

Earlier Newspapers

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Like Santa Claus, the editor of an historical column has many helpers. Hardly a day passes that I do not receive some information which helps to bridge the gap between the past and the present.

One of the oldest sections of Solano County is the Pleasants Valley district. A copy of the Vallejo Chronicle of June 1, 1909, was recently found in one of the older houses in that area, and we are indebted to Mrs. Charles Staats (Harriet Hughes) of 301 Mesa Verde for presenting it. Harriet is a great granddaughter of the pioneer after whom the valley is named. Highlights: The Vallejo baseball team defeated Sacramento in the Memorial Day game; Miss Eleanor Phelps and Ensign W. A. Glassford Jr., were married in St. Peter's Chapel; and Dr. Derrick, then widely known local veterinary, was painfully injured in a runaway accident. The interesting items, however, are the grade school promotions. Names such as Elsie Millott, Helen and Mildred Gee, Ruth Adkins, Francis McDonald, Ruth Prior, Ralph Cassady, Edward Giant, Roy Hanson, Guy Ruperto, Edna Ross, Jessie Blackwood—and hundreds of others which will be readily recognizable today.

WASHINGTON'S FUNERAL

A real antique, however, is the 164-year-old newspaper in possession of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Lund, 865 Palou St. This is the weekly Ulster County Gazette of Kingston, New York, dated January 4, 1800. It devotes two pages to the obituary and funeral of George Washington, who died December 20, 1799, and was laid to rest on Dec. 20, 1799 in George Town in the District of Columbia. What really caught our eye was the type of advertisements. Every ad contained this phrase:

"Terms are cash or country produce only." One store says: "Ashes will be taken in our store"—a reminder that soap was a home-made product in those days. But the ad which brought a pang of remorse was the description of a slave who was "For Sale."

The Vallejo Weekly Recorder was born on Feb. 23, 1867, and Ed Price, 1020 Kentucky St., has every issue for its first year. He obtained this valuable collection from the late Alex Rowland, a scion of one of Vallejo's truly pioneer families. Week by week the Recorder gives the progress of the California Pacific Railroad from South Vallejo to Sacramento and Marysville. Similarly it told of the day-by-day building of the Napa Valley Steam Railroad from Napa Junction to Calistoga. Some bits: On July 25, 1867,

"The first passenger car reached Yountville"; "the first car to Rutherford arrived Aug. 3, 1867." Feb. 23, 1867: "Heavy grading was underway in Jamison Canyon toward ,Bridgeport (now Cordelia)." June 29, 1867: "The railroad wharf (trestle) between North and South Vallejo was completed yesterday morning, and many. citizens walked over it."

BIRTH OF THE CHRONICLE

On July 6, 1867, the Recorder wrote: "A weekly newspaper called the Chronicle made its first appearance in Vallejo this morning, Leach and Gregg, proprietors."

On May 11, 1867, the Recorder wrote: "The Ensley Company broke ground yesterday for their gas works in Vallejo. The site is at the water's edge on Maine street opposite the U. S. Hotel. In a few weeks our streets will be lighted gratuitously by the company, and stores and dwellings may be brilliantly lighted at small cost."

On Saturday evening, Aug. 3, 1867, the gas lights were lit for the first time in Vallejo. The paper reports that 560 burners were in operation.

An item on May 26, 1867, says: "G. Bergwall has opened his wine cellar, corner Virginia and Santa Clara streets. James Frost of the Naval Drug Store has had his soda fountain in operation for several days. James Topley of the Pioneer Apothecary Shop has also fitted up a fountain. The thirsty will find something palatable at these places."

CHURCHES

The Vallejo Recorder of April 13, 1867, "A large number of workmen have been employed this week in excavating preparatory to laying the foundation of a new Catholic Church in Vallejo in the block bounded by Sacramento, Kentucky, Florida and Santa Clara streets. Nearly one half of the population of Vallejo are of the Catholic persuasion, and we expect to see an edifice reared on yonder eminence which will be a credit to them and their religion and an ornament to the town.

Rev. Father John L. Daniel, O. P., has the direction of the work." The foundation stones for St. Vincent's came from Dillon's Point on Carquinez Straits and were brought to the Vallejo wharf by the sloop War Eagle. The cornerstone of the church was laid on Sunday afternoon, Aug. 18, 1867.

On July 6, 1867 there appears this item: "The Rt. Rev. Bishop Kip, Bishop of California, will visit Vallejo on Sunday, July 21, with a view of organization of an Episcopal parish at no distant date. Rev. A. C. Treadway is gathering an Episcopalian congregation at a downtown hall and the prospect of building up a flourishing society here is

encouraging.”

For those who wonder when the first bank opened, the Recorder answers: On Feb. 23, 1867, “A bank is needed in this locality. Properly conducted by responsible parties, it would be a great convenience to business men and the people generally.” On Aug. 10, 1867, “a bank was organized by Messrs. Hilton, Powell, Aspenwall, Brownlie, Lee, Sawyer and Snow.” Old-timers will recognize these as pioneer Vallejoans; Snow had Vallejo’s first department store. The bank was located on Georgia; the vault measured 6 feet by 8 feet, and was 8 feet in height.

One thing seems certain—Vallejoans didn’t write much. It took about six weeks to send a letter east via the Isthmus of Panama; cost \$5 by Pony Express. On April 20, 1867, the Recorder said: “The number of letters received in the Vallejo Post Office averaged about 100 each day the past month; about one hundred and twenty-five are daily forwarded from the office.”

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