

# Submariner MacArthur

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, April 12, 1964

This past week Vallejo mourned, along with an ever-grateful nation, the passing of a great American—General of the Armies Douglas MacArthur. Significantly, these same days marked the 60th anniversary of another event which is important in the lives of Mare Island and Vallejo.

Most of us take for granted the fact that Mare Island is perhaps the country's leading submarine shipyard—combining both building and overhaul facilities, and outstanding in the field of nuclear propulsion as applied to submarines. Mare Island became a submarine yard during the second week of April 1904. It was then that the GRAMPUS and PIKE, small gasoline-driven boats, became the first submarines to churn the waters of Mare Island Straits. These two submarines were skippered by one commanding officer—a young Navy lieutenant by the name of Arthur MacArthur Jr. He was a brother of Douglas.

## APRIL 1904 WELL REMEMBERED

Not only did Lt. MacArthur highlight the month of April 1904, but other things were happening here. The Carnegie Public Library was being constructed; the Navy YMCA on Santa Clara street was being readied for its cornerstone ceremonies by President Teddy Roosevelt; and the armored cruiser CALIFORNIA was launched on April 25, 1904 at the Union Iron Works, San Francisco, and came here for her outfitting. On the shipyard across the channel, George Hanscom and others were getting ready to send the first wireless message in the Pacific, with Bob Stuart spelling out a message on the telegraph key to the hospital ship SOLACE outside the Golden Gate.

The old Navy YMCA, torn down several years ago in the Redevelopment area, was first called "Club House for Blue Jackets and Marines," later the "McCalla Home" for the Mare Island commandant, but it was officially dedicated several years later by the name we all associate with it. The same George Hanscom just referred to was in charge of construction program of the Navy "Y"; he was then Master Electrician in the shipyard; Chief Draftsman A. C. Lutgens of the shipyard Public Works Department was the architect; W. C. Concannon of Oakland the general contractor. The wiring for this pioneer building was done by Wm. A. Widenmann (now living at 731 Naoa St.) and his crew.

## EARLIER FADS

The human race seems to have a weakness for transitory fads. We're passing through (we hope) the fad of worshipping the Beatles from Britain. Perhaps today's tight-tight pants will become bargain counter items in the stores next year. But let's not place the weakness for fads on the current generation.

Read what the Vallejo Chronicle wrote on November 24, 1891: "On the white shirt fronts of nearly every man in Vallejo, whether young or old, who thinks he is in the fashion or wants to be, blazes a red necktie. And they are the reddest kind of 'red, too. A subdued maroon or a dark wine colored scarf is not tolerated at all. It must be sanguine, brilliant, glaring, scarlet. It is astonishing to see how the red neckties and red handkerchiefs have caught the town. They arrived here about a week ago. Now everybody has one and there is a rivalry to see who can get one of the brightest hued ties to hang around his neck."

Other things change, too. Did you know that Vallejo had a match factory (out on Maine street near the railroad tracks) in 1892? And some of our older citizens will remember there was a busy cigar factory in Vallejo, on Georgia street, between 1910 and 1920.

## **CITY COUNCIL PROBLEMS**

Our present day council meetings are concerned with planning decisions, municipal wage demands, budget headaches, etc.

Electricity brought problems to an earlier council, as reported by the Chronicle on Dec. 3, 1891: "There was a full meeting of the Trustees last night. The hall was filled with interested citizens, and it was nicely lighted up by a combination of gas and electric lights, burning peacefully side by side. R. B. Barr, Supt. of the Electric Light Co., occupied a front seat at this baptism of electric lights in the Trustees' hall.

Trustee Browne of the Fire and Water Committee discussed the disposition of the gas lamps which the city owned. He reported that 55 were worthy of storage and should be kept in case electric lights didn't succeed.

"The trustees also heard complaints about the carbon electric lights on the streets. The carbons would only last about 9 hours and would not give light all night long. Mr. Barr promised to see that the full number of hours of light were given. Also, it was reported that certain street lights were hidden by shade trees. The Trustees ordered the Light Company to change such lights to the other side of the street."

May we comment to say that if any tree blocked a street light today, the tree (and not the light) would be changed. But our real concern is about the eventual disposition of the outmoded gas lamps; where did they go?

## **THE PENA ADOBE**

This historical landmark a mile west of Vacaville is being restored through the efforts of that city, the Medical Facility, many Vacaville citizens, and the County Historical Society. It is the oldest building in Solano County. On Sunday afternoon, April 26th, there will be an "open house" at the Pena Adobe so that Solano people may see the work, which is nearing completion.

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