Golden Poppies

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Local gardens as well as the countryside are ablaze these April days with our state flower—Eschscholtzia Californica. This golden poppy is deservedly the most celebrated and one of the more popular western flowers. Have you ever wondered why they seem most plentiful along the railway rights-of-way throughout California? Particularly along the railroads in Napa and Sonoma counties: between Sacramento and Auburn; and along the Southern Pacific tracks on the Coast route.

Although nature distributes this plant somewhat uniformly in all California valleys, it is most abundant along the rails. There is good reason for this. About 1910, when California was preparing to welcome all America to two 1915 world’s fairs—one in San Francisco and the other in San Diego to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal—the Native Sons of the Golden West decided to do something spectacular. Knowing that practically everyone would come to the fairs by train (there were but few private autos and only a handful of buses in all the state), these loyal native sons decided to literally pave the approaches with gold.

With the cooperation of several large seed-growers, hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of poppy seed were distributed to Californians. Then, as they traveled on steam passenger trains or electric interurban cars, they would open the coach windows and strew the seeds as the trains sped through the country areas. There are Vallejoans today, like the writer, who can remember doing this proud little chore for their native state.

MORE ON ‘COW PALACE

Two weeks ago we wrote of the hub of Vallejo’s social, recreational and civic life for the 40 years or so preceding 1920. This was “The Pavilion,” better known to Vallejoans as “The Skating Rink,” on the site now occupied by the Gernard Apartments, Georgia and Sutter. We have been deluged with phone calls telling us of countless other events held there. For example, John Philip Sousa personally conducted his famous band in the Pavilion. On the evening following the April 18, 1906, San Francisco earthquake, nearly 80 refugees were given shelter in the Pavilion upon arrival by Monticello boat from the stricken city. And, in April 1904, the Native Sons of the Golden West held their state convention (others were 1914 and 1938) in Vallejo in this building.
We are indebted to Mrs. Ivan Luce, 1327 Farrell St., for the formal invitation issued to her father, Gustav Reichman, to the Grand Ball held on April 29, 1904; also, the ornate menu at the banquet tendered to the grand officers of the N.S.G.W. The officers of the Vallejo Parlor No. 77 at the 1904 convention included Frank Lee, president; William J. Tormey, George Weniger and Henry G. Frey, vice president; Thomas J. O’Hara, secretary; J. A. Browne, treasurer, and Joseph Clavo, marshal. The committee included George Harris, Frank S. Houseman, G. G. and A. S. Halliday, and John Noonan. Mrs. Luce’s brother is the well-known physician, Dr. Carl Reichman, now practicing in Sweet Home, Ore.

EARTHQUAKE ANNIVERSARY

No, we do not mean the San Francisco quake. That happened on April 18, 1906, and has been well covered by my predecessor, Wyman Riley, in previous columns. We’re referring to the April 19, 1892, quake which all but leveled Vacaville, Dixon, Elmira and Winters, followed by a devastating after-shock on April 21.

Many of our readers have little knowledge of our own private Solano County tremor, so we quote from the Vallejo Chronicle of April 20, 1892:

“The earthquake of Monday night did so little damage in Vallejo that it was not dreamed by our people that this county could have been such a sufferer by it. Vacaville, Fairfield and Dixon were damaged to the extent of thousands of dollars, although happily no lives were lost.”

“Vacaville presented a strange appearance. The south side of Main St. is nothing more or less than a row of wrecked brick structures, and the street is filled with debris.”

“Damage to the Presbyterian Church, Brunswick Hotel, business properties of Platt, Malone, McCabe, Hacke, Madison, Crystal Bros., Snook, Gates, Chittenden, Butcher, Dobbins, newspapers Reporter and Enterprise, Walker, Blum, Hewitt, Miller and Bennett were considerable. The Odd Fellows Hall, Ream and Thomas Grocery, Masonic Hall, and residences of This-sell, Mrs. Blake, and Carl Gates are almost totally damaged. In Fairfield the principal damage was to the Methodist Church. In Dixon the Baptist Church was demolished and the primary school heavily damaged. About 20 business firms there ‘suffered damage.”

WINTERS DESTROYED

Then the Chronicle of April 21, 1892, reported: “About 9:45 this morning we received word by telephone that Winters has been completely destroyed by earthquake and Dixon was wracked from end to end and there are not two whole brick buildings
standing. No material damage was done at Vacaville in this later earthquake.

In the same issue the Chronicle editor wrote: “Editor McLain of the Vacaville Reporter got his paper out on time and gave his readers a complete account of the destruction of his town, even though his plant was damaged. It was a creditable piece of enterprise.” An item in the Vacaville Reporter added: “Vacaville will build right up again and be once more the beauty spot of the state.”