

## Then, And Nowadays

By Ernest D. Wichels

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When one is interested in the earlier years of Vallejo and Solano County, it seems that every issue of the current Times-Herald or Evening News-Chronicle contains at least a dozen stories that lead directly to similar events some 50 to 100 years ago.

Yesterday (Saturday) the Mare Island Naval Shipyard inaugurated a new type of salesmanship in disposing of surplus or obsolete materials. This is a retail store, under the direction of Captain Ross A. Porter, (SC), USN, Supply Officer. Unquestionably the items—whether outmoded or surplus—will still be of modern vintage. But Mare Island has always been in the business of selling.

Just 50 years ago this month, in November 1914, Mare Island sold a real antique: the 100-year-old frigate INDEPENDENCE, hero of the engagements against the Barbary Coast pirates of Northern Africa. A Captain John Rinder bought the famous hulk for \$3,515, and on November 28, 1914, towed it to some mudflats in lower San Francisco Bay and there beached it and burned it for the copper it contained. No salute was fired from the yard batteries, as there had been when the INDEPENDENCE arrived in 1855 to serve Farragut.

The Mare Island band didn't even play Auld Lang Syne for a ship that had been so much a part of the yard for nearly 60 years. But, as Lieut. Cmdr. Lott reported in his "Long Line of Ships," a retired Navy musician, perched on the old El Capitan dock at the foot of Georgia Street, lifted a battered bugle to his lips and played "Nearer My God, to Thee."

Most of Mare Island's sales have been by sealed bids, but there have also been auction sales—notably the disposition of the equipment of the Paint Manufacturing Shop some five or six years ago.

Here is an item from the Vallejo Chronicle of July 17, 1900: "A sale of condemned stores which was held at Mare Island last week was the largest ever held there and realized in the neighborhood of \$93,000. The greatest lot of stuff was that from the Ordnance Dept.; hundreds of old cast iron guns were sold for old iron. Four of the guns were the 15-inch smooth bores of the old monitor Monadnock and brought \$400 each. A hundred thousand of shot and shell were also knocked down for \$70,000."

Your columnist served on the Mare Island "Board of Sale" in 1915 when the shipyard,

sadly, disposed of living creatures. They were four of the faithful horses in the fire department, which had just been motorized, and “Bud” and “Kid,” the beautiful matched greys which had pulled the Commandant’s high-wheeled phaeton for the last time.

## **PIONEER ROTARIANS**

This past week witnessed the passing of two Rotarians. W. Stanley Chisholm, for more than half a century a leader in the civic and business life of Benicia and Vallejo, and Harold Fountain—a well-known government agricultural inspector and local musician in the 1920s—passed on. Fountain will be remembered as one of a group, together with the help of the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, which organized the first Vallejo High School Band, and which grew so rapidly under the leadership of George F. Neill.

Stan Chisholm’s early affiliation with the Vallejo Rotary Club (he was president 1931-32) brings to mind the charter membership of the club when organized on October 31, 1921. Four of the original 21 are still on the club roster—Harry Handlery, Russell F. O’Hara, James V. O’Hara and William A. Widenrann. The names of Vallejo’s leaders 43 years ago will be recognized among those no longer with us: Louis Bauer, Daniel Brosnahan, Robert W. Brown, Albert Casper, Timothy V. Collins, Walter Crosby, Larton Denius, Jesse E. Godley, Peter Hanlon, C. Ferry Hatch, Dr. James J. Hogan, S. J. McKnight, John J. Madigan, Dr. Carson Magill, Charles E. Perry, Carlos B. Rookwood, and Thomas Smith.

## **ELECTIONS**

There were losers a hundred years ago, just as there were last Tuesday. Here is how the Vallejo Chronicle reported the defeat of Senator Gwin following the election of 1867: “Washington, D.C.— Ex-Sen. Gwin (R), late Duke of Sonora, is on his way home to California, having heard the results of the election in his state.” Incidentally, at this same election, General John B. Frisbie of Vallejo was elected assemblyman by 28 votes over William Aspenwall, the latter one of the owners of Mare Island from whom the Navy purchased the land.

## **FIRE DEPARTMENT**

One of the propositions approved at Tuesday’s election will give the Vallejo Fire Department new buildings and new vehicles. The appreciation of the fire laddies was just as sincere 100 years ago as it is today, and the need for new equipment just as critical. Here is the story, from the Chronicle’s annual report of 1869: “The Fire Department is composed of one Engine Company and one Hook and Ladder Company, numbering a total of about one hundred and sixty members, all volunteers. It is a

source of just pride to the firemen of Vallejo as well as to the public spirit of the citizens to be able to boast that the engines and their appurtenances are the private property of the members, and obtained through the individual energy of each. A project is now under way for the purchase of a greatly needed Steam Fire Engine. The Chief Engineer of the department is Philip Hichborn; Assistant Engineer, John King. The Foreman of the Hook and Ladder Company is Daniel Hussey; assistant, A. M. Street; secretary, G. F. Mallett.”

Please note: No bond issues in those days and about the only support from the tax rolls was the “free” water to fight fires.

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