

Graduates Of Early Vallejo

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Today, a high school education is basic. It is considered the very minimum training to face life's problems and challenges. This past week 540 young men and women were graduated from the Vallejo Senior High School; 348 from Hogan Senior High; a total of 888 for what is undoubtedly a record graduation for our city.

But it was not always possible to secure a high school diploma. Prior to 1870 Vallejo did not have a high school. The first graduates didn't appear until June of 1873! In fact, Vallejo didn't have a public school until 1855, and until 1867 the so-called "public schools" were financed by subscriptions. The first county tax levy for schools was voted in 1867. Those Vallejo students, both private and public, who desired and were fortunate enough to afford high school studies prior to 1870 went to Benicia or Vacaville. Girls went to the Benicia Seminary, operated by Mr. and Mrs. C. T. Mills, which was the forerunner of present Mills College; they also attended St. Catherine's Convent. Boys could go to St. Augustine's Training School for Boys in Benicia, or to the Vacaville College, operated by the Methodist Church.

FIRST HIGH SCHOOL

In 1870 the citizens voted funds for a new school building at the corner of Carolina and Sutter; this was the second "Lincoln School" (the current building is the fourth of that name). The Vallejo Evening Chronicle of 1870 describes it as "a commodious, 3-story building, built by J. W. Newbert of Vallejo, for the sum of \$14,000." It houses both the grammar school and the high school classes. The school principal was G. W. Simonton, one of the great leaders in Vallejo's early educational history. The Latin teacher was Prof. W. F. Igoe, who occupied this position for nearly 20 years. The initial high school teacher was Isabella Murphy.

This was the first school building to have a musical instrument. Superintendent Simonton received permission from the trustees to solicit money from the public and a piano was purchased with the \$190 he raised.

The "latest word in Northern California high schools," as the Chronicle defined it, was the building of the large structure on Ohio street, between Napa and Sutter, in 1912. But this high school all too soon reached its capacity and, on April 15, 1922, the present senior high school on Nebraska Street was dedicated. The dedication was quite a show. The principal speaker was Charles H. Kendrick, national vice-commander of the

American Legion; our own Post 104 presented the school with the national flag; among the many gifts was one by the PTA—the beautiful red maples which line the street. The Ohio street building continued as a grammar school until about 1936, when it was razed and the site became Washington Playground.

‘SWEET GIRL GRADUATES’

We mentioned the first high school graduation in 1873. Four girls comprised the class; the names represent families prominent in this county to this very day. They were Mary Long, Hettie Dempsey, Margaret Tobin and Mary McKnight. There were seven in the 1874 class—all girls.

The graduating class of 1875 was limited to two, both boys, one of whom became a noted attorney and jurist in this county—L. G. Harrier. The ten graduates of 1876 included Mary Hobbs, Edward Lawton (whose father was the chairman of the school trustees), Carrie Fraser, and Hattie Klink (whose mother taught in the high school and whose father, the Rev. Mr. Klink, was a later chairman of the school board. In the 1887 class were the two sons, Edward and John, of General Frisbie. The 1878 graduates included several whose descendants have become prominent in Vallejo history—Margaret Kavanaugh, George Greenwood, Florence Devlin, Kate Brew and Lottie Kitto.

The 1881 class included Julia and John Frey (Russell O'Hara's family); in 1882 there was Adele Hilton and G. G. Halliday—for years and years the County Clerk of Solano County. Annie Pennycook (the Penny-cooks later owned the Vallejo Chronicle for many decades) and Frank Devlin (the revered chairman of the California Railroad Commission under Governor Hiram Johnson) were diploma winners in 1885. In 1886 we find Frank Griffin, and Ida Rounds; in 1887, Maggie Brennan and Russell Towle; successful banker S. J. McKnight, graduated with the class of 1889.

The 1890 graduates included such prominent Vallejo names as Charles McEnerney, Henry McPike, Mamie Dieninger, Anna Cassady and Thomas Crosby. In contrast with the 888 graduates of this week, there was an average of only 16 graduates a year between 1890 and 1899.

But this decade included such familiar names as Grace Brownlie, Isabella Roney, Gertrude Doyle, Bert Winchell, Mazie Roddy, Edna Greenwood, Marie J. Buss, George and Walter Roney, Bernard J. Klotz (physician and county coroner), Marie English, Lulu and John Luchsinger, Jessie Roney, Ralph Finnell, Jessie Greenwood, Ida Bassford, Florence Currier, Florence Cleveland, Henry and William Widenmann, Nellie Gedge, Ida and Charlotte Hodges, Joseph Kavanaugh, Joseph Raines (our esteemed Superior judge), Elvezio “Cap” Mini and Alice Lamont.

Yes, these early graduating classes gave us some sterling leadership in the community. George Roe, for years editor of the Vallejo News, graduated in 1904, and others in the decade of 1901-1910 included Russell F. O'Hara, Roscoe Griffin (the banker), Raymond Bangle (jeweler), Edward Mullaly, Mary Bedford, Oscar Hilton (assemblyman), Ralph P. Levee, John Brown-lie, Columbus Castagnetto, Ervin and Albert Casper, and Henry Mini.

The largest class to graduate from the Carolina street school (1911) was 24.

My, how we have grown?

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