

# Hoodlums, Then, Now

By Ernest D. Wichels

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Vallejo is being plagued with a rash of broken windows, damaged automobiles, purse-snatchings, and other acts of hoodlumism. A common observation is: "What is happening to our society?" or "How did this all start?" Apparently many people believe this is all new.

So we went back 70 years. We discovered that the City Council (then the Board of Trustees), the constables, the business people, and everyone else had identical problems.

At the trustees meeting of July 17, 1895, as reported in the Vallejo Chronicle of July 18: "A. B. Coombs informed the trustees that the nightly violation of order at the corner of Marin and Georgia streets should be stopped. My property is destroyed, continued Coombs, and when I seek to reprove the hoodlum element I have been most grossly insulted; the vilest language is used which is not pleasant to ladies and children who are constantly passing the point mentioned. From Marin to Sonoma streets the hoodlums have full sway. I have put up with it until forbearance ceases to be a virtue, and I ask the trustees to do something. The night watchman, Mr. Towle, needs an assistant; he does the best he can and he is a painstaking and careful officer."

We'll have more to say about this block on Georgia Street, later on.

## BEDEVILING THE CHINESE

In the Chronicle of Aug. 13, 1895, is this report:

"Unless some of the boys who are inclined to be destructive stop their nonsense it will not be surprising if a few of them land in jail. It appears that at the conclusion of the band concerts there is a desire to be destructive. The windows of Wah Kee's place of business on Georgia Street appears to be a target and they are continually being broken. The mischievous youngsters should bear in mind that the Chinese laundryman subscribes monthly to the band fund and assists in keeping up the entertainment and concerts.

There is nothing smart in kicking in the doors of the Chinese houses and doing other Damage. Wah Kee is entitled to as much protection from hoodlum as any other person and the officers state he will get it."

We'll add more about the concerts, too.

## **HOODLUM DEFINED**

Being intrigued with the historical origin of the word "hoodlum" we checked with several authorities. Surprisingly, we found that the word was coined as recently as about 1870, and that it happened right here in San Francisco. Oxford defines it as a "youthful street rowdy; a dangerous rough," an American colloquialism first seen about 1872.

Webster describes it as first used in San Francisco to describe gangs of toughs employed to beat up the Chinese, perhaps "back slang for Muldoon, name of gang leader."

## **MORE ABOUT GEORGIA ST**

Another item which came before the trustees at the July 17, 1895, meeting is summed up in this quotation: "Mayor O'Grady stated that the block on Georgia between Marin and Sonoma should be macadamized and that concrete sidewalks should be laid." "The block is one of the best in the city, said the mayor, and from what several of the property owners have told me, they would be willing to have such work done."

What a contrast! The best business block, albeit with dirt street and wooden sidewalks, and at the same time the rendezvous for hoodlums.

The same issue of the Chronicle likewise reported on a new development for the city bandstand. "A fine flag pole will be erected at the bandstand and the Stars and Stripes will float proudly from the structure on the evenings when the open air concerts are held. (These were the concerts from which the youths took off on their sprees.) The pole was presented by R.J.R. Aden who has been more than generous and to whose efforts our citizens owe a great deal for the successful carrying on of our concerts. Who will now volunteer to tender a 12-foot flag?" In the adjoining columns is a photograph of the bandstand-southwest corner of Georgia and Sacramento streets (where the Seevel Apts. stood) -with the flag flying. This was on July 4, 1899.

## **PLACES TO DINE**

In previous columns we've mentioned the dozen or more hotel dining rooms in Vallejo prior to the turn of the century. But there were others. In July 1895 this ad in the Chronicle: "North Beach House, W. T. Street, proprietor, corner Louisiana and Butte streets. One of the coziest places in Vallejo. Private rooms for families and pleasure parties." In those days this part of Vallejo was called "North Beach."

During this same period another popular entertainment spot was Weniger Gardens, out on Benicia Road in what was then called Cypress Knoll - near the intersection of Rice Street. It was operated by Charles Weniger.

But if you had a large family, and finances made it necessary to eat at home, you would relish this ad from the Chronicle in July 1895:

BROWN'S BAKERY, Virginia near Marin;

Think of it!

25 loaves of bread for \$1.

"Delivered to any part of the city."

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