

October Leaves

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, October 11, 1964

Every month has important anniversaries of local interest. Three of Mare Island's nuclear-powered submarines were launched in October: THEODORE ROOSEVELT, a polaris-firing boat, on October 2, 1959; the attack A-Sub SCAMP on October 8, 1960, and the first Mare Island A-Sub, SARGO, on October 10, 1957.

In past years the month of October witnessed the launching of the conventional submarines TINOSA, TUNA, TRIGGER and TILEFISH. The destroyers PERRY, DECATUR and HASTINGS, likewise.

It was on Oct. 25, 1916, that the keel of the battleship CALIFORNIA was laid in the shipyard, with a full holiday on both sides of the channel, and a parade up Georgia Street that evening. The first warship built on the Pacific Coast, the gunboat SABINAW, had its keel laid here on Oct. 28, 1858, and was wrecked almost exactly twelve years later, on Oct. 29, 1870, on Ocean Island in the Pacific. The cornerstone of Mare Island's naval hospital, now the Naval Schools Command, was laid on Oct. 12, 1869; and the first chapel in any Navy yard was dedicated as St. Peter's on Oct. 13, 1901. We are also reminded that Mare Island's first master mechanic, the master blacksmith, was appointed by Commandant Farragut on Oct. 3, 1854; his name was King.

MORE AUTUMN LEAVES

The fire which almost engulfed Green Valley two weeks ago brings us to the burning of the first flour mill in that valley, 97 years ago.

The Vallejo Chronicle of that era reports: "The well known Dingley Mill, situated at the head of Green Valley, was completely destroyed by fire last night. The mill was built by the late George Dingley seven years ago, but since then the ownership was transferred to Jas. B. Townsend of San Francisco." The recent fire came within half a mile of these premises, now owned and occupied by the Art Garben, Sr., family. The stone walls of the structure built 104 years ago still stand, and some of the timbers still retain the char of that ancient fire. Incidentally, the citrus trees planted at that time are still growing and producing on this place.

Several other items appearing in the Vallejo Chronicle of 100 years ago include the following:

“The Vallejo Dramatic Society has under rehearsal the popular Irish drama, ‘Shandy Maguire, or the Bould Boy of the Mountains’. The Dramatic Society was organized in 1859. Present officers are James Veeder, Lawrence Cook, Thos. Grennan, James R. Lee, Thos. Casey, Peter Gaffney, G. A. Wall, Jos. M. Shea, A. Gorham and John Dunn.”

Also, “The editor acknowledges two complimentary tickets through the politeness of Mr. McGettigan to the second annual ball of the Emmett Circle, Fenian Brotherhood, at Eureka Hall, on the 18th. Supper will be provided by Mrs. Gorham.”

The most important news item in this edition of 100 years ago was the proposal to build a west side canal from Tehama County down to Solano. Just recently Congressman Leggett advised his constituents that the west side canal will now be included in the Central Valley project! If we’re patient, it will come.

OLD BOOKS

Friendly readers are very kind in sending to this columnist, numerous old books on Solano County pioneers. Bit by bit, as opportunity affords, excerpts will be printed. One is a published diary, titled “Crossing the Plains in ‘49” by G. W. Thissell, loaned by Mrs. Melvin Hodgkinson, Redwood Apartments. Thissell was the wagon master of several pioneer trains from the East. One of his chapters deals with the departure, with the 1849 wagon train, of George Olinger of Milwaukee, with his wife and two small daughters, one only 18 months of age.

The other, 3 years of age, was the delight of the several Indian tribes they encountered. The Olinger family arrived in California on Sept. 16, 1849, and settled near Vacaville; later, they moved to Vallejo. The small, red-headed three-year-old later married Robert Hodgkinson, and their son George was a Mare Island career employe. Another pioneer Vallejo family was joined when George married Christina Greig. Their son Melvin passed away earlier this year. This is only one of numerous 115-year Vallejo families, and we will mention others in due time.

1,000 WORDS

Someone has said that a picture is worth 1,000 (or was it 10,000) words. Many of our thoughtful readers send us old-time pictures and perhaps, with the editor’s permission, they may sometimes be used in conjunction with this column. Yes, pictures are important. Our contemporary, Marion Devlin, could never adequately cover weddings, engagements, anniversaries, etc., without the camera. Certainly no words could do as much for such wonders as the pyramids, the Grand Canyon, or Niagara Falls, as a picture.

But this columnist takes satisfaction from the fact that words, too, can do an adequate (and sometimes, superior) job of describing subjects. Is a picture always worth 1,000 words? Well, let's see. The Twenty-third Psalm contains 127 words; the Gettysburg Address by Lincoln, 268 words; the short form of the Ten Commandments, 116 words; the complete Bill of Rights of the American Constitution, 461 words. These total only 972 words, and we still have 28 words to include the inspiring opening sentences of our Declaration of Independence.

No picture could paint or interpret the story of these documents.

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