

## Another Year Is History

By Ernest D. Wichels

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The year 1963 is now another page of the past. Much happened in tragedy, space science, international politics, the curb on nuclear testing, etc. Future historians will tell future generations what was important; we all are too close to the picture to make the appraisal today.

During the new year this column will continue to present the things that happened long ago which have a bearing on our city and county today, likewise the people whose efforts and conduct (whether intentional or otherwise) have molded the growth of our Solano communities.

### THE CENTENNIAL OF MARE ISLAND

In 1964 we come to the tenth anniversary of the greatest party ever held in Vallejo. On Sept. 16-19, 1954, the Navy, city, County and state sponsored a four-day celebration unequalled in this part of California. Parades, cavalcades, aquacades, banquets, dances, exhibits, fireworks—certainly no other naval shipyard has ever had such a birthday party. We are bold enough to suggest to Naval and civilian leaders that on Sept. 16, 1964 we have an appropriate “10 years after” celebration.

Much has happened since that Centennial extravaganza. It was then that Mare Island was designated as a nuclear-powered submarine shipyard and two years later launched SARGO. Nine other A-subs have subsequently been launched; three others are on their way. Yes, 1954 marked the end of one era and the beginning of another, just as Mare Island had seen the change from sail to coal, from coal to oil. Today it holds unquestioned leadership in the building of nuclear-powered submarines. Selfishly speaking, at a time when there is to be a reduction in the number of government defense plants, why not stand up and let the nation know more about the sterling shipyard in our front yard? Let's have a birthday party next September 16th.

### HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Last month the press told of the Board which was appointed to investigate the need for eleven naval shipyards. Last summer Congress debated the distribution of naval repair between private and government yards. Congressman Leggett took considerable time to prepare his case to disprove the allegation that Navy work could not be done better and more economically in naval shipyard. This is nothing new. In the New Year's

edition of the Vallejo Chronicle of Dec. 31, 1885, a special insert of four pages defended Mare Island's work on the MOHICAN which, according to Eastern sources, could have been done for less back there. Result: Secretary of Navy Whitney appointed a board to investigate the issue. Now, 78 years later, we are still facing boards, but with the same confidence in the stature of Mare Island!

## **VALLEJO JUNGLES**

Two weeks ago Antone "Tony" Smith, Jr., 1101 Nebraska Street, made his 43rd annual trip to nearby "jungles" with food for the shivering denizens. Tony, with his father, is known to many Vallejoans as the operators of meat markets since 1920—the Washington, Sonoma and Georgia; the California, Marin and Virginia; and the old Brown Market, 210 Georgia. With the assistance of scores of other merchants he has delivered cooked turkeys or chickens, fresh fruit and canned goods during Christmas. This last visit may prove to be the end—the traffic is disappearing. The South Vallejo jungle, at the end of the railroad line, contained only two men; the Napa Junction retreat, only a few more; the largest concentration was at Shellville, Sonoma County. The top population was during the depression years; in 1935 there were 128 men in the South Vallejo jungle at Christmas, and nearly as many at Napa Junction. One reason for the decline is perhaps our improved economy. Another, since the ban on pedestrians on the Carquinez Bridges, there is now no connection for them between the railway terminal at South Vallejo and the freight yards in Crockett. In fact, South Vallejo is now called a "coffee break" by these drifters.

Tony, 75, a Past Commodore of the Vallejo Yacht Club, and holder of the world's record for the 2-mile backward walk (27 minutes), tells us that there is caste even among these nomads. First, there is the "tramp"; he is the one with some dignity, will cut wood and do odd jobs. His "blanket roll" is deluxe and he generally shuns the trains. He either walks or hitches rides on the highways. The "hobo" is the fellow who rides the freight trains. He is not as eager to work as the tramp, and because of the nature of his "travel reservations" he carries only the bare necessities. The third category is the "bum". He is the outcast of the jungles, and is never welcome; usually he is the wino character.

## **GEMS OF THE PAST**

What happened on this very day, January 5th, in the past? Mare Island commissioned its first warship, and the first to be built in the Pacific, the gunboat SAGINAW, on Jan. 5, 1860. And on Jan. 5, 1869, the Chronicle reports "While in attendance at the funeral of Mrs. Simonton, the team of General Frisbie, attached to the family carriage, ran away. General Frisbie's wife jumped out, sustaining no material damage, however." There was a special election in Vallejo on the first Tuesday in January, 1892—the issue isn't

important but the honesty of the editor is amazing. The Chronicle said: "We are having our windows cleaned so that the election returns may be read through them."

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