

Dusts Of Early Vallejo

By Ernest D. Wichels

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As Parish Bros. bulldozers and steam shovels level the blocks of the Redevelopment area in southwest Vallejo, they do more than merely create dust and dirt in the downtown stores.

They truly stir up the dust of early Vallejo history. Our attention was first attracted to the army of "bottle-hounds" and others who seem to descend upon this area each evening after the dirt-movers cease operations for the day. We knew Vallejo had its share of coin and stamp collectors, rock-hounds, etc., but it was a revelation to witness the bottle collectors. One of the surprises was the unearthing of an ancient dump at the corner of Pennsylvania and Sacramento streets—literally filled with bottles, along with old cast iron stoves, pieces of metal furniture, etc.

One of the interesting bottles was one with the name "Topley's Pharmacy" blown into the glass—reminiscent of the days when many Vallejo merchants dispensed their wares in monogrammed bottles bearing their own names. Some antiques are also dug up—including a silver tea pot at least a century old. Several brick-lined cisterns have been uncovered—telling of the early days when Vallejoans conserved all rainwater falling on roofs.

GIRL RESERVE PLAQUE

Another story is told in a bronze plaque, about 8 by 6 inches, beautifully engraved, bearing the creed of the Girl Reserves, the youth organization sponsored by the YWCA. One day last week we received a phone call from Fireman John Kloske of Fire House No. 1, located at York and Sacramento streets. He reported the finding of this plaque—thoroughly roughed up by probably hours of bulldozer operation, on the block across the street from the firehouse. Unquestionably this was the plaque affixed to the fireplace of the former Woman's Club Building, originally the YWCA, where the Vallejo Girl Reserves were established. This group is now known as the Y-Teens.

Let's talk about this particular block. It is one of the most historic in Vallejo. This was the site of the state Capitol, 1851-1853, and this is where State Historical Marker No. 574 will be reinstalled when the Redevelopment program nears completion.

The YWCA Building was the project of the National YWCA Board during WW-I as a wartime need for "the women and young girls of the Vallejo area." There were many

devoted Vallejo women in those days half a century ago who sparked the programs for these young ladies and girls. Until the York-Sacramento Street building was completed sometime in 1920, the groups met in the building across from the present Public Library, and were also the recipients of the generosity of the Dr. Dempseys in their spacious home on Capitol Street.

The leader of the YWCA in its first years at the Sacramento Street building was Mrs. Jesse Godley. The activities, particularly with respect to Girl Reserves, were carried by a host of unselfish local matrons—including Mrs. Bert Knott, Mrs. Ferry Hatch, Mrs. John Greathead, Mrs. Ora Cline, Mrs. Ellis Webber.

NEXT, THE WOMAN'S CLUB

By 1930, It became apparent that public subscriptions were not sufficient to support the YWCA building. The same thing happened to the Industrial YMCA building which then became the Casa de Vallejo. So, about 1931, the National YWCA board negotiated with the Vallejo Woman's Club—having in mind that the future of the building should be continued in a role which would serve women of the community. So, from 1931 to about 1962, when torn down, it served well.

It should be noted here that the old "YW" served the community in many ways. It was here that the Vallejo Rotary Club, in its founding days, and for nearly a decade, met for its weekly noon luncheons. The "YW" cafeteria was a favorite luncheon mecca for men and women in the downtown business field, and it was a popular spot for evening dinners.

SAME CORNER, YEARS EARLIER

This corner has long been a gathering place for Vallejoans. It was here that the Eureka Hall stood until old-age, dry-rot, and obsolescence required its demolition about WW-I. The origin of Eureka Hall is told in a few words by Mrs. Frank Bathe in her pamphlet "Early Days."

She writes: "The center of social activities was Eureka Hall, a frame building on the corner of Sacramento and York streets, built by Abe Gorham, the local dramatic agent and leader of the only stringed orchestra. The first event given in it was the Firemen's Ball in 1862, under the auspices of the Hook and Ladder Co." Obviously it was fitted up for conviviality, because the Evening Chronicle of 1870 has an advertisement by Charles J. Edgar, proprietor, Eureka Hall Saloon, which says: "The finest wines selected for the use of the Green Room." Perusing the Chronicle files we learn that Eureka Hall was the scene, for at least two generations, of gala New Year's Eve balls; musicales, political rallies, wedding receptions, and receptions for distinguished visitors

to the city.

This block also contained the pretentious homes of some prominent early Vallejoans. Like the Capitol Building, the Eureka Hall, and the YW Building, they've disappeared. Nothing remains but a few bottles, a silver teapot, a Girl Reserve plaque, a lot of dust, and—among the old-timers—just memories!

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