

# Vallejo's Cow Palace

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For upwards of a half-century Vallejo had its own version of San Francisco's Cow Palace. Perhaps the present Vallejo generation marvels at the variety of activities which the Cow Palace holds under its roof—rodeos, ice hockey, presidential conventions, religious revivals, dog shows, prize fights, etc.

But Vallejo, too, had its "Vallejo Pavilion." It was better known as the "Skating Rink." It stood at the corner of Georgia and Sutter; more than 40 years ago it was torn down for the construction of the Gernard Apartments for Dr. B. J. Klotz.

Although it seemed primarily a huge roller skating ring, it was the hub of almost every civic event held in this city for nearly a third of Vallejo's life. The Vallejo roller skaters did real well; for several years they held the Northern California championship—a team which included such speedsters as Woods, Seymour and Smith. Roller skating was the popular pastime in this arena—when it wasn't being used for a rally, prize fight, political rally, masquerade, charitable bazaar, or the Women's Improvement Club annual spectacular called Kirmess.

Skating was always done to a live orchestra (not the present day juke boxes). A retired Navy bandmaster, Tom Olaquez, was leader of the orchestra for years; the musicians included such Vallejo pioneers as Oscar Setterquist and Harry Hay. It was here that Vallejo's younger "fry," like Miss Elsa Widenmann and others, brought their neighborhood girl friends for entertainment following a kiddies' birthday party.

## GRAND BALLS AND MASQUERADE

In the age when there were no paved highways, no Candlestick Park, no TV sets or radio, and few if any movie theaters, the city relied on its own resources for entertainment. So the Vallejo Pavilion served as a focal point for most of Vallejo's fun. In those days (forty or more years prior to 1920) there always was a Fourth of July celebration and the inevitable Grand Ball in the Pavilion. Always the spearhead for Vallejo's charitable relief, the Elks Lodge No. 559 held an annual carnival in the Pavilion which (in a town then of some 5,000 people) would do credit to our present city of 70,000! Such names as Mesdames McCudden, Whitaker, Harrier, Weniger, Lamont and others headed the list of scotes of local women who assisted the Elks and the Associated Charities organization.

The early pages of the Vallejo Chronicle are replete with the events at the Pavilion. It was here that the Native Sons of the Golden West held their annual masquerade—one of the city's outstanding public affairs—in which everyone from the mayor to the Georgia Street cigar maker donned a distinctive costume. The 1905 masquerade listed more than 80 prizes in the following day's Chronicle.

Prize-fights were staged here, and one no less than champion Jack Sharkey graced the Pavilion with his presence.

One of the largest gatherings was the McKinley-for President rally, and political rallies frequently interrupted the usual skating programs.

## **THE WOMEN'S CLUB KIRMESS**

According to the dictionary a "Kirmess" is a European carnival held for charity. Well, the highlight of each year at the turn of the century was the Kirmess given by the Women's Improvement Club (undoubtedly the forerunner of the present Vallejo Woman's Club). We will list here some of the persons and events connected with the Kirmess of May 11, 1905, as related by the Vallejo Evening Chronicle. We know that Vallejo, because of its spectacular growth in population in the past 25 years, has only a minority who recall the days of which we write. But it is likewise true that most of the names we will mention are linked with thousands of present day Vallejoans. The Chronicle headlined its Kirmess story thus: "Youth and Beauty Mingle Amid Entrancing Surroundings."

The story then proceeds: "The Pavilion presented a scene of kaleidoscopic beauty and loveliness that has never been equalled by any similar affair in Vallejo." Then follows a credit to Admiral McCalla, USN, for the loan of flags. The lemonade booth featured a realistic old oaken bucket, and was presided over by Mrs. Longfellow, assisted by Mesdames Weniger, Richardson, Morton, MacLean; and Misses Tessie Kneass, Sophie Ulston, Edith Brownlie, Minnie Burnham. The Ladies Exchange was held in a "model of a training ship" (the USS INTREPID), and the skipper was Mrs. Fannie Gibson; her committee included Mesdames Pope, Evans, Calvin Stevens, Tripp, Glenn Dickie, Robt. Brownlie.

And they had a Turkish booth, handled by Mesdames Norris, H. J. Widenmann, Harrier, Heegler, Silveria, Bernheim; Misses Violet Weniger and Alice Kavanagh. Miss Olive Wilson, Vallejo's beloved teacher, headed the fruit and flower garden, and her aides included Susie Gedge, Mabel Nesbit and Freda Trethaway. The palm garden exhibit served "exotic teas." The operators were Mesdames J. H. Cooper, Dick, Ralph Cassady, Gedge, McGill; and the Misses Lulu Luchsinger, Jessie Roney, Ina Wilkinson, Helen Wilder.

Even Vallejo's newcomers will recognize many, if not most of the names of these pioneers at the turn of the century.

The Chronicle story continued with the fancy work enterprise presided over by Mrs. M. H. Denio, and the Mesdames Hanscom, Devlin, Hodges, Rippetoe, Connolly, Halliday, McInnis, Casper, Finnell, McCudden and Kemper.

The story tells of the "favorite cooling edible" ice cream—sold by Mrs. Theo Smith, assisted by Mesdames Chappell, Sam Copper, Cam Whitthorne, Russell, Klotz, Duhig, Noyes and McMillan. Girls selling candy included the Harvey sisters—Inez, Blanche and Maude; Tot Browne (Mrs. Frank Bathe, 521 Alabama St., whose historical publication "Early Days" has been invaluable to us), Marie Buss, Adelaide McEnerney.

Of course they had a palmist, grab box, musical program and May pole dance. There men were in the act, too—operating the "Pike." Mrs. Elon Mitchell, club president, and Mrs. S.M. Levee handled finances.

These old-timers were really organized!

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