

Grandfather's New Year's Eve

By Ernest D. Wichels

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We've reviewed the New Year's Eve celebrations of earlier generations of Vallejoans. A half century and more ago there was one program which was inevitable. This was the formal grand ball attended by all of the officials and leaders in the community, usually followed by a generous meal sometime around midnight.

One example is that reported in the Chronicle of January 2, 1896: "Vallejo's formal New Year's Eve ball was held in San Pablo Hall. The committee in charges consisted of Messrs. Peabody, Greenwood, Munro and Williams, and Caterer Rowland furnished the supper.

The Chronicle's editor waxed poetic, or indignant, on the day following New Years, depending on the damage wrought to the newspaper's property. He was in a jovial mood on January 2, 1870, as the lead story said: "New Year's Day was generally observed by all classes of our citizens. The morning was bright and beautiful, the day warm and the evening pleasant. In the forenoon the streets were thronged with strollers exchanging congratulations, looking and being looked at. Altogether, the day seemed to be heartily enjoyed by all."

BELLS, POWDER AND ROOSTERS

In the January 2, 1886 edition we read: "New Years was ushered in by a vigorous ringing of bells, the explosion of powder, the blaze of bonfires, the song of the rooster, the resounding incantation of the devil boxes, and the howling prowlers. A crowd of enthusiastic boys, with unwritten license, overdid themselves with their ideas of proper celebration which embraced damage to property. Several early morning risers taking a perspective view of their front yards would be struck with the absence of a swinging gate, found later to ornament some lamp post. But a charitable people endured every act, and those who participated in a glorification of the hour, will not forget their fun for sometime to come."

It was equally riotous on January 1st, 1876, as the Chronicle of the 2nd reports: "The Vallejo Rifle's Ball and the Parade of Horribles at Midnight were the most prominent of a large evening of merriment. The Ball Committee had not been idle and there was a noisy clangor from every steeple. During the night a bonfire was started on Georgia Street by individuals more patriotic than cautious, and by Saturday morning all the planking at the crossings were smoldering embers. There were no other drawbacks to

the pleasure of the evening.”

MARE ISLAND'S FIRST NEW YEAR'S EVE

Vallejo's first newspaper, the "Weekly Bulletin" lasted for only six weeks in 1855, and since the Chronicle files begin in 1867, we went to Mare Island for the earliest story of New Year's Eve in this area. In Farragut's own handwriting it is described in his log as follows: "Jan. 1, 1855. At 1 a.m. commenced blowing from the S. and E. and at 3 a.m. wind shifted to South. The Brig GEORGE EMERY broke from the moorings and swung off in the stream and let go their anchor, but the gale continued and she dragged her anchor over to the North Eastern Shore. At 4 the WARREN began to drag the Port stream anchor off shore and forge ahead, but the third anchor held. -In the yard the covering of hay stacks was mostly blown off. In Vallejo, some of the houses were unroofed and some blown off the foundation blocks. Most of the workmen's boats were stoved, so that they could not cross to the yard. The Bark CALEDONIA was blown up on the Mission ' Road and still lies there."

But New Year's Day also marked the revival of things—as the Chronicle of December 31st, 1895, reports: "The New Year will mark the opening of the Philadelphia Brewery. From out of the chaos of a fire which almost entirely consumed Mr. J. F. Deininger's Philadelphia Brewery at South Vallejo in August, an entirely new structure has been erected. The building is large and airy and well adapted for the making of a high class article of beer." Don't feel sorry, friends, for the apparent drought during the warm fall months—Vallejo had two other breweries in full operation, the Pioneer and the Solano. The latter was operated by the Widenmanns.

The Vallejo Board of Education had a special meeting late on Dec. 31, 1895, to complain of lack of progress by Contractor Rountree on the new school house. The Superintendent was Harrier; the directors, Brownlie, Saunders, Cooper and Topley.

The police court also met that day but adjourned for lack of a prisoner. It seems that James Herbert's horse and cart were stolen from the hitching post in front of Brownlie's store on Georgia Street. Dick Rule reported seeing the thief "while he was on a spin (in another cart) out on Benicia Road"; Constables Fleming and Towle took off and recovered the cart and horse, but lost the thief.

WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE

We hope you will enjoy the Chronicle editor's description of a suffragette meeting in New Year's week, 1870. The meeting was held in Eureka Hall (York and Sacramento), and the speaker was Mrs. Laura George Gordon. The editor's description of Mrs. Gordon: "Her appearance is decidedly prepossessing—a little below medium stature,

but well proportioned, dressed in good taste, a consciousness of mental superiority cropping out in every movement, mobile features, an exuberance of auburn curls—not one of which is false—with large magnetic eyes.” Then, “the lady commenced by referring to the large attendance, and noticing a preponderance of the sterner sex upon the back seats, some of whom appeared a little fidgety, expressed the hope that good order would be maintained and remarked that this was not an exhibition, a show or a place where thoughtless men and rude boys had come to eat peanuts and make sport.”

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