

Christmas In Vallejo

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, December 22, 1963

Christmas is the same over the years—the family reunions, the joy of the children, and the turkey on the table—but the manner of reporting it has changed. We went back into the old copies of the Vallejo Chronicle 70 to 90 years ago, and bring you the life of the city in those holidays.

From the Chronicle of December 26, 1888: “There was a variety of entertainment Christmas eve. Three churches were celebrating the day with Christmas trees and Peck’s Bad Boy had a large audience in Farragut Hall.” Then followed the detailed programs, and I know that the names of “wise men of the east” and of “angels” will be recognized by many descendants and friends in Vallejo today. Fannie Mead, Jessie and Edna Greenwood, Harry Aden and Flora Winchell participated in the Baptist Church pageant. At the Methodist Church were May and Ella Colvin, Frank Hines and Bobbie Walker. At the Presbyterian Church were Grace Brownlie, Anna Cassady, Mary Buss and Willie Shillingsburg. The newspaper added that the Hon. Joseph McKenna held open house celebrating his re-election as Congressman, assisted by Lansing Mizner of Benicia, who was his campaign manager.

CHRISTMAS ADVERTISEMENTS

The ads in the Chronicle on Dec. 24, 1888 featured “fresh eastern oysters” rather than turkeys. At J. A. Browne’s (a real pioneer family) candy store there was a holiday special: “A pound of Choice Tea given with every nickel’s worth of candy.” And in the Bernard Block (now occupied by Levee’s) P. J. Kennedy’s Christmas ad featured “Gents Extra Fine Sewed Goods” and “Understandings” for Ladies and Misses.

In the same 1888 paper is this note: “The Street Committee of the Board of City Trustees have had laid a plank walk to George Street on El Dorado from Jackson’s corner on Maryland Street, and now foot passengers between North and South Vallejo can travel with comfort. This is a worthy Christmas present, and now what we need is a plank walk to the railroad crossing, to connect with the new walk”

The Vallejo police court also met on the day before Christmas, 1888, and the Chronicle reports: “60 days is the length of time the Marine that borrowed Anson Clark’s hat and Chas. Mugridge’s overcoat will languish in jail for omitting to speak to the owners of the borrowed articles before carrying them away from Golden State Hall.”

WIND, RAIN AND SIN

On Dec. 24, 1892, 71 years ago, we find a variety of stories. First, "Owing to the fierceness of the storm, the Christmas Tree Festival at the Episcopal Church is postponed until after the regular Sunday evening service at Christmas night. Should the storm still continue, the Festival will be postponed until Monday evening."

The Presbyterians held their Festival "notwithstanding the wind and rain, and everyone went home happy but wet."

The very next item reads "The Salvation Army girls with their War Crys now come regularly to Vallejo. They say that they are treated very well here, especially on the island. When they have enough officers in the field, they intend making an attack upon this citadel of sin."

And imagine this, in the same edition: "Postmaster W. D. Pennycook lists 47 letters which remain uncalled for. If not called for within 15 days they will be sent to the Dead Letter Office."

There must have been more than meets the eye in another story which follows: "The navy yard people will have their Christmas tree this evening in the mess room of the barracks. This is rather inconvenient, but owing to the orders of Commodore Belknap closing up the other places, it is the best that can be done."

90 YEARS AGO

On Dec. 24, 1873, the Chronicle reported that the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches had musical programs for Christmas Eve with decorated trees for the children. The Baptists met for a social hour on that night, but "have determined to disperse with the Christmas Tree this year." The Good Templars Orphans Home (up on Camina Alta way) asked that gifts be brought for the children.

St. Vincent's Church had a midnight Mass, and the paper reports that the church was "illuminated by 1,000 tapers." Remember, these were days before the advent of electric lights.

The Christmas Day sermon, Dec. 25, 1873, at the Ascension Episcopal Church was preached by Chaplain Adam A. McAlister. Twenty-eight years later, in 1901, Chaplain McAlister was responsible for the erection of St. Peter's Chapel on Mare Island—now the oldest chapel on Navy property. The Chaplain served many tours of duty in the local shipyard, and was buried there in 1914 in the Naval Cemetery on the south end of the yard.

And so, as we approach Christmas 1963, it is our wish that all of our readers may be blessed with the spirit of this Christian season.

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