

New Year Eve Past Century

By Ernest D. Wichels

Sunday, December 27, 1964

We discover what our forefathers did during the New Year season by reading Farragut's log books, and looking over the early editions of the Vallejo Chronicle. How did the weather behave here 100 years ago today?

Farragut wrote: "Clear and pleasant; Susan A. Owen (a river boat) arrived with cord wood for the government; low 50 degrees; high, 62."

But on January 1, 1885, Vallejo had a real storm. Farragut wrote that "the brig George Emery broke her moorings and dragged her anchor over to the northeastern shore (Kentucky Street)." Also, "the bark Caledonia was blown on Commission Rock and still lies there."

Present day readers may not know of this "rock"—a hazard to all shipping in the channel until 1914, when the Army engineers took several months to blow it to pieces and remove it. It was in midstream, between Sperry Flour Mills and the Ammunition Depot.

VALLEJO NEWS

The Chronicle was not established until 1867—so we go back to 90 years ago, and tell you what the edition of December 31, 1874, said:

"Nearly 80 per cent of the navy yard employes will be discharged on January 1, 1875, because of the change of the national administration." Present day employes with civil service protection may find it difficult to realize that jobs changed hands when the national administration changed.

Prices may have been lower, 90 years ago, but apparently interest rates were better than those of today, as the Chronicle reports: "J. R. English, cashier of the Vallejo Savings and Commercial Bank gave notice that the annual dividend of 10 per cent to depositors will be payable on Jan. 15th."

Teachers were well paid—for the times. "The Board of Education met today and received applications for positions as teachers from Miss Maggie Tobin, Wiola Kimball, E. K. Hill and Levi Davis. Principal Simonton resigned, and Hill was appointed at \$125 a month. Isabella resigned as 4th grade teacher and was replaced by Miss Kimball at

\$35.”

FIFTY YEARS AGO

Even as recently as fifty years ago it is difficult to believe some of the things we read in the Chronicle of Jan. 1, 1915:

“The cost of constructing the proposed Vallejo-Benicia electric line will total \$86,500, according to a statement furnished the Vallejo Chamber of Commerce. The promoters were presented by Jos. J. Henry, President, and Abner J. Sevier, Secretary-Treasurer. The Vallejo Realty Board today endorsed the project.” What happened to this promotion?

The same issue said: “Blind pigs will be closed attr the 1st of the year. Possession of internal revenue license will be needed as proof of permission to sale of liquor.”

Two days later, Jan. 3, 1915: “Hon. Frank R. Devlin of Vallejo has been appointed Railroad Commissioner succeeding Lt. Gov. John M. Eshleman. He was sworn in yesterday at Sacramento.”

The New Year’s Eve festivities in Vallejo on Dec. 31, 1914 featured the drummers and buglers from Colonel Lincoln Karmany’s command at the Mare Island Marine Barracks. “They drummed out the old year, and blew in the new year,” according to the Chronicle.

The highlight of New Year’s Day, Jan. 1, 1915, was scheduled to be a return rugby match between the Vallejo High School team, under Manager Luchsinger, and the city team under Manager “Pat” O’Hara. The latter team featured such players as Pete and Coon Mini, Heegler, McCrane, George O’Hara, McInnis and Coleman. But the Chronicle of Jan. 2nd reported: “New Year’s Day was the dullest in Vallejo’s recent history. The two games proposed to be played were postponed indefinitely because of the wet weather.” And then, in another column.: “Home run O’Hara will pack bag and baggage this week and return to the University of California after a year’s absence. Pat says he may try for the job oftwirler for the varsity nine.”

LESS HAPPY NEW YEARS

But along with the happy new year celebrations, Vallejo has had a sad one or two. Thirty-two years ago, the tragedy is recorded in the opening paragraph of the Jan. 1st, 1933, Chronicle: “The Vallejo Elks Club was the funeral pyre for five, men when the historic landmark at Sutter and Virginia Streets (once General Frisbie’s home, and for years the Widenmann residence) was completely destroyed by flames at 5 a.m. this

morning. The victims were Ed J. Geering, Geo. B. Swasey, E. A. Fogarty, Frank Wiggins, and W. H. Mitchell. One survivor, Tom Gaffney, Mare Island draftsman, was badly burned and is in the local hospital. Two escaped without injury, Milton H. Cutler and `Dad' Powers.”

The writer has just received a Christmas greeting from Tom Gaffney. For several years he has been residing in Malaga, Spain, and makes extensive trips from this present address. Tom is, perhaps next to our touring Ozzie Hilton, the most travelled Vallejoan—at least in recent history. His present “tour” began in 1961, and he has lived in England, Spain, Canary Islands, Brazil, Uruguay, Valparaiso, Argentine, South Africa, and stops in Gibraltar, Cadez, and all along the East Coast of Africa. Previous trips have taken him to Japan, New Zealand, Australia, India, Algeria, Ireland, Germany, Malaya, Scotland, and the Scandinavian countries. Most of this was buttoned Lip in two trips around the world.

A Happy New Year to all!

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