

# Mare Island's Earthquake

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, March 29, 1964

Tomorrow is the anniversary of Mare Island's most disastrous earthquake. Shortly before midnight on March 30, 1898 the tremor struck. Although damage was experienced in both Vallejo and in San Francisco, Mare Island suffered most.

The chimneys and slate roofs of the eleven 3-story brick quarters on Walnut Avenue crumbled and fell to the ground, requiring complete demolition a few months later. The sawmill was flattened; the paint shop likewise collapsed; the south end of Building 69 lay flat on the ground. Heavy damage was caused to the hospital and to the Administration Building No. 47. The dock couldn't be operated because, although it was undamaged, no power was available for the pumps. The powerhouse chimney was badly cracked and there could be no fires until makeshift repairs were made.

The present colonial-styled officers' quarters on Walnut Avenue are built on Farragut's original brick foundations laid in 1855. The present homes date from 1901. At least one souvenir remains of the old brick mansions. When Naval Constructor Snow was forced to move out of his quake-damaged Quarters "E," he acquired a home at 740 Capitol Street. Before the wreckers had destroyed everything, he moved the beautiful curved walnut staircase to his new home; today it is the pride of the Robert Allgoods who own this home.

## NEW BANK—OLD NAME

This columnist avoids any form of advertising but frequently we must mention business entities to complete the historical chain. One of Vallejo's financial institutions recently acquired a new name: "Crocker-Citizens National Bank." To most local people this may seem to be the first use of the name "citizens" for a hometown bank. Some 60 years ago "The Citizens Bank of Vallejo" was incorporated here. President was John B. Frisbie; vice-president was Charles Widenmann; cashier and secretary was its founder, Joseph R. English. In November 1909 the name was changed to that of the First National Bank. Other officers were the well-known Vallejo names of P. E. Bowler, Frank R. Devlin, B. F. Griffin and George R. Cadan. Years later Cadan became Mayor of Santa Rosa.

The earliest local bank was the Vallejo Savings and Commercial Bank, still doing business here under a different name. Many pioneer families are likewise identified with this institution, such as the Brosnahans, McKnights, Byrnes, Wilsons, Adens and

Powers.

## **OTHER MARCH ANNIVERSARIES**

March is an interesting month for anniversary dates in the life of this community. Mare Island launched the first warship ever built in the Pacific, the SAGINAW, on March 3, 1859. It was on :March 9, 1933, that the fa- mous cruiser SAN FRANCISCO was launched here.

Oldtimers may remember Mare Island straits without a causeway or bridge. The present Yard causeway was dedicated on March 13, 1935; the earlier wooden causeway was opened on July 3, 1919. Captain Edward L. Beach, USN, (whose son was President Eisenhower's aide and later skipper of the globe-encircling A-sub TRITON) cut the ribbon on that day.

It was on March 15, 1884, that Mare Islanders attended the funeral of Mrs. Anna Key Turner, whose body lies in the century-old Mare Island cemetery. Mrs. Turner was the daughter of Francis Scott Key, born 1811 and one year old when her father wrote the words to the national anthem.

Old-timers will remember Vallejo's population of saloons, and particularly the bars of lower Georgia Street. On March 16, 1918, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels issued the order "drying up" Vallejo because of the alleged adverse influence of these saloons on the young sailor boys of World War I.

## **SOUTHERN SYMPATHIZERS**

Californians possessed a divided allegiance during the Civil War days. Those who know of Sam Brannan's biography are familiar with the fears of many Unionists that the "rebels" might cause trouble here. It was because of this threat (real or fancied) that President Abraham Lincoln on March 12, 1863, authorized an appropriation of \$100,000 for the construction of a Marine Barracks for a suitable brigade to put down any rebellious acts.

Long before the brick building was constructed, in fact before Lincoln's ink had dried on the paper, there was alleged trouble. On March 17, 1863 the sheriff of Napa County appealed to the 1Vlare Island Commandant for military assistance in controlling a band of "copperheads" at Calistoga. This was the term then used for anti-Union sympathizers. The commandant indicated he was without authority, short of martial-law, to comply. Therefore, the civilian employees of Mare Island, on March 30, 1863, organized a group in Vallejo called the "Mare Island Guards" to stand ready in protecting the city should any "copperheads" attempt trouble. Mare Island authorities

were also alerted to possible Confederate influence at Gold Beach, Oregon. But nothing materialized.

These are a few of our March anniversary highlights.

### **SUBMARINE No. 658**

Being historically minded, we are naturally delighted with the Navy's selection of the name "MARIANO GUADALUPE VALLEJO" for the newest Polaris submarine building at Mare Island. Despite the fact that our city honors this great native son with his name, very few of the 70,000 residents are familiar with many facets of his life. Future columns will provide bits of these.

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