asset to the community, but unfortunately in late years vandalism and disrespect for the original intended purposes of the park, have played an important part in downgrading the respectability.

The city has now embarked on an expansion program on lands contiguous to the original park site. These improvements represent an expenditure of several hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Bob Farrington, director of parks and playgrounds in Vacaville, was able to keep Vacaville Rotarians glued to a screen as he showed a half-hour presentation of vandalism constantly being done at these facilities.

The recent discussions on use of Andrews Park as a continuing site for the annual Fiesta Days points out the lack of essential conveniences for people of the community.

With two heads better than one, the Fiesta Committee and the City Council should get together and do some future planning for a growing community. "Andy" Andrews saw the need back in 1946. In this year of 1979 we should be . learning some lessons.

The will to have the annual Fiesta Days is far more important than a site selection.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/7146>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/7146/>