

Solano Pioneers

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, September 20, 1964

This afternoon, at 3 o'clock, the public is invited to the Third Annual Pioneers Day sponsored by the Solano County Historical Society, at the historic Rockville Churchyard, about a mile north of Cordelia. The society has a long-range program of cataloging the large list of pioneers who shaped the destinies of our county a century ago.

It is not an easy task, but it is a pleasant one, for the lives of these old-timers make fascinating reading. They were a hardy, resourceful lot. We of Vallejo and Solano County are particularly grateful that, almost without exception, these pioneers of the 1840's, 1850's and 1860's are represented by descendants who live among us today.

It is difficult (even dangerous, perhaps, for a columnist) to list any names because space does not permit inclusion of everyone. But the historical society is determined to compile, eventually, a complete census. Our readers will readily recognize some of the names.

The Wolfskills (1841), John O'Donnell (1854), John - Q. Greenwood (1860), Stiltz (1846), Isaac Hobbs (185), William Gordon (1862), Henry Goosen (1852), Sweitzer (1849), Andrew J. Raney (1850), P. B. Lynch (1859), .Winchells (1867), Isaiah Hanscom (1854), Kilkennys (1875), John W. Lambert, who was born in Suisun Valley in 1856, and married a Chadbourne girl—whose family arrived in 1852; Pangburn (1862), Morrill, Jonesfamily, pioneers in Green Valley; Robert Brownlee (1851), S. G. Hilborn, A. Powell (Vallejo's early merchant); A. J. McPike, James M. Pleasants (1849) of Pleasants Valley; Cooper (1849), the Foleys, Minis, Hales, Morrisons, Grigsbys, Pierces, Durbins.

Also, the Neitzel family (1854), Mason (1861), Henry A. Bassford, whose family arrived in 1849 and pioneered Vacaville orchards; Topleys, Gees, Hiltons, Horans (1869), Adens (1866), Mugridge (1852), William Gordon (1841 with Sutter and settled Gordon Valley in 1862). Greigs and McDonalds.

The list is endless, it seems. An historical writer from one of the Mother Lode counties recently said to this columnist: "Your Solano County should feel proud that you can trace a direct relationship with your hundreds of pioneers to present-day residents of your county; in our county we have a heritage of many great pioneers, but the descendants have all moved away."

Several anniversaries which occurred this past week passed almost unnoticed.

First, Mare Island's 110th birthday on September 16. Who can forget the tremendous 4-day, birthday party which Vallejo gave to Mare Island on Sept. 16-19, 1954—a short 10 years ago. Although all America lays claim to the immortal Farragut, he will always be considered a Vallejo pioneer; who lived with us for four years, and was a taxpayer on his Maine Street property for about 15 years.

Then, last week on the 14th of September, there occurred the 150th anniversary of the writing of the Star Spangled Banner by Francis Scott Key in 1814. We mention this because this, too, has a Vallejo connection. Key's daughter, Mrs. Anna Key Turner, wife of a Navy surgeon, lived here and died near here on Mar. 15, 1884. Her final resting place is marked by an impressive marble vault in the Mare Island Naval Cemetery, on the south end of the island.

Farragut found five island dwellers when he came to Mare Island on Sept. 16, 1854, as is indicated in his log (the original is still retained in Admiral Fahy's office on the yard):

"Sept. 16, 1854. Commander D. G. Farragut took command of the Island this day, and forthwith warned off all the squatters vz. Turner, Roy, Vera, Gilbert and Antonio Pinto. Weather very fine but warm. Thermometer 86."

But the next day Farragut brought squatter Vera back to the yard as an employe's job: dig a hole for the flagpole. Then, on Oct. 2, 1854, the National Flag was raised, and the USS WARREN fired a 13-gun salute.

OTHER ANNIVERSARIES

Yesterday, Sept. 19, marked the anniversary of the launching of the Monitor MONADNOCK in 1883 from a Vallejo shipyard near the foot of Pennsylvania Street, less than a block from Steffen's Marine ramp where hundreds of pleasure boats are launched daily. 'The MONADNOCK builders, Vanderbilt and Secor, were bankrupt and Commandant Kempff sent a tug to Vallejo and hauled the monitor to Mare Island. It was not until 1896 that the MONADNOCK was completed, Congress was hesitant about appropriating money for Civil War type relics.

Today, Sept. 20, marks the anniversary of the opening of Mare Island's first cafeteria, in 1913. And tomorrow, Sept. 21, marks the date that trains first traveled to Mare Island on rails. On that date the tracks were completed on the first (wooden) causeway in the year 1920. Prior to that time freight cars were carried by train-ferry; earlier, all loads had to be shifted to barges and towed over.

Next Friday marks the 110th anniversary of the start of construction of Mare Island's first shop. Farragut, on Sept. 25, 1854, had his laborers begin digging for the foundations of the smithery. Today this is Building 4C, the Pipe Shop, where Irwin H. Whitthorne is group master. "Irv" apparently likes this building, for this is where he began work for the shipyard 56 years ago! Irv is Mare Island's outstanding career employe; he is the dean of all civil service employes throughout the entire Navy; he is one of a handful of individuals in this nation who has been awarded the Defense Department's Distinguished Civilian Service Medal.

And he has earned it!

Here's another "pioneer."

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