

February Anniversaries

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Every day is an anniversary of some person, some discovery or other event. These have varying degrees of importance. February reminds us of anniversaries because we celebrate the birthdates of Washington and Lincoln. But we are tempted this week to recall other February anniversaries which should interest many Vallejoans and Mare Island folk.

On Feb. 11, 1853, President Fillmore signed the order purchasing Mare Island for \$83,491. On Feb. 13, 1855, Mare Island received its first repair job—overhaul of the U.S. Sloop St. Marys.

Mare Island today counts many hundreds of female employees on its great shipyard team, but the first woman to be given employment there was Mrs. Elvina Baldwin, a nurse at the Naval Hospital, on Feb. 25, 1871. In a whimsical entry in his log on Feb. 16, 1957, Admiral Farragut recorded the first death of a "Mare Island worker" the deceased was an ox he had purchased in 1855.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The application of the 8-hour law was ordered in Mare Island by the Secretary of the Navy on Feb. 23, 1869—although until 1889 certain groups were required to work longer shifts.

We hear a great deal about automation these days, and the problems it poses for continued employment of millions of workers. Many of the younger generation may believe this is something relatively new, and some of the unemployed may think it is a recent evil. But February marks a real anniversary—a sort of industrial revolution, as it were—in the field of automation.

In this month, in the year 1914, Henry Ford inaugurated his "assembly line," a new technique in the manufacturing world. Prior to February 1914, Ford mechanics spent at least 121/2 hours putting a car together, according to the Vallejo Chronicle of that era. With the assembly line, the entire job was done in 93 minutes. And brand new Model T's sold in Vallejo for less than \$350. Realtor Bill Elliott, owner of Vallejo's oldest Model T, vintage of 1912, attributes its long life to the fact it is "custom" made, and not a production-line job.

Another first for the month of February is the opening of the Mare Island naval cemetery. The first burial occurred on Feb. 12, 1956, with the interment of George David, Quartermaster aboard the USS Massachusetts.

A few Sundays ago we mentioned, indirectly, the operation of a small hospital in the town of Dublin, north of Walnut avenue, on Mare Island. This was the house occupied in later years by Vallejo pioneers, the Lanes, Brennans, Krehs and Somers. Our research provides the information that the first patient was admitted exactly one hundred years ago—Feb. 17, 1864.

THE NUCLEAR AGE

Mare Island is today one of the nation's leading shipyards in the field of nuclear-propulsion—construction, refueling and overhaul of A-sub. The shipyard laid the keel of its first nuclear boat, the USS Sargo, on Feb. 4, 1956, has subsequently laid ten more, and has two more to come. Its first Polaris submarine, the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, was commissioned and delivered to the Fleet on Feb. 13, 1961.

Of less significance than atomic power, but very important in 1881 nevertheless, is the fact that on February 10, the first telephone line inside Mare Island was completed and two persons conducted the first conversation via wire.

LAKE TAHOE

Tahoe is a considerable distance from Vallejo—but it is a mecca for thousands of our citizens. A hundred or more Vallejoans own Sierra cabins; additional hundreds are ski enthusiasts; many more hundreds will tell you of their good fortune (?) at the gaming tables at the Tahoe casinos. But Tahoe also has an interesting February anniversary.

General J. C. Fremont discovered the lake on Valentine's Day in 1844-120 years ago this month. He climbed Steven's Peak (10,000 feet) from the Markleeville side, and his diaries give it two names: Lake Bonpland and Mountain Lake. In 1853 it became Lake Bigler, in honor of California's third Governor. Somewhere around 1862 or 1863 it was officially named Tahoe, although some Nevada sources continued to refer to it as Lake Bigler as late as 1875 or so.

Tahoe is from the language of the Washoe Indians (with which it rhymes) and means "big water." John Fremont didn't know that within a few years a road would gnaw its way across those granite cliffs for the bullion-laden ox wagons from the Comstock, or for the dashing, daredevil Pony Express riders. Or for the Hank Monks driving their stage-coaches. He certainly didn't visualize the 4th of July traffic jams of our era, or the jet planes that whiz in from San Francisco in a matter of minutes. Our former

Vallejoan—Chuck F. Brandi, now publisher of the Lake Tahoe News, might also add that Fremont was spared the ordeal of listening to some of those crooners from Hollywood who are imported for the casino theatres.

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