

Early Solano

By Ernest D. Wichels

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A common human weakness is to predict the future. Sometimes the vision we see in the crystal ball may, by coincidence, come true. The editor of the Vallejo Recorder, in July and August of 1867, published a series of articles on Solano County communities and speculated on their development.

From time to time we will print some of his observations. On Aug. 3, 1867, describing Rockville: "Rockville has a post office, one store kept by James Gilmore, one saloon and two blacksmith shops. The village is not likely to grow much." It hasn't.

On July 6, 1867, he pictured Silveyville (two miles west of Dixon) : "Silveyville is a town of 2 hotels, 2 saloons, 3 general stores, 2 drug stores, one hardware store, one saddlery shop, one photographic gallery, one shoe shop, 2 wagon shops, one school house, 2 churches, and cottages enough to make up a respectable village. The Depot of the California Pacific Railway will be established two miles east of Silveyville, consequently the village is not improving—the two will undoubtedly be transferred to the depot." And move it did! The depot on the railroad was located on land donated by a rancher named Dickson. The railway right-of-way agent had met Dickson, but had not seen his name in print; his report to the company recommended the name "Dixon" for the depot. It was never changed!

MORE SOLANO NOTES

The Vallejo Recorder for 1867 tells of other happenings. In August a disastrous fire in Benicia destroyed two blocks on 1st street between D and E streets. In February a fire wiped out a block in Suisun, including the Pacific Hotel. In December a tremendous storm destroyed the Catholic Church in Suisun and flooded a large part of the town; the creek through the Vacaville created flood damage, and a causeway at Collinsville was partly destroyed. On September 7, 1867, the tunnel on the California Pacific Railway line in Jamison Canyon, a mile west of Cordelia, was completed. Many Vallejoans don't even know there is a tunnel on this line—it's still there!

Perhaps the most ambitious dream of 1867—and a dream it remained—is told in this Vallejo Chronicle item: "A company has recently been organized in this city and has filed articles of association with the Secretary of State under the name of Terminal Central Pacific Railway Co. The organization is for the purpose of constructing and maintaining a railroad between Yerba Buena Island in San Francisco Bay and Vallejo in

Solano County. The purpose ultimately is to cross the straits of Carquinez by a bridge a little less than 3,000 feet in length and thus form a permanent connection with the California Central Railroad in South Vallejo.”

PIONEERS

One of the prime sources of material for a historical column is the roll call of Solano County pioneers. At last September's Old Timers' Day of the Historical Society at the Rockville Churchyard, former County Clerk Lou Morrill did a wonderful job of highlighting some 30-odd early day families. In the brief time-allowed he couldn't begin to name all of them. Hardly a day passes without another name being added to the growing list. We are indebted to Jack Cureton, 3303 Tennessee St., for a fascinating story of his family. Jack's father, Paul Cureton (retired; an early developer of the automatic washing machine) lives at 450 Springs Road. Jack's grandfather, William H. Cureton, first came to Solano County in November 1857 by overland trail from the Missouri Valley. He first worked for the pioneer Gordon in this county (for whom Gordon Valley, Napa County, is named). Grandpappy Cureton was a pioneer in other fields, as well. After serving a term as Assemblyman from Mendocino County in 1867-68, he made early history in the California newspaper field. He edited such papers as the Santa Rosa Republican, the Fresno Republican, and the Town Talk in San Jose. In the 80's he established the first weekly in Mohave County, Arizona, the "Alta Arizona." He passed away in Santa Cruz in 1930, aged 88. The written account of his interesting life covers many pages.

A MUDDY STORY

Some Vallejo citizens frequently complain of the condition of our present day streets. Please console yourselves with this top story in the Vallejo Chronicle on Nov. 24, 1869:

“The improvements needed on our streets could be made during the present dry spell to good advantage. Nothing has been done by the Street Commissioner in relation to increasing the width of the street crossings. One person can be accommodated on the narrow planks only, and during muddy and slippery times it is almost impossible for two pedestrians to pass each other without one being crowded or stepping off into the mud, sometimes a foot in depth. Marysville—our neighbor by rail, is having granite crossings laid, but we shall not be so extravagant in our infancy—we only demand an increased width to the timber crossings now provided. It is suggested that if the poverty of the city is so great, that merchants and those doing business in the vicinity of the ‘narrow gauge,’ raise a subscription to widen each crossing.” Today our merchants worry about adequate parking. But what the story didn't say is that when the horse-drawn vehicles came to these interections, the driver would have to dismount and remove the 16 foot by one foot planks, drive through, and replace the planks. Of course, he wore

boots. On New Year's Eve following the above story, the paper reports that town hoodlums gathered these crossing timbers and held a bonfire in the intersection of Georgia and Sacramento streets.

Bit by bit the town has been improving. Twenty-two years afterwards, in 1891, the Chronicle reported the first electric street lights, and said editorially: "Sidewalks, paving, sewers, and electric lights! Now for street cars."

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