

Seals And Shoplifters

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, December 13, 1964

Readers of earlier Vallejo newspapers saw items which seem strange to the subscribers of today, yet there is a great deal of similarity in some of the problems both then and now.

Here are two items from the Vallejo Chronicle of July 15, 1875: "The Vallejo fishermen caught a good many seals in their seines off the lower end of Mare Island. The seals enter the nets to eat the fish and are unable to escape. These are of a different kind from the fur seals of the north, and their pelts are worthless."

Fishing was a major industry a century ago; salmon was a principal product. Benicia had one of the largest fish canneries in the area, and the nets in the Carquinez Straits area were a problem to river steamers as late as forty years ago.

The other item in that edition was from the sports column: "A foot race between J. J. Smith and Louis Malley was to have come off near the city gas works Thursday evening for a \$5 side bet. The money was put up, but Malley failed to appear. While waiting for the appearance of Malley, Smith ran a couple of times against Thos. Wynne." In today's Times-Herald we'd find Dave Beronio giving this story a heading of "Vallejo Olympics."

CHRISTMAS SHOPLIFTERS

Today's merchants have their problems (sometimes solved by Municipal Judge Wallace Cox) with light-fingered shoppers. This is nothing new, and we quote from the Chronicle of Dec. 16, 1875. "All storekeepers expect to lose more or less articles that are taken from their counters by persons who get away with their plunder without much danger of detection. An expert shoplifter can frequently pursue the avocation very successfully for a long time and not get caught. But Mrs. S— of South Vallejo was not so fortunate. She will appear before Justice Dwyer charged with petty larceny. Constables found goods in her home which had been taken from Dannenbaum's (105 Geo.), Haas Bros., (145 Geo.), Smith Bros. Shoes, (126 Geo.), and W. H. Pettis Clothing (134 Geo.),"

Even pigs made news in those days. The Chronicle of Mar. 6, 1875, had this front page item: "A fine specimen of an English hog of the Devonshire breed could have been seen at the Dashaway Market (113 Geo.) this morning. The ship Dhawar brought him

from Liverpool.”

The Dhawar was a British ship loading wheat at the South Vallejo elevator, for England. The Chronicle, three days later, Mar 9, listed all of the ships - some clippers and some steamers - which had loaded at the South Vallejo elevators (Starr's Mill and Friedlander's) for the preceding nine months. They carried both wheat and flour. These totalled 66 ships! Vallejo in that year was second only to San Francisco as a shipping port on this bay.

OYSTERS AND SPUDS, TOO

The Chronicle of Mar. 13, 1875, enlightens its readers about the progress at Tomales Bay (Pt. Reyes Station, Inverness, Marshall, etc.) “An old oysterman is preparing to plant a bed of oysters in Tomales Bay on a scale which, if it doesn't succeed, will certainly test the feasibility of the scheme. It is probable that a starch factory will be put up near Tomales for which the enormous potato crop of that section will furnish the staple.”

The oysters are still there; seed oysters brought from Japan and raised to maturity here; some large beds are located between Pt. Reyes Sta. and Marshall. But there is hardly a spud outside of a family garden plot. However, in the Point Arena area small acreages produce huge tonnages of a special frying potato (for chips), and this activity is expanding south of Point Arena.

Another 1875 story, published in the Chronicle of July 13, gives an interesting sidelight to a bit of California history. “The astronomical observatory to be erected on this coast by Mr. James Lick, which was at first contemplated to be built on a mountain near Lake Tahoe, is likely to be built on Mt. St. Helena, in Napa Valley. Mr. Lick, while at the Vallejo White Sulphur Springs (now Blue Rock) recently visited Mt. St. Helena and thinks it a favorable location.” The Lick Observatory has for these many years been located on top of Mt. Hamilton, east of San Jose. We would like to know why Mr. Lick changed his mind.

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

December marks the advent of the Solano Democrat, whose first edition appeared on our streets on Dec. 4, 1869, and didn't survive too long, under that name. Vallejo's first newspaper was called the “Weekly Bulletin” established in the latter part of 1855 by A. J. Cox; it lived six weeks. Its size scarcely exceeded a sheet of foolscap paper.

The Vallejo Recorder was brought out by George A. Poor on Feb. 23, 1867; it was a weekly until June 20, then a daily until Aug. 30, when it ceased (having fulfilled its

object - a campaign sheet). But, on the 29th of Sept., 1868, publication of the semi-weekly Vallejo Recorder was begun, published every Tuesday and Friday.

The demise of the Recorder is succinctly told in this advertisement in the Chronicle on Mar. 4, 1875:

“A printing office for sale. The presses, type, furniture and material recently used in the publication of the Vallejo Recorder will be sold at 50% discount.”

The Chronicle itself was established as a weekly on June 29, 1867. We have quoted liberally, in the past, from its first two or three editions. The publishers were Messrs. Leach and Gregg. On Oct. 9, 1868 it became a daily. Shortly after, Frank A. Leach became sole owner and publisher. The Chronicle is nearing its centennial.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/767>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/767/>