

Memories Of Holiday

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, November 24, 1963

Next Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. It's a holiday, with pay, for most people. Noteworthy, the religious aspect of the day has been growing in recent years. Up until World War II it shared this significance with football games throughout the country—in Vallejo, too, for the Apaches observed a home-and-home schedule with the Eureka High School. A half century ago most of the independent Vallejo teams—the Winged V's, the Pioneers, the All-Vallejo's and the Post 104 team had Thanksgiving Day games.

EARLY VALLEJO THANKSGIVINGS

We found many good stories in the old files of the Vallejo newspapers. Let's take 1869. To begin with, Thanksgiving was held on Thursday, Nov. 18—the Third Thursday, with U. S. Grant (R.) as President. Some 70 years later another President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was roundly criticized for suggesting the third Thursday. Vallejo was a village of some 5,000 (including the separate community of South Vallejo) in 1869. Yet no less than 10 hotels advertised Thanksgiving Day dinners—The Philadelphia House, Hotel Capitol, Hotel Washington (Moran family) ; Vallejo White Sulphur Springs; New York House (Gallagher family); Metropolitan House, Solano House and Frisbie House in South Vallejo, Vallejo House (P. B. Lynch family) and the Golden Eagles. If this surprises our readers, it should be noted that there were eight other hotels in Vallejo in that same year!

Entertainment was popular on the eve of Thanksgiving in the old days. Thus, on Nov. 28, 1883, the Community Players staged "The Ticket-of-Leave Man" at the Farragut Theater. It was billed as "A Grand Production of the Celebrated Drama" and the cast included familiar Vallejo names as J. B. Gillespie, W. J. Tobin, O. H. Hilton, Miss Annie Walter.

On Thanksgiving Eve in 1920, Capt. Edward L. Beach, USN, Mare Island Commandant, spoke on "American Traditions" to 400 Vallejoans in the Virginia Theater under the auspices of the First Presbyterian Church as a benefit for their new edifice on Marin street. Ralph Cassady was a co-chairman.

The Vallejo Chronicle of that evening had other announcements—The Navy assigned the Optical School to Mare Island, and at the notorious "Y" north of town, a bootlegger shot and dangerously wounded a Mare Island Marine.

MORE ON FOOTBALL

On Thanksgiving Day on Nov. 27, 1913—exactly 50 years ago—the All-Vallejo football team won its game at the Cyclodrome (the Central avenue area today) against a San Francisco team. The Vallejo coach was Charles Goshen. Stars of the game were “D u t c h” (Leon) Coleman and Brenneman. Other Vallejoans on the team: Burns, McInnis, McKenzie, Blanco.

FARRAGUT’S THANKSGIVINGS

In his handwriting, in the shipyard log, Farragut on Nov. 24, 1854, wrote: “Very foggy morning; rang bell as usual but being Thanksgiving no one came to work.” On Nov. 22, 1855, Farragut commented that it “rained all day” and “no one worked.” But, there was no pay, either! So, turkey or no turkey, the yard employees came to work on Thanksgiving days thereafter until 1864. In that year President Lincoln established the holiday so that federal employees could receive pay.

But one item in the log is especially interesting as It lists the names of workmen who have descendants in Vallejo today. We’re speaking of Thursday, Nov. 24, 1859, and the Commandant wrote: “Begins clear and cool. Work going on as usual. The following named men having struck for increase in wages as Helpers in the Smithery, the Commandant directs they not be again employed in the yard under any circumstances: James Heffernan, John Ford, Thomas Ryder, A. Reardon, James Elliott, N. Wright, Edward Fisher, R. Thomson. At 11 performed Divine Service, the day having been appointed by His Excellency, the Governor of the State, as a general day of thanksgiving. Ends cloudy with rain.” We agree that it must have ended “cloudy” for those who incurred the Commandant’s displeasure!

SOME THANKSGIVING BACKGROUND

The day was first established by the Pilgrims in 1621; observed frequently until about 1680 when it became an annual festival in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The first Presidential Proclamation was by Washington in 1789; it was repeated by him in 1795. Madison renewed it in 1812. By 1858 governors of states and territories were issuing annual proclamations, but the present custom of presidential proclamations began with Lincoln in 1864.

The editor of the Vallejo Chronicle in 1869 (Frank A. Leach) sums up the basis of our holiday in the language of 94 years ago, but we subscribe heartily to it:

“Thanksgiving has been appointed by the President and the Governor of this state, to be observed tomorrow throughout California as a day when men shall rest from their

labors and seek their holy sanctuaries. It is a day of early Puritan observance and time has engrafted it upon the commonwealth as a custom of hallowed memory.”

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