

## Carols And A Blaze

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, December 20, 1964

In the days before automobiles, movies, TV or radio, many Vallejoans turned to their churches for Christmas Eve fellowship and entertainment. We chose 1878, at random, and here is what the weekly Chronicle of 86 years ago said, on Dec. 28:

"The boat from San Francisco Christmas Eve brought one of the largest loads of passengers ever seen on the route, as friends and relatives came to town for the anniversary.

"Among the places decorated were the business places of H. Connolly, J. F. Tobin, Joseph Brownlie, J. E. Williston, Harry Wilson, and Shirland and Fitzmaurice."

"One of the pleasantest and in every way most successful celebrations was at the Second Advent Church on Christmas Eve." Among the juniors on the program were Mamie Pennell, Jessie Pennycook, Henry and Tinnie Stahl, Henry and Nellie Jamison, and Ruthy Whitford.

"A very large assemblage gathered at the Baptist Church on Christmas Eve. John M. Williamson was Santa Claus."

"St. Vincent's Church was elaborately and tastefully decorated. The customary High Mass was not celebrated, but Christmas Mass in the early morning drew a crowd of votaries."

"Divine services were held at the Church of the Ascension on Christmas morning. The music was furnished by Mrs. Chamberlain, Nellie Wright, Joe Weill and J. W. Breed, leader. A children's party was held on Christmas Eve."

"There was very little drunkenness or disorder visible during the anniversary. On Christmas night two rival factions were parading the streets and at a late hour there was some promise of disturbance, but thanks to the vigilance of Marshal McDonald and other officers, no hostilities were opened."

### NO METHODIST PROGRAM

But there was one church without the ambition for a Christmas celebration. Nor with a church in which to hold one!

The tragic event was reported in the Chronicle of Dec. 14. 1878:

“Burning of the M. E. Church. At about half past seven o’clock Sunday evening, Dec. 8, as the Rev. E. I. Jones was beginning his sermon, Alex Brownlie and J. Crosson, who were in the congregation, observed a reflection of light near the ceiling. There was a large congregation in the building.”

“Soon it was known that the church was ablaze. Remarkable as it may seem, however, there was not the slightest manifestation of fear or apprehension. The audience quietly arose and filed out the aisles.”

“The church was a total loss. The organ was among the things saved. The fire department did a wonderful job, including the Neptunes, San Pablos and Frisbies, but the fire had too much start.”

## **VALLEJO’S FIRST CHURCH**

The Chronicle continues: “It was the first church erected in Vallejo. The church was built with money raised by subscription. Mrs. Farragut was one of those who took an active part in collecting the funds.”

“Although built as a non-denominational church, with Dr. Woodbridge of San Francisco as preacher, it soon was taken over by the Methodists, and the Rev. C. V. Anthony was the first pastor of their congregation.”

Two weeks later, in the Chronicle of Dec. 28, 1878: “The Masonic Hall has been generously offered for three months for the free use of the Methodist congregation and divine services will be held there regularly hereafter.”

In the adjoining column is a picture of this early church, loaned by Mrs. Violet Simmons, Grant street.

It stood on the site on Virginia street where Staats and Bell Furniture Store is now located; the two lots were donated by General Frisbie.

An early story is that Mrs. Farragut, an Episcopalian, tried for months to find enough followers of her inclination to organize an Episcopal Church. Failing in this, in 1855, she and her husband’s first commandant of Mare Island, led the program for the church we’ve just described.

The Ascension Episcopal Church was later organized, in July 1867.

## OTHER 1878 NOTES

Some of our avid duck hunters—Minis, Perkinses, Raahauges, Kenny, et. al., may find this item in Chronicle of Nov. 30, 1878, of some interest:

“Alex Boyd and Fred Deininger went hunting in Suisun Creek yesterday and in the morning shot and killed 113 ducks. Alex left the pond to go and look into another. Fred left to hunt a couple of crippled ducks and while he was gone a lot of raccoons attacked the pile of 113 ducks, and in a very few minutes destroyed the lot by partially eating and tearing them.”

And the Chronicle of Dec. 7, 1878, had this tall (?) story: “A monstrous pear, weighing three pounds and nine ounces, was sent by mail this past week by Robert Williams, rancher of Suisun Valley, to relatives in Boston.” I wonder whether up-valley pear growers Percy Neitzel, Ralph Mason or the Chadbournes can top this.

This columnist wishes for all readers, this holiday week, the merriest and happiest Season’s greetings.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/768>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/768/>