

SOLANO HISTORIAN





Solano Historian

The *Solano Historian* is published twice yearly at Vallejo, California, by the Solano County Historical Society.

Edited by

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and Robert Allgood.**

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The purpose of the *Solano Historian* is to stimulate the enjoyment and preservation of history by publishing pictures, stories, articles, and letters furnished by its readers. Much valuable material that would flesh out our knowledge of the past is lost each year because those who might save it either do not realize its value or lack the motivation to take any immediate action. The *Solano Historian* will supply the motivation by showing there is an appreciative audience for such material and that people are intensely interested in items relating to their own background, that jog their memory, remind them of memorable events, and satisfy their curiosity.

Readers who furnish material for publication will find they are amply rewarded by their own feeling of satisfaction and the recognition earned by their contribution.

The *Solano Historian* is now soliciting material of Solano and North Bay interest for future issues. More details concerning this may be obtained by contacting President Mary Higham or Lee Fountain. Comments on this issue are also welcome.

The Society does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of statements or opinions of contributions although every effort is made to be historically correct.

Solano County Historical Society
P. O. Box 922, Vallejo, CA 94590

On the Cover

Preservation and restoration of fine old Solano homes are vital concerns of the Solano County Historical Society. The Monterey Colonial on Green Valley Road, known at different times as the Stiltz house and the Jones home, was open, empty, vandalized, and being used by transients in 1983 when the Solano County Historical Society solicited the efforts of the Sheriff's Department, the absentee owner, and preservation experts.

After a year of quiet work the significance of the house was established. Meanwhile the house had been sold and the new owner set about saving the structure. Now the venerable ranch house which contains an early adobe under a portion of its clapboard exterior is beautifully restored. Its gleaming white exterior, new roof, and pillared verandas make it a treasure for the entire valley.

Ernest Wichels in his column "Pages from the Past," August 20, 1967, quotes Dorothea Jones, owner of the home at that time, "One of the first non-Indian settlers in the Valley was the John Stilts family who bought a good portion of their land from General Vallejo. Stilts also purchased one of the first prefabricated houses that came around the horn in 1847...He built it near an adobe which was on the property."

Actually the adobe is incorporated into the house as a summer kitchen. Few people have been aware of the hidden adobe. Historians have not determined the origin of the rubble stone structure, but rumor has it that it may be the adobe General Vallejo had built for a contingent of his soldiers.

The interest of the Solano County Historical Society acted as a catalyst to start appropriate preservation measures to save this important ranch home. It is unfortunate this pattern of concern was not evident when the Hastings House in Benicia was destroyed. Read the story about Benicia's mansion elsewhere in this issue of our *Historian*.

About Our Authors

Eileen Hogan DeLaMater is a native Vallejoan and member of a pioneer family. Although an avid traveler, she has lived here most of her life. She taught elementary school to several generations of local school children. Her quiet expertise on things "Vallejo" make her a resource person for inquir-

(Continued to page 16)



Dear Members:

It gives me great pleasure and a profound sense of pride to add a message to our Society's very first journal.

This issue is the result of the foresight of our Past President and Editor Lee Fountain and her committee. Many of you may recall when the first thoughts were put into action. Last year at our annual Christmas party, Lee spoke to our members regarding the collecting of material for a publication. Now, after nearly a year, a goal has been realized. A sincere thank you to the committee members and the contributors for bringing our goal to fruition. We present this work to our members and readers with pride. What better way to celebrate our thirtieth anniversary!

The Society has a busy year planned. We look forward to seeing you at our scheduled programs. The Christmas party committee is hard at work to bring you the merriest Christmas party ever. General meetings will be held at three of our county's museums, which are always in full operation and offering many exciting exhibits. Please join in giving support to our museums; they are the backbone of local history.

During the summer it was learned the historic Waterman house in Fairfield is being restored and occupied by the new owner and his family. We are invited to tour the old house when the February meeting is held in the adjacent renovated barn. We are lending our support in placing the house on the National Register.

Many future projects and ideas suggested by the membership are still in the planning stages. With your continued support and cooperation, these too will become achievements we can be proud of.

Mary Higham
SCHS President, 1985-86

General John Frisbie, Solano Entrepreneur

by Thomas Lucy

John Frisbie was not only the founder of the city of Vallejo, but also one of the builders of California, and in later life a dominant figure in Mexico. He was the patriarch of the American colony of successful industrial promoters in Mexico.¹

He was born in Albany, New York, on May 10, 1823. After attending the Albany Academy, he and another student, Leland Stanford, later famous as a railroad magnate and governor of California, studied law with a prominent lawyer in that city. Frisbie enjoyed a lucrative practice, and in 1846 was elected captain of the Van Rensselaer Guard, acknowledged to be the best drilled in the state.^{2,3}

During the Mexican War Frisbie recruited a company which joined the New York Volunteers under Colonel J. D. Stevenson for duty in California, arriving in San Francisco, March 5, 1847. Captain Frisbie was given command of the Sonoma Barracks in 1848 and remained there until mustered out on August 25, 1848.⁴

After his discharge, Frisbie persuaded General Mariano G. Vallejo to open stores in Sonoma, Napa, and Benicia to outfit the miners. In 1849 he ran a mercantile brokerage in San Francisco with his brother Eleazer, and in the same year established a home in Benicia where he was engaged in the sale of property and cattle.^{5,6,7,8}

Even though he was not a delegate, Frisbie took part in the Constitutional Convention of 1849 held in Monterey and helped develop the political future of California. He ran for lieutenant governor, but lost to John Mc Dougal.⁹

In 1850 General Vallejo gave Frisbie power of attorney over all his claim to Suscol Rancho, which amounted to 84,000 acres in the present Solano and Napa Counties, allowing him to bargain, grant, and sell land on the Rancho. Frisbie sold substantial portions of the claim to San Francisco capitalists who with the aid of Frisbie and Vallejo made the new city of Vallejo the capital of the state.^{10,11}

In 1851 while residing in Benicia Frisbie was promoting the sale of property in Vallejo among capitalists and the general public. On New Year's Day of 1851 he was the Speaker of the Day



John Frisbie at his prime.

at the first celebration of the Society of California Pioneers in San Francisco, and he was on the first Board of Directors of that organization. On April 3, 1851, he married Epifania Vallejo, eldest daughter of General Vallejo. An attendant at the wedding was Colonel Joe Hooker, who was to command the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War.^{12,13,14}

While Frisbie was busy in Vallejo and Benicia, the United States was investigating sites for a Pacific Coast naval base. A commission appointed by the United States Government decided to locate a navy yard in Sausalito, but Frisbie lobbied for a new commission, which after a thorough investigation, recommended Mare Island.¹⁵ The government purchased Mare Island in 1854 for its west coast navy yard. Frisbie was therefore instrumental for both the state capital and the navy yard being located in Vallejo.

In the spring of 1853 Frisbie and his wife left for New York where he sold portions of General Vallejo's Suscol and Petaluma properties. When they returned to San Francisco early in 1854 they boarded with the Thomas Larkin family.¹⁶

General Vallejo deeded the Town of Vallejo to Frisbie on December 9, 1854, for \$25,000,¹⁷ and for the next twenty-

two years he promoted the City of Vallejo, engaging in enterprises with energy, perseverance, and sagacity. By 1876 he had invested in a livery stable, the Maine and Georgia Street wharfs, a wharf in Contra Costa County, schooners on the Bay for transporting freight, the Vallejo Water Company, the Vallejo and Benicia Telegraph Company, the Pacific Insurance Company agency, the California Pacific Railroad of which he was vice president, the Vallejo-Sonoma Stage Company, the Vallejo Building Association, the Vallejo Grain Elevator, the Vallejo Savings and Commercial Bank of which he was president, the Vallejo Coal Mining Company, the Emma Mine in Utah, Vallejo Land and Improvement Company in partnership with Leland Stanford and others, the Vallejo Gas Light Company, the Russian River Water Company, the Vallejo Tanning Company, the Vallejo Boot and Shoe Company, a ranch outside Vallejo, and the Vallejo Dock Company.¹⁸

In 1860 Frisbie chartered the ship *Oracle* to ship wheat grown near Vallejo to Liverpool, the first shipment of wheat overseas from California.¹⁹

In 1861, to help secure California for the Union, military units were formed throughout the state. One of these, the Vallejo Rifles, was mustered in on September 8, 1861, with Frisbie appointed the first captain of the unit. He was appointed to the rank of general by Governor Leland Stanford in 1862, a title which was to remain with him for the rest of his life.^{20, 21}

Frisbie was the heaviest taxpayer in Solano County during the period from 1867 to 1875 and was also a heavy taxpayer in Napa County.

Frisbie purchased the White Sulphur Springs, now known as Blue Rock Springs, in 1869 for \$30,000 and spent large sums of money renovating the park, making it one of the finest in the state.²³

In 1871 Frisbie, in order to further promote the City of Vallejo, offered parties who would furnish one-fourth the capital and establish manufacturing of any description in Vallejo a loan on the balance at ten percent.²⁴

He was generous in his donations of land for churches, schools, and for civic purposes. He gave land for the original Methodist Church on Virginia Street, the first Catholic Church on Marin Street, the second Catholic Church (St. Vincent Ferrer) on Florida Street, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Advent

Christian Church. He donated land on York Street for the Baptist Church but the Baptists chose to build elsewhere. His other donations included lots for public schools in Vallejo and South Vallejo, for a cemetery on the Benicia Road which in 1859 was divided into the present St. Vincent and Carquinez cemeteries, and one square block of land for a city park.^{25, 26 27}

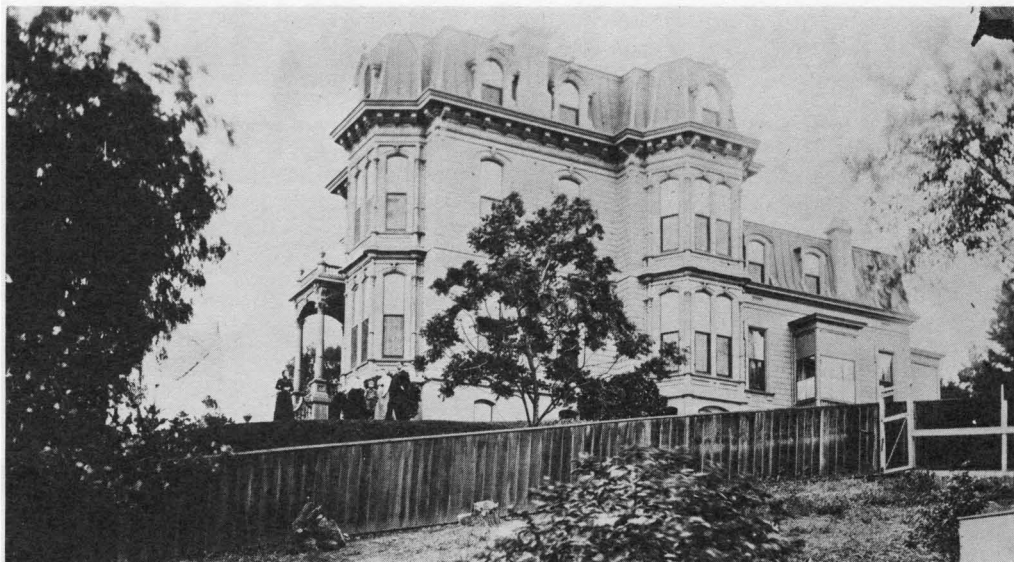
One of Frisbie's most important contributions toward improvement of Vallejo was the Bernard Hotel which was completed in 1872. The hotel, one of the finest in the state, had eight stores on the street level and forty rooms on the second floor.²⁸ In 1876 the Frisbies moved into the magnificent residence he had built at the corner of Sutter and Virginia Streets in Vallejo.²⁹

General Vallejo had purchased the Suscol Rancho from the Mexican Government in 1844, but after the Americans' take-over of California there were many who questioned Vallejo's claim to the Rancho, thereby triggering a run on the Rancho by squatters. Frisbie devoted much of his time for fifteen years before the Land Commission, the Courts, and Congress attempting to secure his claim and to eject the squatters.

In 1862 Frisbie and his associates persuaded California Representative John Phelps to introduce a bill in Congress which would enable those who were in possession of land purchased from a discredited Mexican claimant to preempt it at the government price of \$1.25 an acre. The bill was tabled. They tried again in 1863. This time they won a major victory when both houses approved the Suscol Bill on March 3rd. It was not until 1867 and 1868, however, that patents were issued by the United States Government and signed by President Andrew Johnson granting the City of Vallejo and portions of the Suscol to Frisbie and purchasers from Frisbie.³⁰

In 1867 Frisbie was elected California state assemblyman in a bitter election, serving one term.³¹ In 1871 he was elected to the Vallejo Board of Trustees and was selected president of that body.³² In 1873 and 1874 he was one of the leaders in a scheme to move the county seat to Vallejo, agreeing to donate land for county buildings. Although the move was approved by a majority of voters of Solano County, it was killed by the State Legislature.³³

Frisbie had embarked on many and important enterprises in Vallejo and elsewhere. These required expenditures of large sums of money, much of



Frisbie Mansion, later the Widenmann home, and still later the Vallejo Elks Club until it burned in 1933, was built on the corner of Virginia and Sutter Streets. The group posed in the garden are possibly members of the Frisbie family.

which was borrowed. Some of these investments proved remunerative and others did not. He held 18,000 shares in an extension scheme for the California Pacific Railroad, a \$50,000,000 corporation promoted with a view of building a network of railroads in the coast states.^{34, 35} Because of the collapse of this grand scheme, the Vallejo Savings and Commercial Bank closed its doors on September 28, 1876, and went into liquidation. To satisfy his debt Frisbie sold all his holdings, including his home, the Bernard Hotel, the White Sulphur Springs, and all his other property. In addressing the depositors he stated that the assets of the bank exceeded liabilities. His statement proved true as no depositor lost any

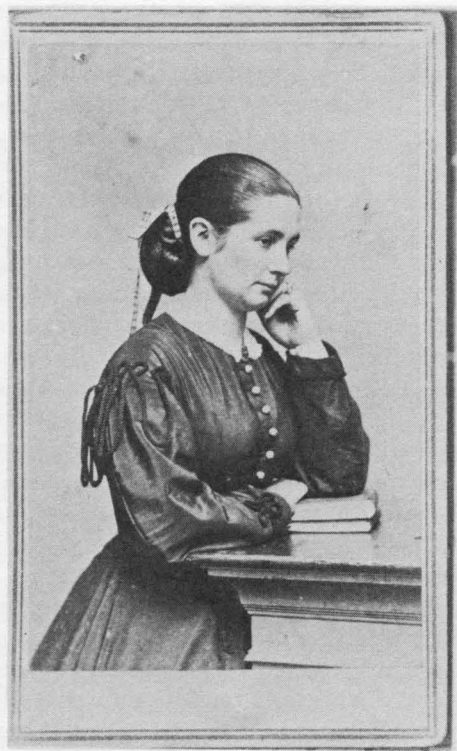
money and the bank reopened.³⁶ Frisbie, however, had lost everything.^{37, 38, 39}

Frisbie borrowed money from his brother-in-law Patrick Lynch for funds to visit New York with the hope of reestablishing himself financially. The press dispatches announced his arrival in New York on November 4, 1876. While in the east he made plans to visit Mexico to determine if there were opportunities for him to recoup his fortune.⁴⁰

Rutherford Hayes was president at the time. His administration did not recognize Porfirio Diaz as the President of Mexico and had plans to annex the northern states of Mexico. The State Department upon hearing that



Commercial building built by Frisbie and called variously Bernard Hotel and Bernard House. It was on the S.E. corner of Sacramento and Georgia streets where Levee's store was, and is now called Georgia Street Plaza.



Epifania (Fannie) Vallejo before her marriage to John Frisbie, her father's trusted associate.

Frisbie was going to Mexico and that he was taking General Vallejo with him, asked him to check into the situation there. Rumors in the American press that Vallejo and Frisbie were in the northern states of Mexico as secret agents for the United States proved to be false. While in Mexico Frisbie won the friendship of Diaz and agreed to represent him in Washington to see if he could resolve the problems between the two countries. Proceeding to Washington with a letter from Diaz, Frisbie was told by the Secretary of the Senate that there would be war between the two countries. Frisbie met the congressional delegation for California, Nevada, and Oregon and prevailed on them to adopt his view favoring recognition of the Mexican Government. An attempt was made at this time by the State Department to discredit Frisbie with the Mexican agent in Washington because they believed he was gaining concessions from Diaz of a personal nature. They failed in their attempt. Frisbie met with Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York, who was also a native of Albany, in a long session resulting in the senator introducing a resolution in the Senate asking for a committee to look into Mexican affairs. A similar resolution was introduced in the House, and a clash with the Hayes Administration commenced.^{41, 42, 43, 44, 45}

Frisbie left for Vallejo but received a

telegram from Senator Conkling calling him back to Washington to appear before the congressional committee on Mexican affairs. Appearing before the committee Frisbie spoke for an entire day favoring the recognition of Diaz.⁴⁶ He then returned to Vallejo for a short visit and returned to the east coast on January 18, 1878, with three of his daughters. The rest of his family joined him there after settling their affairs in Vallejo, and all proceeded to Mexico.⁴⁷

With his family settled in Mexico, Frisbie, now fifty-four years old, began a new career. The Hayes Administration at last recognized the Mexican Government, so Diaz, grateful to Frisbie for his part in the affair, gave him an abandoned gold mine in addition to a large fee. Frisbie had secured a concession from the Mexican Government to build a railroad from Mexico City to Cuernavaca. He was in the employ of the Huntington-Stanford Railroad and an agent for the Pacific Steamship company in Mexico. He became involved in mining, and in 1879 was in New York selling bonds in his mining company.^{48,49,50}

Mrs. Frisbie was a frequent visitor to Vallejo, usually accompanied by one or more of her children to enroll them in California schools. Not fond of Mexico, she returned to Vallejo in 1899 and purchased the home her husband had built in 1876.^{51,52}

Frisbie joined her in the winter of 1899, his first visit to Vallejo in twenty-one years. He organized the Citizen's Bank of Vallejo, which was incorporated November 29, 1899, holding 910 shares out of a total of 1000 shares and was president of the bank. It was the intent of the Frisbies to remain in Vallejo but their plans did not materialize. They returned to Mexico.⁵³

In 1901 the Frisbies celebrated their golden wedding anniversary at their San Nicholas Rancho, a sugar plantation. In the same year Frisbie sold his El Oro mine to an English syndicate for \$1,000,000, retaining his interest in another mine.⁵⁴

When Frisbie died May 11, 1901, at the age of eighty-six, he was worth over \$1,000,000. He had interests in railroads, banking, stock raising, dairy farming, sugar mills, and an electric light and power company. At the time of his death he was survived by three sons and four daughters, all married and all residents of Mexico. There are many descendants in Mexico today.^{55,}

^{56,57}

There are many memorials to Frisbie, but perhaps the most appropriate



Fannie Frisbie, although still young, in deep mourning after the death of a child.

is from the *Benicia Tribune*, reprinted in the *Vallejo Evening Chronicle* on February 18, 1874, which read "Never was a city more indebted to one man than Vallejo to Captain Frisbie."



Lighthouse Alert

Lighthouses have recently become the center of national attention for preservationists. One by one these precious structures that have sent out their life-saving beams for generations have been allowed to die — by storm, by neglect, by vandalism, and by replacement — as the men and women who tended the lamps, lenses and fog horns were replaced by automation.

Today there are keepers at but 30 of the roughly 500 light stations still standing in the United States.

A new national organization for the preservation of extant lighthouses has emerged. The famous Fresnel lenses are being saved and restored, and local groups are being organized to save the structures.

The recent Northern California History Symposium held in Crescent City centered around local lighthouses. While heavy seas prevented close approach to St. George's Lighthouse, all attendees were able to visit Battery Point Lighthouse, still manned by a devoted couple.

The Village That Vanished

A Suisun Valley Tragedy

by Evelyn Lockie

The following story is written from a tape made when Evelyn Lockie spoke before a California Historical Society tour of Solano County during its luncheon break at Joshia Wing's restaurant June 2, 1981. The story begins after a few introductory remarks.

I was somewhat shocked to learn how few people nowadays remember Chinatown, a village of several hundred that stood on the shores of Suisun Creek near Rockville. It was on the old Hatch Ranch, so well organized it was destined to last forever, but on a bright August day in 1928, a sudden tragedy brought it to an end. Today it is forgotten; the majority of the residents hereabouts, meaning Suisun Valley, never heard about it. Those who do remember it have put it out of their minds. To me, it remains a vivid memory. I suppose it could be called

“living through history”, so I am writing down this story as my contribution to Solano County history, to tell you a bit about Chinatown and a bit about the great influence the Chinese had in the settling of our valley.

To begin with, why did the Chinese come here originally? Most of them came from the province around Canton. By 1848, 49, and 50 there had been much political upheaval in China, and then there were crop failures for several years in succession. And then came news of the great gold strike in California. News crossed the Pacific by ship almost faster than it reached the east coast of the United States. Canton was a huge port with lots of ships which offered low fares; sometimes a mere \$40 could bring one to the Gam Saan or the “gold mountain” as Cali-

fornia was known to the Chinese. When more and more laborers were needed, free fares were offered. The men and boys of the families came first, the women nearly always being left behind in China.

And so they came, all expecting to get rich quickly. They worked hard and long. And because they were so strange with their baggy trousers, loose cotton jackets, dark olive skin, and their hair in long pigtails, much abuse was heaped on them. In gold mining, although they were successful, even inventing the famous sluice box, they were outrageously taxed as foreigners. In addition to mining, the Chinese did many other jobs, mostly menial work that the Americans wouldn't do.

Almost our first introduction to the Chinese in Solano County is the census tabulation of 1870 which shows a total of 441 Chinese here. All came directly from China. There were 14 farm laborers in Montezuma township, (that is where Collinsville is), 53 woodchoppers in Rio Vista township, 10 laundrymen in Dixon township, 13



Suisun Chinese community gathered to celebrate memory of Sun Yat-Sen in 1925, three years before the Leung murders. Most of the members shown here were still living in the encampment at the time of the tragedy.

Mrs. Wong is the tenth from the right in row one. Ruthie and Helen are the twelfth and thirteenth in the same row. Mr. Wong, superstitious about photography, refused to be photographed.

laundrymen and clothes washers in Suisun City, 90 woodchoppers in Green Valley, (address, Bridgeport), but there were 261 farm laborers in Suisun Valley.

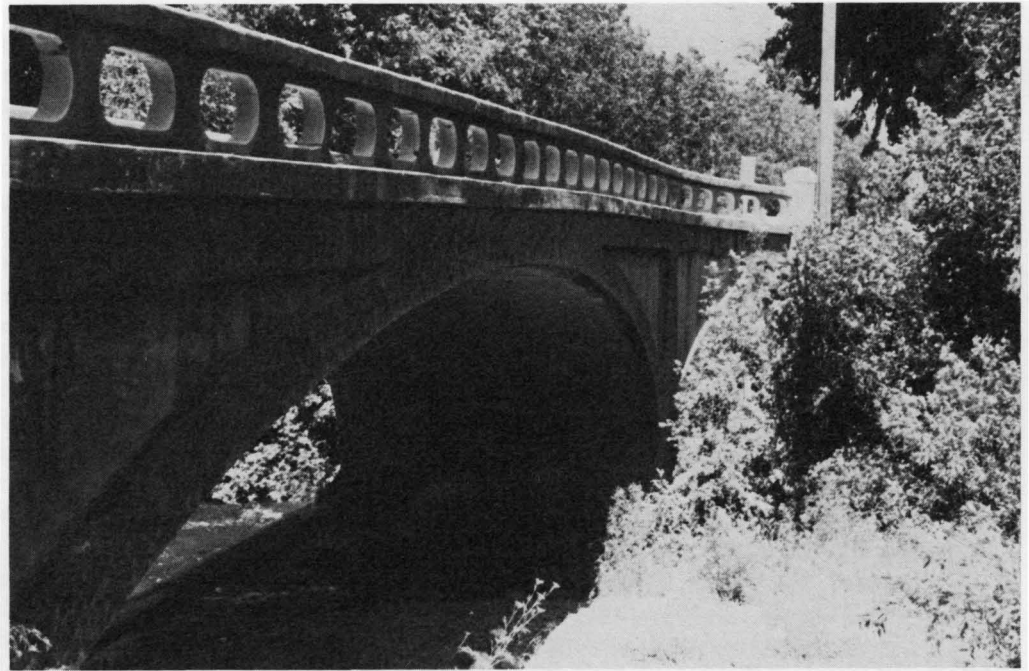
Today you can see many results of their labor--drive out to Grizzly Island where all the levees were Chinese constructed. Drive into Green Valley where all the rock fences were built by Chinese and are still as solid and substantial as they were more than one hundred years ago.

The construction of the western half of the transcontinental railroad is a story in itself, but its success rests on the backs of the Chinese. It was considered the outstanding engineering feat of the century, but when it was finished in 1869, there were 25,000 Chinese out of work and looking for new jobs.

They turned to every kind of work. They went into fishing, manufacturing, even shoemaking, both here and on the east coast. They did everything--housework, laundry work, cooking. Even we on the ranch had a Chinese cook when the fruit crops brought in a profit. I remember our cook so well. His name was Wong and he always made cake by mixing and beating the ingredients with his hands. He beat them and beat them and beat them. He turned out the most beautiful cakes you ever saw. And today I can still tell by the pie crust if the pastry cook in a restaurant is a Chinese.

There was nothing the Chinese did not do. They reclaimed swamp land, worked in vineyards and orchards, developed shrimp and abalone fishing. They clung together, followed customs of their own lands, living in Chinatowns. When they were able, they sent for wives and families. If they never were able to do that, they wanted their bodies returned to their native land for burial. And, oh yes, they opened restaurants.

In Suisun Valley practically everyone had a "Chiny" cabin, usually kept for the bossman. You would never know if he'd be there alone himself or if the place would be full to overflowing with his friends. Ours was over on Ledgewood Creek, the creek being the western edge of our ranch. I remember it as a rather small, dark cabin with a well and a hand pump outside. I don't remember ever going into it nor do I remember the bossman who lived there. Maybe it was because it was a mile from the house. But I used to make regular visits to the bossman who lived a short way across the pasture on the Towner ranch. I loved his cluttered up



Near the east end of this bridge over Suisun Creek on Suisun Valley Road was the concealed exit from the tunnel that connected with the opium den.

cabin and we used to talk by the hour. Once he had a brand new picture up on his wall and he told me that it was Sun Yat-Sen, the new president of China and that he was a great man. That must have been around 1912 as that is the year that Sun Yat-Sen took office.

Out on the banks of Suisun Creek, about a mile north of Rockville, was Chinatown. Houses, bunk houses, big stables for the horses, wagon yards, fruit sheds, all were part of the village. A good Chinese friend always insisted it was not a village, absolutely not a village but always a camp, but it included a store and a Buddhist Temple so that it seemed to take on the bigness of a village.

There were gambling rooms too as the Chinese were great for gambling. And it was whispered about that there might be a hidden opium den among the buildings. In other words, it was a place sufficient unto itself. Oh, yes, among the buildings were a number of bunk houses for the single men whose wives were in China. Each bunk house had a good number of wooden beds and its own kitchen and cook. Sometimes these houses were full, especially during the fruit season, and sometimes almost empty. Also there were laundry facilities where the single men as well as the families could do their washing.

When I was very small, I made many trips there with my father, driving in the spring wagon with a pair of fast stepping horses. My father and Wong Gee, the bossman, were good friends. My father raised hogs and the Chinese were his main customers. Too, we bought rice there. It came from China

in fifty pound ricks, sacks made from woven reeds. Papa and I would go into a sort of office for our business with Wong Gee. He always gave me a bottle of strawberry soda pop that was always warm. This was before the days when ice was abundant. Anyway, because I was unused to soda pop at all, I always thought it was a special kind of Chinese concoction. How I savored it, drinking it slowly to make it last, loving those biting tastes that soda pop brings, even to the tingling in the nose.

But most of all I remember Wong Gee coming to our house on Chinese New Years. He always brought a bulb plant, Chinese lilies mostly, in a beautiful pottery bowl for mother as well as a basket of jasmine tea. And there was always a little Chinese doll for me. How I loved those dolls with their straight black hair in bangs over their wee almond eyes and their dresses of brocaded silk. There were lichi nuts and such good candy; like sugared coconut strips, brown sugar candy, and sugared melon candy. Then there was my favorite special candy, the rich, rich almond cakes. One of the things I remember most about Chinatown was the swinging bridge across the creek. It was on cables and bounced with every step. No doubt it was easy to cross if one could adjust to the up and down motion. But the only time I tried it, I got to the center and I froze. There was nothing to hang on to as the cables swooped down to the walkway itself at the center. There I was, screeching at the top of my lungs, the creek below looking like a grand canyon. My father

rescued me but you may be sure that I never stepped on that bridge again.

So that was Chinatown, thriving and happily existing in 1928. In August of that year, as happened each August, it was augmented by many tents full of campers, all helping in the fruit harvest. Peaches were in full harvest and the days began at dawn and ended at dusk.

At that time I was the correspondent for the *Sacramento Bee* from Fairfield, and I received an early morning telephone call that all hell had broken loose in Chinatown. There were deaths by shooting, and for me to get there pronto if I wanted a grim story.

Knowing I needed help, I called Sacramento, telling them I needed a photographer and reporter, telling them I would meet them at the sheriff's office, and hurry. In less than an hour they were down and we joined the sheriff's deputy and reporters from Oakland, San Francisco, and Vallejo.

Our guide, the sheriff's deputy, knew the facts and gave them to us. A young Chinaman had gone berserk and murdered a number of people, including nearly an entire family. Hardly a question was asked. About the only noise was the scratching of pencils on notebooks, as we furiously wrote away, flinching at the more gruesome details.

All of Chinatown was in a state of confusion. People still seemed to be in a state of shock, with very little talking going on.

We first went to the old office where as a child I used to drink my strawberry pop. It looked the same, maybe a little dustier, and a little more bed-ragged, but our guide stooped over, flipped over a rug, and raised a trap door leading to a dusty room beneath, lit by a rather dim electric light globe. There was a short ladder and four bunks down there. "Here," said the deputy, "is where Wong Gee was lying having a pipe of opium before he went to work. And the way we reconstruct it, one of his men came down to get the orders for the day. Then a young Chinaman by the name of Leung Ying appeared with a sawed-off gun, shooting Wong Gee first, then the farm worker."

The bodies had been removed, but the blood, a lot of it, was still there. Wong Gee had never risen up but his companion had gotten halfway to the door. I stared at the blood, looked at the dim electric bulb giving light, heard the buzzing of a fly, and felt panic creeping into my being. The man continued, "Now here is the other exit," he

said, opening a door into a tunnel that emerged into Suisun Creek. The entrance from the creek was completely covered with vines. No one would ever guess that such an underground chamber as this existed. The long suspected opium den was just a little room, not much after all.

On we went to the laundry, where another man was killed, to the cutting shed where several lost their lives. And then into our cars to drive to Wong Gee's home, a half mile away. We talked practically not at all. We were too shaken; there was just so much blood.

The guide continued, "Leung got over here just as Nellie, Wong Gee's fifteen year old daughter, was coming down the front steps to go to school. He shot her in the abdomen." Nellie was gone. She was still alive at the hospital, but her books were there lying on the steps covered with blood. "They don't think she will survive," said the deputy.

Then he went inside. We followed. "This man met Mrs. Wong Gee at the door. She was carrying her ten-day old baby. He shot her. She fell to the floor and in her dying moment flung herself over the baby to protect it. He walked over to the crib where Johnny, four, was sleeping. He shot him. He must have run out of shells by then because

he picked up a cleaver from the kitchen table and split three-year old Willie's head. And then he grasped Mrs. Wong Gee by the shoulder, turned her over, and cut open the baby's head. He did not know that Ruthie and Helen, seven and nine years old, were upstairs still in bed. He had killed eight people outright and three more were believed dying, eleven in all, in barely no time at all."

We were through the gruesome recitation. We went out to our car. My *Bee* photographer pulled out a pint of whiskey and handed it to me. "Here take a slug," he said, "before you pass out. You are as white as a sheet". And I did, a heavy slug, and so did he. And I'm sure that was what got me back to normal. Somehow, somewhere along the way, I kept remembering little Chinese dolls dressed in rusty red brocade, the same color as all those pools of half-dried blood we had been seeing--and seeing.

The murderer was Leung Ying, a young Chinese of about thirty, if I remember correctly. He had driven away in Wong Gee's car. The proper bulletins were sent out and finally he was apprehended up near Grass Valley.

I remember when the sheriff and deputy brought him back the next day. There had been no word as to when



Chinese houseboys, wearing work clothes, in the garden of a Vacaville home.

they were expected, but there was a big crowd gathered at the jail entrance. Many Chinese. It was a scary moment, totally unexpected by the lawmen, but outside of mutterings softly voiced, nothing happened. It was with great relief that he was finally lodged in a cell.

Meanwhile there was a funeral. I had best tell you about that by quoting an article from the *Sacramento Bee*. "Chinese of Suisun Valley and the neighboring countryside as well as many from San Francisco and other cities gathered in Suisun City to bury their dead. Slowly they filed through the funeral chapel to gaze at the bodies of ten who met death at the hands of a drug-crazed maniac. (Nellie didn't die until five days later, after the shooting.) With reverence they looked upon their friends, from the aged man who, it is said, cried out to his dead mother in his last moments, to the wee ten-day old baby nestled in the arms of its beautiful mother.

"And the unemotional Chinese forgot they were unemotional. Tears rolled down the checks of men who probably had not wept since they were children. Sobs racked their bodies for there was not one amongst them that did not behold a close friend or relative among the slain. Revenge was forgotten. Only sorrow and sadness held sway.

"Then the caskets of those to be buried here were loaded in the six hearses. And car after car of both Chinese and white followed in line. Devil papers were stewn along the funeral line, a superstition of old China wherein it was believed the devil, being of curious nature, would stop to read each one, thus permitting time to inter the body before the devil reached the grave. To each person in the procession a coin wrapped in red paper was given, as well as a piece of Chinese candy, both ancient beliefs.

"When the peaceful Rockville cemetery was reached, closely tucked against the hillside and a mass of color from the myriad blossoms that fill it, the huge crowd gathered around the grave site with people mingling, white people mingling with the Chinese, for they had come to pay their respects to those who had won from them their esteem and admiration.

"Slowly the caskets were lowered into the six graves, side by side--Wong Gee, Mrs. Wong Gee and her baby, Willie, Johnnie, Wing Hong, and Young Gum Foon. (Later Nellie joined them, seven graves in all.)

"Then silence. Gone was the outburst of grief, and the stoic mask of the Chinese was readjusted back with one exception. Little nine-year Helen sobbed as her mother, father, and three brothers were lowered into their final resting place. And her arms stole around Ruthie, her seven-year old sister, as if to protect her from the fate of the others.

"A Chinese minister, holding a tiny Chinese Bible in his hand, began the services. In a soft melodious voice he seemed to speak an international language, for all present realized he meant his words for every one--the story of Christ and of the Resurrection--The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And then it was over.

As for Leung Ying, the murderer, after due trial he was sentenced to be hanged.

Why did he commit these murders? Well, as far as we could find out, and according to his own version, he had been the subject of much teasing. He was an ugly little man, whose face was deeply pock-marked, probably from small pox, and he wasn't too bright. The teasing irritated him. He found out that opium swept away his unhappiness and became addicted to it. As "hopheads" were not encouraged on this ranch, he couldn't get any opium, and this coupled with his being teased so much led his warped mind to the path of murder. He knew exactly who his targets would be and methodically went about disposing of them.

He was never once remorseful. The only regret he ever voiced was that he hadn't been able to find a certain elderly Chinese woman he wanted dead. In fact, he once propositioned the deputy at the County Jail that if he could be free long enough to find and kill this particular woman he could come right back.

Yes, he was sentenced to be hanged, but before that day arrived, he braided a towel and a strip of blanket into a noose and hanged himself on Death Row in San Quentin.

As for Chinatown--that was its end. In about six months no one was living there. Little by little the many buildings were either torn down or disintegrated.

Today (1981), some fifty-three years later, no solitary vestige remains. The little village of Chinatown has vanished from the face of the earth.



While Mary Higham and Donna Marie Girton were taking pictures of the Chinese graves in Rockville Cemetery, they met a Chinese woman putting flowers on the graves of relatives. After a friendly chat, Mary asked if she knew about the Suisun murders. She responded that her mother was nineteen in 1928, living at the camp, but was not present at the time of the murders because she had gone shopping early, something she ordinarily never did. She knew about the unpopular Leung. After talking with her mother who now lives in San Francisco, Mrs. Quan said the two girls, Helen and Ruthie, were spared because they slept in a small porch attached to the back of the house. The girls were later taken to San Francisco where they went to school and were graduated from nurses' training. They worked many years in their profession and are now retired.

Mrs. Quan loaned the Society the picture of the Chinese community taken in 1925 when almost every member of the Chinese community was present; however, Mr. Wong, who was present, declined to be in the picture.

The remains of those murdered in 1928 were later removed by the Teung Sen Ton Benevolent Society of San Francisco and buried at Colma.

The Historian recognizes the debt that Solano County citizens owe to columnists and writers of local history who have contributed to the knowledge of the County, the North Bay, and the land around the "inner Golden Gate." Ernest Wichels, Robert Power, Wyman Riley, Sue Lemmon, and Harry Gray have written well of our past. Their fine books, stories, articles and vignettes are an inspiration to the hundreds of second, third and fourth generation Solanoans who have family letters, diaries, stories, and pictures that hold the keys to many a fine story yet to be told.

Cordelia, When I Was Young

by Pearl Fowler

I was raised in Green Valley when all the trees and vineyards were young and green. I was surrounded by a green orchard of pears and apricots. It was three miles to Cordelia, my home town where I went to school and church. My brother drove the horse and cart to school for three of us. We put a sack of hay under the seat and tied it on for the horse's lunch. We picked up the neighbor's kids, three of them. One hung on behind and one sat on each shaft of the cart. Yes, six small kids can get into a cart.

There was always a center of interest in my young world. It was the old yellow depot with the post office opposite and the general store run by Peter Siebe and Sons nearby.

The store had groceries and rows of glass jars with candy in them. It had a pot-bellied stove, a coffee grinder, stacks of blue overalls, and bolts of calico. It had a warehouse joining, filled with sacks of beans, rice, sugar, flour, potatoes, chocolate, and a stack of daily papers. Every one read the paper as there were no T.V.'s yet. Such was our supermarket to date. The farmers charged their groceries until the crops came in and then they paid the bill.

Tall milk cans were perched beside the depot and the boys lounged around them until the train came in. Then the cans were put on a platform and wheeled into a freight car.

There were three hotels and four saloons. The two families running the hotels near the depot each had beautiful daughters. They would doll up, put on their hats and come over to the post



The Siebe store that had glass jars of candy, sacks of beans, chocolate, and daily papers.

office at train time. They got their mail and saw their friends. People of the valley drove down to get the paper and the mail.

The railroad track ran through the center of Cordelia and it is still there for freight trains. There was a gravelled road on each side of the track, (now paved), with ditches beside them. The sidewalks were gravelled and narrow. There was a row of houses along the gravelled walks. Most of them had white picket fences and luscious gardens with grape arbors. There were fields in back of the houses for a cow and chickens and a pig pen hidden.

There was Dunkers meat market, a saloon side by side and a dance hall upstairs where many dances and meetings were held. Also a small white Methodist Church and later a Lutheran Church. I attended a two-room grammar school with eight grades which I went through. We were promoted from one grade to another by written exams. On graduating from

the eighth grade there was a real program, a speaker and the presentation of diplomas.

The following year we could go to high school. We went by train from the Cordelia Depot to Suisun and walked into Fairfield. The train came from South Vallejo through Napa Junction to Cordelia where we all got on to go to Suisun.

We walked from Suisun to Fairfield's Armijo High School. We named the train "the old plug." The train went from South Vallejo to Suisun in the morning, then turned around at Suisun and went back to Vallejo. It carried most of the county officers, such as the tax collector, the assessor, the auditor, the district attorney and us, the high school kids. I have forgotten how they got to the Court House, but we walked all the way from Suisun and I suppose they did also.

Although Armijo building is still standing it has been changed to a Court House, and the walk is still there but the palm trees along the walk are towering over everything now.

The Cordelia Depot, the store, post office and meat market with the dance hall on top burned on one awful hot summer day.

I remember the winery on the other side of the hill from school. The wagons drawn by horses brought lug boxes of grapes from Green Valley vineyards owned by Pierce. They stopped the horses and let the kids climb on the back of the wagon to get a bunch of grapes. We got beautiful muscats, pinots, large purple grapes, and one called "sweet waters."

The vineyards of the upper Green Valley have all died and the lower ones

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GENERAL MERCHANDISE.

Groceries and Provisions, Dry Goods, Hardware, Glassware, Crockery
Cigars, Tobacco, Confectionery, Boots and Shoes, Paints
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Tackle. Large stock of Tinware

 Agricultural Implements at Lowest Prices.

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were just taken away recently. There is still one vineyard left. The old winery in Green Valley is gone as is the one in Cordelia. My memory is faint like the seventh carbon sheet of print, pale and fading but still there. And I remember the poem that we sang in school that began—

*When all the world is young lad
And all the trees are green
and ended—
God grant you find one face there
You loved when all was young.*

There is one face, or rather, place left in Cordelia I loved when all was young. The old Thompson Corner. It was Studer's Corner then. It too had a dance hall above it. The men still play cards there and use it for their social club. The fire department gives its dances across from it in a larger hall and the ladies still make cake for supper time for the dance I loved when all was young.



The Cordelia Station where high school students caught the train for Suisun.



The flourishing community of Cordelia had three hotels and four saloons as well as its railway station that

shipped out tons of fruit and nuts each year. Social life centered around the buildings at Studer's Corner.

John Frey and the Vallejo Water System

by Sally O'Hara Woodard

Experts admonish writers of history "not-to-begin-with-the-flood!" One, writing about water, is more tempted than others for, after all, the flood was of water, and water is the substance that makes life possible. The presence of water, plus a physiologically mild temperature, led to the start of the evolution of life on earth 1.5 billion years ago. And hydrogen was formed in the "big bang" 15 billion years ago. The stunning words of Genesis tempt us even more to carry our subject back to the creation of life, but we must resist.

We know that water covers about 70% of the earth's surface in the oceans, lakes, rivers, and glaciers. We know that 97% of earth's water, the oceans, is saline (salt) water and that only 3% of earth's water is fresh. Of this 3% fresh water, we know that 2/3 of it is locked in polar ice caps and glaciers and that the remaining 1/3 is found in ground water, lakes, streams, and in the atmosphere. It is this 1/3 of 3% — one percent of all earth's water—from which we draw our sustenance—our life.

What portion of earth's fresh water was available to those who first settled Vallejo? If we could have flown on high for a bird's-eye view of our land, we would be struck by the fact that Solano County was largely defined by boundaries of abundant waterways. In the north, Putah Creek (Rio do las Putas) leads the boundary eastward to the Sacramento River which carries it southward and thence westward to Suisun Bay and then to the Carquinez Straits and into San Pablo Bay. From there the Solano line proceeds northwest to where Sonoma Creek and Napa Slough enter the Bay. Running then due east across numerous islands and salt marshes, it crosses the Napa River at the northern end of Napa Bay at Slaughterhouse Point. It continues east until up in the hills of eastern American Canyon it proceeds northward, passing west of Elkhorn Peak, west of Wildhorse Valley, and through the Vacaville Mountains until it returns to Putah Creek.

Thus, water appears on all but one side of Solano County. Vallejo, near the southwestern corner of the county, fronts on the Carquinez Straits, on the

Mare Island Straits, and Napa River. Water, water, everywhere...?

If we had read the diary of Jose de Canizares, first sailing master of the *San Carlos*, written as he brought the first Spanish boat into San Francisco Bay, we would have gained some insight about our future water supply.¹ Canizares noted, as he neared Carquinez Straits from San Pablo Bay, that the hills were without trees and barren. Also, his boat was miles (four or five leagues) northeast of Vallejo at Suisun Bay before he found fresh water "that could be drunk." Of course! Vallejo's boundary waters are

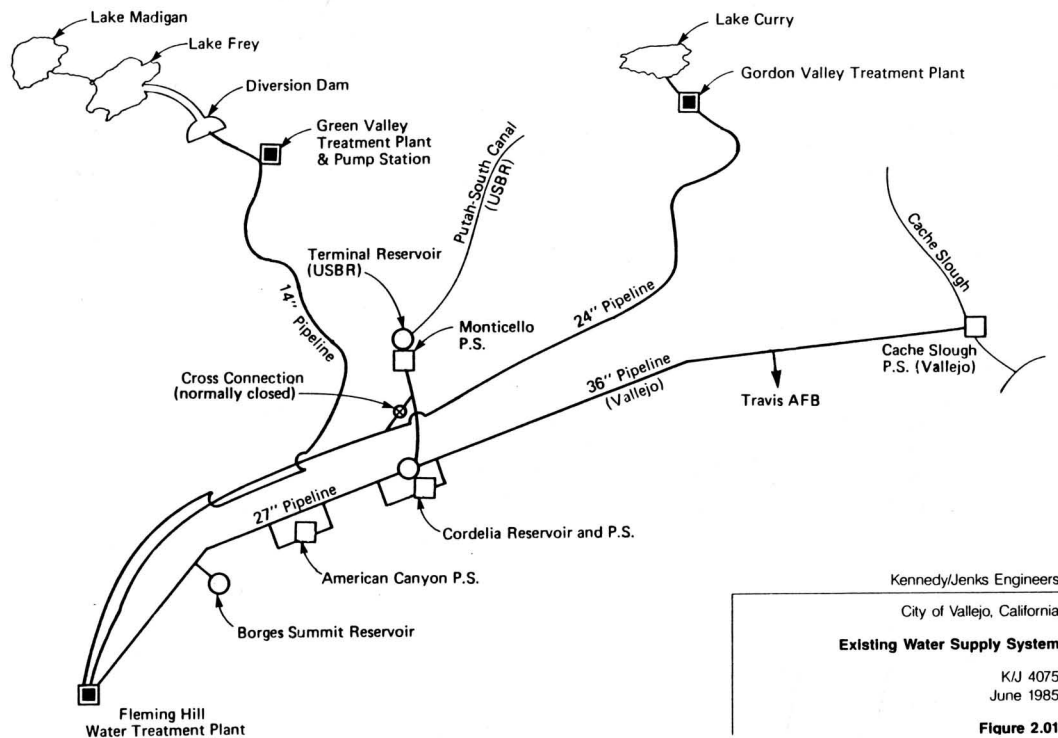
saline. Must the water supply then come from inland—from this land which appeared so dry to Canizares?

Again viewing from on high, we would have seen that there were no rivers or natural lakes in Solano County. We would have seen many small creeks or creek beds, but only nine that would seem sufficient for a water supply. Of these nine, five were north of or close to Vacaville. These were Putah Creek on our northern border, Sweeney, Ulatis, Alamo, and, to the west, the Pleasants Valley Creek. In central Solano County, Suisun Creek, rising in Napa County, flowed southeast to the salt marsh 1.5 miles east of Bridgeport (Cordelia), and Green Valley Creek with a watershed roughly between Wildhorse Canyon and Twin Sisters Mountain emptied eight miles downstream in Cordelia Slough at Bridgeport.

In southern Solano County there



Beautiful Green Valley Falls, the scene of many happy outings and picnics before it was secured as one of the primary sources of the Vallejo water system.



were but two streams appearing sufficient. Rising on the eastern (Benicia) side of Sulphur Springs Mountain was Sulphur Springs Valley Creek, which ran a southeasterly course through Sulphur Springs Valley and emptied into the salt marsh two miles north of the U.S. Barracks (at the Benicia Arsenal, the source for Lake Herman). In the Vallejo area was Sulphur Springs Creek, rising from the watershed of the western Sulphur Springs Mountain, coupled with the runoff from White Sulphur Springs, three miles east of Vallejo. This creek ran a westerly, then northwesterly, course, emptying into Napa Bay three miles north of Vallejo.²

It is the Sulphur Springs Creek which would later become the source for Vallejo's first water system. This stream "like all other Coast Range streams, is torrential in character. Their flow in summer time is almost negligible, though rising to floods in times of heavy rainfall. To equalize their flow and utilize them for water supply purposes, storage is necessary. Storage means reservoirs, transmission mains, distribution pipes--an entire networking system--a costly enterprise for a struggling town."³ It would be eighteen years from the time Vallejo became capital of the State of California in 1852 until Vallejo had its first water system. It would be twenty-two years from the date of its founding, 1854, that Mare Island Navy Yard would wait for its water supply.

Thus, Eden, Eureka, or Vallejo, as it has been variously called, relied upon ground water and rain water for over

twenty of its early years.

Ground water--natural underground reservoirs or storage basins--has several advantages over surface water storage. It is often cheaper; the water is filtered naturally by percolation; and there is little loss through evaporation. The basin also is a natural distribution system enabling water to be pumped out when needed. In 1975 it was estimated that 40% of California's water needs was supplied by these ground waters. The quality of underground water depends upon the balance between the amount filtering into the basin and the amount going out. With little rain or precipitation when the basins are not replenished and with excessive pumping, contamination by salt water intrusion in basins that are connected hydraulically with the ocean or other bodies of salt water is common.⁴ Such was the case in Vallejo's early years. There are many references to the harsh and brackish well water. In the dry season, the saline in the wells was intolerable in Vallejo.

The town depended heavily upon rain. Cisterns and water tanks were the best hope for pure water. The quality of the water stored in these depended upon the cleanliness of the container and the method of catchment. It was not easy to keep roofs and drains clean. Animalculae were continuous problems. Pollution from one's own earthclosets and those of neighbors ever threatened the cisterns and wells in the ground as did the occasions of tragic leakage. Water tanks, made of boards, were subject to rot and warp.

Evaporation lessened precious supplies.⁵

When the rain was heavy, the town suffered from endless mud. In dry spells, water was too precious to sprinkle the dusty streets. Water in those lean times became a luxurious commodity. Enterprising men brought water barges from Benicia, Contra Costa, and the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers where water was in better supply, and sold this vital substance by the bucket or the barrel.

For many years, Mare Island was especially dependent upon the water bargemen. In 1870 the Vallejo Directory commented on the Navy Yard, saying, "The arrangements for supplying the Yard with water are at present wretchedly defective. There is not a well in the Yard, and the inhabitants are compelled to use cistern water, not only for culinary, but drinking purposes. Some years ago an attempt was made to sink an artesian well (near the S.E. corner of Bldg. #45), but after boring some four hundred feet, the appropriation gave out and the work has never been resumed, although there is no doubt an abundance of water can be found if they go deep enough. The neglect of the Government, in this particular is the more striking when it is reflected that in case of war, should the Island be blockaded, it would be at the mercy of the enemy, who could easily cut off its present precarious water supply. One or more artesian wells are an imperative necessity, and should be sunk without delay."⁶

The hazard to the health of the residents was obvious. The growth and development of a healthy and prosperous economy were impossible without more and better water. The spectre of fire must have been haunting. The first two fire companies were formed in 1859 and 1865. In 1866 Vallejo suffered its first major fire. A poignant petition to the Board of Trustees in July, 1878, makes the reality very clear. One of the fire companies requisitioned the city "to replace the many tin buckets lost in fighting the last fire."⁷

Life was not easy in the early years, but Americans had already conquered a continent. Their spirit and enthusiasm were unquenchable. In the late 1860's Vallejo's population neared 6500. In 1869 the intercontinental railroad would be linked to the west. Vallejo became a city on April 6, 1868. The Civil War was over--many would look to the west for their fortunes. The Gold Rush was over--prosperity would now come from commerce. Vallejo stood at

the headlands of the "western Bosphorous, the strait of Carquines, the inner golden gate of San Francisco Bay...where much of the wealth of the country would flow."⁸ Vallejo *must* have water.

Talk of water abounded. On April 13, 1867, the Vallejo *Recorder* wrote of the Sulphur Springs, "after 24 hours exposure to air the water is freed of its sulphurous taste and becomes far more palatable than the well water of Vallejo. Parties are looking into the question of conducting surplus water from the springs in pipes to supply the town. There is sufficient water to supply all those who are likely to patronize. We may have water conducted to our own doors this summer!" The *Chronicle*, June 29, 1867, reported, "Finally the talk about introducing water from Sulphur Springs Creek into Vallejo will come to pass. Outside of cistern water there is little if any good water to be had in town. During the dry season the masses have to use the saline water from wells." On July 20, 1867, The *Vallejo Recorder* wrote, "Parties in Vallejo are figuring upon the matter of introducing water into the town from American Canyon and the White Sulphur Springs. It is the best speculation we know." And, on February 14, 1868, the *Recorder* said, "Vallejo can obtain by an artificial channel thirty (30) miles long, a supply of 40,000,000 gallons daily from Clear Lake, and the abundance will make it cheap."

There were venturesome ideas about the source of water. Who would bring it into town? Six water companies were incorporated and their certificates of incorporation filed in Solano County during the period of July, 1867, to November, 1871.⁹ It was their intention to bring water to Vallejo. This flurry of incorporations hints at the profitability of the water business. The companies that were formed, the dates filed, and proposed source of water, and the incorporators were:

The Vallejo Water Company, July, 1867; from the several springs and creeks to the north and westward; Callender, Brownlie, Wood, Snows & Wright.

The Vallejo Water Company, March 2, 1868; From Solano White Sulphur Springs and other sources; Marvin (S.F.), Conolly & Frisbie.

The Vallejo City Water Company; August 1, 1868; from the several Springs and Creeks to the north and eastward; Wright, McCue & Edgumbe.

The Suscol and Vallejo Water Com-

pany; October 29, 1869; from waters found between the road at Suscol in the County of Napa and the fountainhead of the stream crossing said road...; Shirley, USN, H. Cullum, W.L. Brown.

The Vallejo Water Company; October 11, 1869; from Solano White Sulphur Springs, and American Canyon, and Clear Lake, and artesian wells to be sunk near Vallejo and other sources; Rutter, Musheimer, Toomy, Denio & Lickens.

The Russian River Water Company; November, 28, 1871; to supply the towns of Healdsburg, Santa Rosa, Sonoma, and the City of Vallejo with water from the Russian River, Santa Rosa Creek, Los Guileros Creek in Sonoma County, Sonoma Creek and Huichira Creek in Napa County and other sources; by Frisbie, Atherton, Babcock, Lathan, Parrott, Green, and de Laske.

We have no record of negotiations, if any there were, between the City and companies other than the Vallejo City Water Company. It was this Company that petitioned the City of Vallejo, on August 24, 1868, for "leave to lay down water pipes and to erect hydrants and reservoirs within the city limits for the purpose of supplying the city with pure water from the Sulphur Springs Creek." The City awarded this franchise only after negotiating an agreement whereby the company would

furnish "water for the extinguishment of fires gratuitously"-- a good bargain.¹⁰ The franchise was to run until 1891. Another corporation, the Vallejo Water Company, organized in 1883, acquired all the properties and the franchise of the Vallejo City Water Company in 1883 and continued to serve Vallejo,¹¹ apparently with the same principals involved, Joseph Edgumbe, Michael Reese, and Anthony Chabot.

There is excellent documentation of the construction of the storage reservoir built north of Vallejo called Chabot Reservoir or Lake Chabot, including maps, diagrams and drawings of the transmission lines and 7.2 square mile watershed of the Sulphur Springs Creek.¹² The new water distribution system was based on gravity flow from Chabot to the City of 6500 inhabitants. By 1869 many lovely homes and St. Vincents Church were being constructed on the hills surrounding central Vallejo. Early in 1872 the City Board of Trustees formed a reservoir committee assigned to explore the possibility of a reservoir on Capitol Street hill--obviously the gravity system was insufficient to serve the higher areas. On April 25, 1872, Mr. Edgumbe of the water company received permission to erect a tank on Napa Street north of Capitol to meet the need until the completion of the



John Frey, left, clasping hands with the other men involved with the development of the municipal water supply

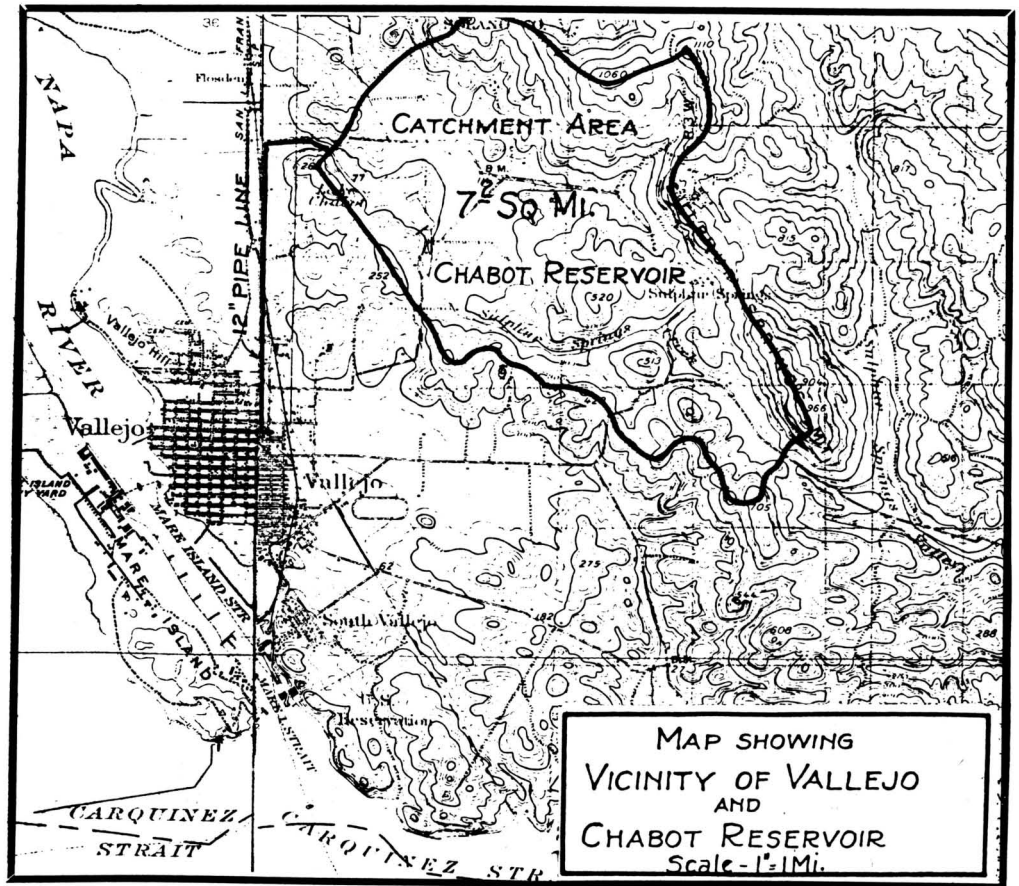
reservoir. It is interesting that the City, rather than the water company, built and paid for the Capitol Hill Reservoir property, for this property was listed as a company asset in later years. John Frisbie, of the Vallejo Land and Development Company, agreed to loan the city \$50,000 for fire and water purposes including the building of the reservoir. The loan was for 90 cents on the dollar plus interest. The minutes of the Board of Trustees contain detailed information on the costs, specifications, bids, and construction of the reservoir.¹³

The *Vallejo Chronicle* on December 24, 1875, reported that, "water was let into the Capitol Street Reservoir yesterday" thereby ending the problem of pressure pumps and private wells.¹⁴

In July, 1876, happy news came for Mare Island.¹⁵ "Orders from Washington D.C. have been received to complete the reservoir on Mare Island." Thus ended the twenty-two year period in which the Yard's only water was from cisterns or the water barges. Mare Island was soon connected to the Chabot system by two pipelines, one running from the Capitol Hill Reservoir and the other from the Chabot Reservoir. The Mare Island contract was an important source of income for the Water Company. The company's annual receipts were \$32,000 to \$35,000 per year (16 to 17.5% on their \$200,000 investment), of which \$9,000 would come from Mare Island.¹⁶

Were the dreams of Vallejoans coming true? Did a surge of growth and prosperity follow the acquisition of water? The diary of John Frey answers our questions. Mr. Frey was elected to the Board of Trustees in 1890. He was a business man who owned a jewelry and stationary store, but it was his perseverance, dedication and spirit which earned him the title: "Father of Vallejo's Water System". His diary says:

"This new water company, called the Vallejo Water Company, located its storage reservoir — its source of supply — about three miles from Vallejo on a creek whose source is the White Sulphur Springs. A portion of this sulphur water would find its way into the storage reservoir, called Lake Chabot, but nearly all the water for the supply of Vallejo had to be made up by catchment from the winter rains which would have been well enough had the watershed been fairly clean. But such was not the case. White Sulphur Springs was operated for a time as a public resort and for a while as a state institution, a home for the feeble-minded for the whole state, occupied by



several hundred human beings. The balance of the watershed was all occupied by 8 or 10 different farms so that all the sewage or filth that would accumulate during the summer or dry season would find its way to this reservoir, so-called Lake Chabot.

"During the storms of the winter or rainy season, while this filth may have increased the quantity it certainly did not increase the quality of the water furnished by this company. While no doubt this kind of water was dangerous to the health of the consumers, one of the worst features was that the water supply was inadequate for the needs of the community. At one time the water supply gave out entirely for ten months. The people had to go back to the primitive method of supplying themselves. The old wells were brought into use again. The water cart again went from door to door. Flat boats brought water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and some brought water by various conveyances from San Francisco.

"The farms in the catchment area were under cultivation, and if the rain fell in such a manner that the ground could absorb it, there would be little or no catchment and the natural consequence would be a water famine for Vallejo. If the water consumer was furnished with water for one hour a day, he considered himself a happy fortunate being for a little water was better than no water at all."¹⁷

Easily the most colorful description of Vallejo's water was in a document written by John Frey in 1892: "(the Company proposes to) furnish the people of this city for all time with a sort of nauseous soup composed of vegetable refuse, animalculae and pollywogs, the water in the mixture seeping to the catch basin from a watershed composed in part of the drainage from barnyards, pigpens, and water closets and pastured and enriched by numerous hogs and cattle which bathe and wallow in the shallow".

We are told that the Company greeted every request for relief or refund with a stock statement: "If you don't like the way we serve you, you can have your water shut off." It was apparent that the Board of Trustees, prior to 1890, was lenient with the water company and allowed it to collect water rates as high as the traffic would bear.

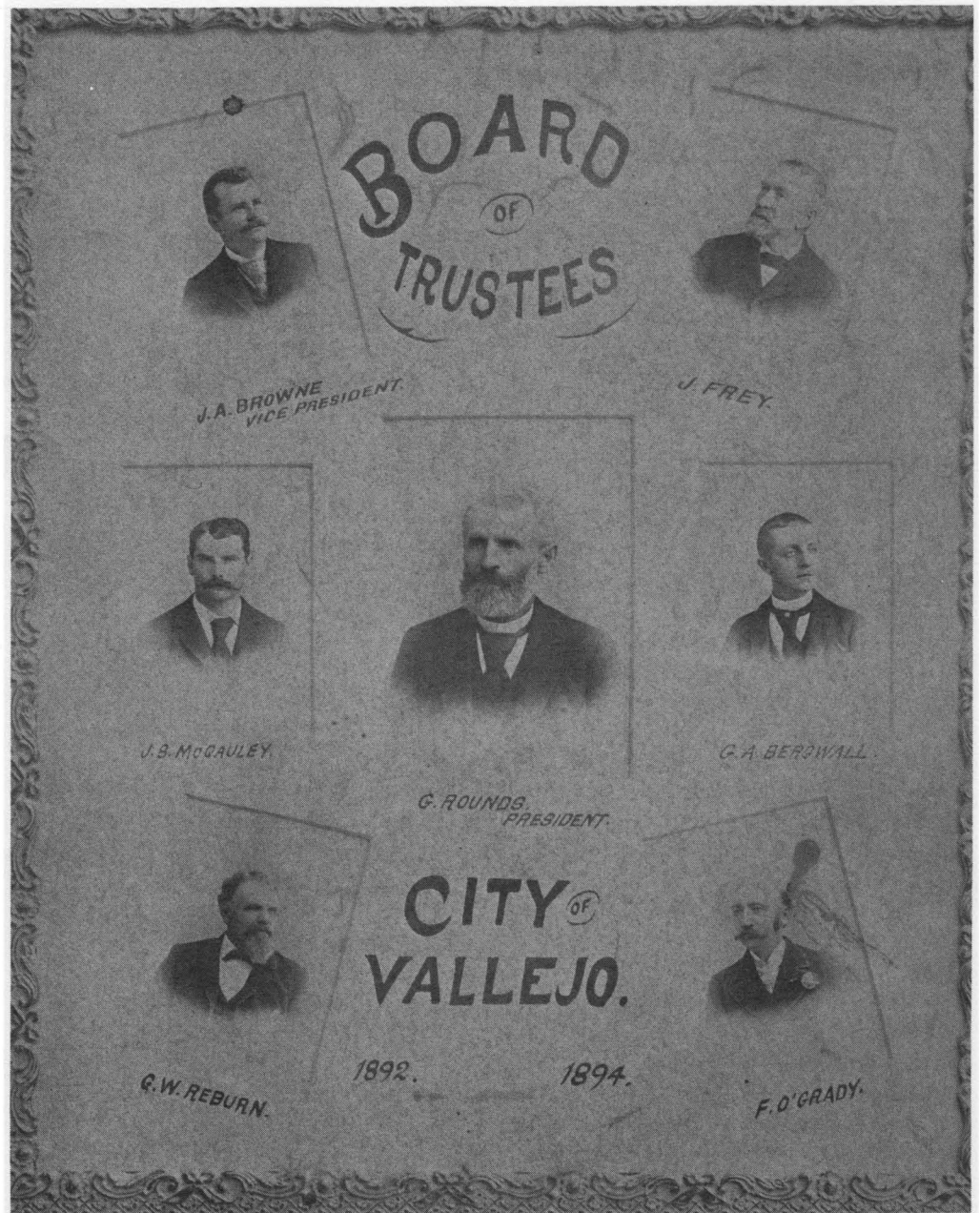
Frey states that the election of an entirely new Board of Trustees in 1890 was "apparently by the merest of accidents", but it is certain that an angry and thirsty populace was "accident" enough to account for the new slate. As one of its first official acts, the new Board, consisting of Trustees Hackett, Rounds, Frey, Bergwall, Brown, Saunders, and Michaelis, in June, 1890, passed a resolution, offered by Trustee Frey, acknowledging the importance of "a good reliable and wholesome water supply" for the city and "Respectfully" requesting the Com-

pany to "take such action as lies in their power to secure an unfailing supply of good wholesome water." The Trustees pledged that, thereafter, water rates would be full rates for full service, and proportionally lower for shorter supplies; and that they would use all of their powers to remedy the existing danger and protect the interests of the city.

For over one year, the Water Company replied only with scorn and inaction. On August 5, 1891, the Board again acted, this time with more resolution. The Board had not been idle. They were now armed with the conviction that the city could, and would, if necessary supply itself with water. A committee of three Trustees was appointed to recommend solutions for this problem. They were Frey, Rounds, and Brown. After a thorough investigation this committee recommended that: the Chabot Dam be raised no less than 10' to increase capacity and that the Company acquire the lands necessary for this increase; that the Company lay a 10" pipe from American Canyon Creek to double the watershed; that the Company remove all sources of pollution; and that if the Company refused to comply with the above, the City would proceed to construct new water works itself. The Company replied that it would not spend one dollar on improving its plant and that the people of Vallejo could "help themselves if they could". Under pressure from the bondholders of the Company, who held \$185,000 in outstanding bonds, the Company suddenly reversed its tactics, and humbly agreed to all requests and posted \$50,000 bond to cover the necessary work. Unconvinced, the Trustees investigated and found the bond to be worthless. Meanwhile secretly the Company had secured a court order enjoining it from raising the dam even an inch.

The city had had enough. The Trustees called for an election to be held March 16, 1892, to authorize the issuance of a \$250,000 bond issue to finance the purchase of 1,200 acres of Suscol Creek property in Napa County and to construct a municipal water system. The election fell 30 votes short of the required 2/3 majority needed. The Trustees, undaunted, called another election for June, 1892. This time the Suscol water bond issue carried by 39 votes over the 2/3 majority.

Elated with its success, the city water committee rushed to complete purchase of the Suscol property. The owners had agreed orally to the sale.



Surprisingly, two insurmountable obstacles intervened. The Vallejo Water Company had secretly offered the owners \$45,000. Now, the owners' price was \$60,000—an impossible amount. Secondly, the disgruntled water company had filed suit in Napa County for the condemnation of the Suscol properties. Suscol appeared to be hopeless.

It was clear that the water company would try to defeat the city at every turn and "had plenty of coin." Whatever was to be done must be carried out in secrecy. The committee knew that the Green Valley Creek, with its "never failing mountain stream of the purest of soft waters" must be its objective. The difficulties seemed insurmountable — the distance of the stream from Vallejo was 21 miles by wagon road; there were innumerable right-of-ways that must be secured; the 1657 acre watershed, the Hastings ranch, must be purchased; and a low pass for the

transmission mains would have to be found. It seemed almost impossible to accomplish all of these things for \$250,000 and without the water company hearing of it. John Frey knew that it had to be done and took complete charge of the matter.

Frey dared not hire a surveyor to test the elevations, lest the news leak to the water company. He purchased surveying equipment and, alone, made the measurements. Knowing that property owners would charge astronomical prices if they knew of a major public works project, Frey enlisted the help of J.M. Gregory, a former Solano County Superior Court Judge and trusted friend, to assist with the purchase of the lands, in cases where Frey's presence might reveal the nature of the project.

Frey's diary details his many adventures. A low enough pass was found, the property rights were secured and Mrs. Remi Chabot, the city's most

dogged opponent, was eluded. With careful management, Frey believed that the project could be accomplished for the bonded amount. In all, Frey made 245 trips out of Vallejo to secure the project.

The first and second elections in 1892 referred to the Suscol properties. This legal technicality could only be cleared by a third election. It was called for November 7, 1892. Mr. Chabot was not through fighting. At his request, Congressman English introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress proposing that the government buy the Water Company for \$250,000 as a water supply for Mare Island. The city needed the Mare Island contract. At that time, Mare Island produced \$9,000 in water revenues. Representative English was contacted. He admitted little interest in the bill. It failed to pass in Congress.

Next, the water company filed suit to enjoin Vallejo from selling water to Mare Island on the grounds that it had no jurisdiction to do so, even if the Island was within the city limits, because the Yard was under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Government. The decision of Judge Buckles, included in the Frey Collection, favored the city.

Prior to the election, the Company had spread vicious rumors. The most common tale was that the water committee would profit handsomely from hidden deals involving the Hastings Ranch property. John Frey met every charge with openness and full disclosure in numerous letters published by the local press. On the eve of the election the water company placed 50 workmen prominently about the streets digging and measuring to give the impression that the company was eager to please the people of Vallejo. The people were not fooled. On election day, the measure passed by a vote of 1066 to 397. Construction began immediately thereafter.

On January 27, 1894, five thousand Vallejo residents joyfully crowded around the street square at the corner of Georgia and Sacramento streets. It was a Saturday evening. The town was lighted by bonfires; a salute of 101 guns was fired; music, fireworks, and the ringing of bells added to the celebration. Vallejo owned its own water supply! The fact that the celebrants did not see their precious water that night due to a break in a pipe did not dim their enthusiasm. A banquet later that night honored John Frey. The beverage accompanying the first course was Green Valley Water.

Did the new municipal water system

work? Yes. In 1914, a glowing tribute to the system confirmed its success: "If there is one thing Vallejoans can point to with pride, it is the municipally owned water system, one of the first successfully operated in the State, and a criterion of what municipal ownership can accomplish for the people when intelligently managed.

"...the reservoirs were natural, as far as it was possible to secure them and, located 1200 feet above the city's base, provided for a complete gravity flow. This gravity feature has been one important factor in the success of the enterprise. Other features are an adequate supply of good quality and the enthusiasm of the people in their own property. With the worth of the system demonstrated, the voters have never hesitated to authorize money for improvements and extensions when they became necessary, and now the city's investment represents an actual value of more than a million dollars. Its moral value is many times that amount.

"It is now at its highest state of development. Two lakes, (Frey and Madigan) with a capacity of 1,002,741,000 gallons, constitute a supply to the city and navy yard for three years. From these lakes, the water sparkles over a

mile and half of picturesque cascades to the diverting dam, from where it is piped to the distribution reservoirs at Fleming Hill, a mile and a half from the city. Two mammoth concrete basins, with a joint capacity of 11,633,700 gallons, here pick up the ice (sic) cold water and from the elevations of 216' above the city's base, send it into the local mains at a high pressure. The reservoirs are so located that they can be used singly or together, this arrangement providing easy facilities for constant cleaning, thus insuring at all times a perfectly pure product.

"The city system consists of 3,000 taps, 150 fire hydrants, and distributing pipes cover about 50 miles. Most of the consumers are on meters with a minimum rate of 75 cents per month, and meters are being connected at all taps as fast as they can be installed. The average consumption is one and a quarter million gallons daily, the navy yard using about half this amount.

"Not only has this system saved the consumers exactly one-half of their former tolls, but it has saved the United States approximately one million dollars since it has been in operation. Every month this amount is augmented. The advantages are especially noticeable by naval officers when war-



Lake Chabot during its draining for construction of Marine World, spring of 1985.

ships are forced to take on inferior water in other ports at more than double the rates.

"Not only has the consumer benefited by a lower price of service, but the tax rate is reduced by the handsome annual surplus that goes to meet the running expense of the city. (Ed. add. \$55,796.18 fiscal year 1910-11). So substantial is this surplus that street sprinkling and water for schools and public buildings is (sic) supplied to other branches of the city government free of cost.

"Vallejo is justly proud of its water system, one of its best assets, and every week inquiries come to the city clerk from other cities, asking for data on the plan. He explains to them that we not only have the best water in the state, but that its cost to the consumer is the most reasonable, and that every year it reduces taxes by diverting to the city a good sum of money to meet the expenses of government."¹⁸

In July, 1985, the Vallejo City Water System served approximately 90,000 persons. By the year 2000 estimates show it will serve 115,000. By 2020 it will serve 150,000. During the 1940's the draft from Green Valley averaged one million gallons a day. The highest annual draft in recent years has been one-third million gallons a day. All of this water is consumed by customers in the Green Valley Country Club area. Lake Chabot, purchased by the city in 1947, is part of the city's recreational system and at the moment is drained in preparation for construction of Marine World. The city now draws 37.66 million gallons per day from 5 sources — a marvel of planning and engineering skills. But that is another story...



About our authors . . .

(Continued from inside front cover)

ies about long-time Vallejo residents and early school personnel.

Marion Devlin, who wrote "Hastings' Folly" in 1937, was Women's Editor for Gibson Publications for forty-seven years. A native Vallejoan, she had press credentials to cover the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana.

Commencement Program

March from "Athalia" _____ Mendelssohn
Miss Dorothy Doyle

Invocation _____ Rev. W. H. Johnstone

Vocal Solo _____ "O Wondrous Youth"
Miss Edith Nash
(Violin obligato, Russll Mayhood)

Address, "The International Peace Movement" _____ Miss Alice Mason

Address ___ "A Local Educational Problem"
Marshall Woolner

Piano Solo, "Dance of the Demons," Edward Holst _____ Miss Pearl Mason

Address, Prof. Thomas H. Reed, University of California.

Violin Solo, "Simple Confession," Thome Russell Mayhood

Presentation of Diplomas, Mr. S. R. Barnett. Secretary of Board of High School Trustees.

The above program of the 1912 Commencement of Armijo High School was thoughtfully saved in the Mezclah yearbook. The pianist, Pearl Mason, is the author of the story on Cordelia. Such artifacts are indispensable in historical research.

Pearl Mason Fowler was born on a ranch in Green Valley. At one time her family, the Masons, owned the largest cherry orchards in Solano County. She taught at the Rockville Grammar School for sixteen years. She was teaching there the day of the Chinese massacre described in the story by Evelyn Lockie. She is an accomplished painter.

Evelyn Woolner Lockie, a Solano native, was a valedictorian of Armijo High School, attended Mills College, and spent three years studying theater. She was an official reader at KPO when radio was new, a correspondent for the *Sacramento Bee*, and a women deputy in the Solano County Sheriff's Department before she decided to see the world. For seven years she tra-

veled, visiting over a hundred countries before returning to retire in Solano County. Recently she has moved to a south Bay Area.

Tom Lucy, a historian at the Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum, specializes in Vallejo history. He is head of cataloguing and accessioning for the Museum as well as curator of the photographic collection.

Sally O'Hara Woodard, a fourth generation Vallejoan, attended Vallejo schools, but was graduated from Anna Head School for Girls in Berkeley. She received a B.A. from University of California at Berkeley and LL.B. and J.D. from Hastings Law School. She was an associate of the law firm of O'Hara, Randall, Castagnetto, and Kilpatrick. She is the great granddaughter of John Frey.

The Last Day of the *Sehome*

A great part of the charm and importance of life in Vallejo in the first quarter of the Twentieth Century was the busy and interesting ferry and steamer system that kept the city in touch with San Francisco and other Bay Area cities. The master of the system was the Monticello Steamship Company which had a fleet of steamers coming and going constantly. Among these were the well-known ferries *Sehome*, *General Frisbie*, and *Napa Valley*, all in service on the frightful day of December 14, 1918.

The *Sehome* left Vallejo for San Francisco at 7:30 in the morning carrying 125 passengers and five automobiles on her usual run. These included commuters on their way to work, travelers celebrating the month old Armistice, and Christmas shoppers wanting to take advantage of the large department stores. And among the passengers was a fifteen-year old girl,

Eileen Hogan, who still has a vivid recollection of the events of that day.

As her father had not indicated otherwise, Eileen assumed this Saturday she would be traveling alone. She had made a number of such trips to the city, with her father escorting her down to the ferry in Vallejo and her aunt meeting her at the docking in San Francisco.

After a quick but delicious breakfast of eggs, toast, and cocoa, she rushed to make the early departure time her father had set. As they stepped out into the blackness of the December morning, they were immediately aware of the dense fog, the moist deep silence that surrounded them as they searched for the familiar Georgia Street landmarks. Only the low, hollow warning of the fog horn on the Straits penetrated the cloud that separated them from the well-known homes and fences they were passing. It was an easy walk for it was all downhill and the young

girl was able to keep up with the long strides of her father.

When they reached the dock, father and daughter joined the crowd that was waiting to file onto the *Sehome*, a favorite vessel that had been on the Vallejo-San Francisco run for a number of years and had been entirely rebuilt only four years before. Surveying the fog and the crowded ferry carefully, the father suddenly changed his mind. Instead of bidding her goodbye, he said, "I think I'll go all the way with you today. There is no reason for me to stay home, and I'd enjoy a bit of a change." Eileen was pleased with the new arrangement even though she enjoyed the feeling of independence and freedom of the ninety minute trip when she spent her time watching the other passengers as they paced the deck, enjoying the passing shoreline, and seeing the sun come up from behind the Contra Costa hills.

However, this day would afford no



Vallejo waterfront 1912, showing ferries *Napa Valley* at left and *Arrow* at right, both operated by the Monticello Steamship Company for the Vallejo-San Francisco run. The *Napa Valley*

assisted in the rescue of the *Sehome* passengers. The waterfront was the center of transportation activities until the advent of Carquinez Bridge in 1927.

sight-seeing. The persistent fog was heavier than she ever remembered it; and the chill of the winter morning soon forced the passengers inside the spacious cabin where they settled down to reading the morning newspaper or to desultory conversation with a neighbor.

An hour passed uneventfully while she told her father about her school activities, and enjoyed the five-cent Hershey bar he always bought her, when suddenly a shuddering crash startled all the passengers. A cracking noise and heavy vibrations warned the passengers that something was terribly amiss. In seconds the crew and passengers were vividly aware that another steamer had struck the *Sehome* amidships and cracked open the hull. The invader was the *General Frisbie*, also from the Monticello Steamship Company.

Both vessels had been going on "the slow bell" trying to make their way through the thickest fog any could remember when suddenly the *Frisbie* saw the *Sehome* loom up before her, but so close the collision could not be prevented. The *Frisbie*, loaded with marines going to a football game in Berkeley, plowed into the port side of the *Sehome* and was stuck fast in the gap in the side of the smaller vessel. Both steamers were locked together, but the *General Frisbie* had sustained much less damage than the *Sehome*. It was obvious the *Sehome* was doomed and would sink quickly. While the frightened travelers surveyed their predicament, the captain of the *General Frisbie*, Captain Charles Sandahl, and the captain of the *Sehome*, Captain Fred Olsen, quickly conferred, realizing the passengers from the *Sehome* had to be rescued immediately.

Within fifteen minutes all the passengers and crew were transferred onto the deck of the *General Frisbie*. In those short fifteen minutes young Eileen observing several ladies clutching prayer books and rosaries realized how fortunate she was to have her father by her side. He seemed bigger and stronger than she had realized before and his calm and quiet assurance alleviated much of the fright that accompanied the groans and shudders of the doomed ship. She could even appreciate the lively music the Marine Band on the *Frisbie* was playing as each of the passengers was gingerly handed and guided to the uninjured steamer. Captain Sandahl had requested the band to help in the rescue by playing its most spirited tunes. The



The steamer *Frisbie* was a regular on the Vallejo-San Francisco run. This picture, taken two years before the *Sehome* accident, shows how commodious the local ferries were.

ragtime melodies lifted the spirits of everyone until all were safely transferred. Because of the trouble on the *Frisbie* with her extra load of passengers, the rest of the marines were ordered below deck to help stabilize the ferry.

At almost the same time a second collision occurred when a tug, towing a rock barge, suddenly struck the *General Frisbie* a glancing blow on the stern, the effect being to separate the two steamers, permitting the *Sehome* to sink slowly "to her hurricane deck on the mud on the side of the San Pablo Channel, close to buoy 3" opposite the rocks, The Brothers. The only victims to sink with the ship were the five automobiles.

Soon the *Napa Valley*, another Monticello ferry, appeared on the scene making its way slowly through the fog, and seeing the tragic circumstances of her sister steamers, offered assistance. This alleviated much of the problem on the *Frisbie* as some passengers were transferred to the *Napa Valley* to return to Vallejo.

The *Frisbie*, carrying Eileen and her father, returned to San Francisco. After landing, she and her father were amazed as they started up Market Street to find that the first extra about the collision and sinking was already being hawked on the streets by young newboys. How could some one get the

information and write about it at the same time it was happening?

Later the young Vallejoan learned that the ferry service between Vallejo and other Bay Area points would be considerably curtailed for sometime because of the loss of the *Sehome* but a new steamer, the *Asbury Park* which would accommodate 2500 passengers, was already being readied for service for the Monticello Steamship Company, and she was so much faster, 23 knots, the whole trip would be shortened to one hour. She was to be in service in approximately three months.

Eileen also learned that the captains of both steamers were congratulated for their heroic efforts to save all passengers and crews, and the entire blame for the collisions was put on the worst fog any one had experienced on San Pablo Bay.

She realized gratefully, no matter how much fun it was to travel alone, on foggy, foggy days when vessels are in danger, a strong calm father is a most satisfactory traveling companion, and trips to San Francisco are more enjoyable when they are uneventful.



The above article is a combination of the personal recollections of Eileen Hogan De La Mater and the newspaper account of the marine tragedy in the Dec. 15, 1918, *San Francisco Chronicle*.



The Hastings' mansion was considered one of the most beautiful homes in all of Solano County and dominated the residential area of Benicia. It failed to become the

center of social and cultural activities, however, when the family found itself suffering serious financial problems.

Hastings' Folly

by Marion Devlin

"Now wrecking; the Hastings Estate at West 2nd and L streets, Benicia; Save up to 70% on lumber, brick, pipe, etc."

These few words, buried in the classified columns of a 1937 issue of the *Vallejo Times-Herald*, spelled the finale to Hastings' Folly—that magnificent and tragic monument to pride and rivalry that has been a landmark for more than half a century in Benicia.

Built during the prosperous '80's, this 40-room mansion rivalled many of the palatial residences built in San Francisco during the bonanza days, and was pointed out with justifiable pride by Solano residents as the county's most beautiful private home.

Yet behind those solid walls lies a story of financial worry, family troubles, and unhappiness—bearing out the name which has been attached to it

almost since its erection—Hastings' Folly. The appropriateness of that title, incidentally, was realized and admitted by Hastings himself, who knew as soon as the mansion was completed, that it had swallowed up almost his entire fortune and left nothing in its place but trouble and worry.

Its inception dates back to the late '70's and early '80's in Benicia, and the rivalry between three of the town's most prosperous and influential citizens—Daniel N. Hastings, Andrew Goodyear, and Lansing B. Mizner, father of "The Many Mizners," whose family history has been published.

Starting perhaps, as a casual discussion, the trio found themselves one day describing the homes they planned to build for their families in Benicia. As each enlarged upon the theme, their architectural plans increased corres-

pondingly, with Hastings striving to outdo his two companions, and especially Mizner.

A native of New England, Hastings had come to Benicia many years before, and had established a comfortable, though unpretentious, home for his family on G street. The Goodyear home, which was finished a few years later, was indeed a beautiful residence for those days, and represented an outlay of perhaps \$25,000. Mizner contented himself with the home he had been occupying already for many years, but to Hastings the dream of building a home to surpass anything ever seen in Benicia had become an obsession, and no time was lost in engaging a contractor and laying down the foundations.

The site was selected at the corner of First and F streets and the foundation

was already laid when difficulties developed between Hastings and the Benicia Board of Trustees over the grading of the property. Provoked by the altercation, Hastings abandoned the foundation and moved to West 2nd and L streets.

Contractor A. L. Ryder was engaged to do the work, and in 1881, Hastings' folly—complete with twenty-one bedrooms, a magnificent staircase costing \$8,500, marble floors, and fireplaces, was completed to the envy and admiration of the entire city.

In the rear was the huge dining room, the ceiling bordered with Bella Robbia garlands in rich shades of orange, sapphire, and green.

In keeping with the general scale of the house, the kitchen was unusually spacious, with huge marble slabs on the tables and drainboards, and roomy cupboards and closets from floor to ceiling. Adjoining was a large pantry with sink and other cupboards, and through another door one stepped into a room the size of many a present-day kitchen, which was devoted entirely to the storage shelves for preserves and kitchen supplies.

Bedrooms lined both sides of the wide halls on the second and third floors, and in front of the third story one mounted that last lap of the polished staircase to reach the cupola, which offered what was undoubtedly one of the finest views of Benicia and the surrounding countryside.

Not content with the reception rooms and library on the main floor, a games room and a billiards room were both incorporated into the house plan, one on either side of the basement staircase. The walls were beautifully paneled and marble tiles covered the floors of the two rooms, where the Hastings' sons were wont to entertain their young friends. Hastings' own office, and a number of storerooms completed the casement layout.

Aside from the staircase, woods in the interior were of oiled and varnished white cedar, teak, prima-vera, toa tomano, and St. Domingo mahogany. The floors were of yellow pine.

Almost as famous as the staircase were the handsome mantels—five of which were of unusual beauty and value. One was entirely of white marble, another of Tennessee marble, one of onyx and one black, and each was placed in a room where wall tinting and furnishings provided the most artistic setting for its particular shade.

According to the contractor's plans, there were 88 doors and 85 windows.

The house itself was 88 feet deep and 48 feet wide in front, 30 in back, while the tower room on top of the house was 15 feet in height.

Heating was by the Harvey method, with hot water radiators, and circuits of hot water running through every room. Speaking tubes and electric call bells were installed throughout the three floors.

Water was supplied from a spring and carried 10,000 feet through iron pipe. Under the residence was a cistern holding 50,000 gallons and a gas engine was used to pump from the cistern to the floors above. On top of the house another tank held 2,000 gallons.

Unusual little shell-like decorations were in many of the bedrooms and upper halls, in the form of a cherub's head of plaster of paris, tinted to match the delicate colorings of the walls.

The three bathrooms were in keeping with the grandiose scale, with huge tubs and washstands, and fixtures as modern as the period offered.

During the construction period, Hastings devoted almost all his time to supervising the work. No detail was too small for his attention, and nothing short of absolute perfection, in his eyes, was acceptable. According to friends, when the plate glass arrived for installation, Hastings found the panes not entirely to his liking, so the entire load was stored in the basement and a new order was placed.

Under his orders, too, the house was made sound-proof and draft-proof, with double flooring.

Laths were laid diagonally paralleling the walls and ceilings and sand was used to fill the two-inch space between.

Financing the mansion was something of a problem at first, but was finally managed with the aid of a loan from his brother-in-law. Hastings himself owned extensive farm lands which he farmed himself and rented out, including the Daly Ranch, later known as the John Borges ranch, the O'Hara ranch, and the Sulphur Springs, Larry Barry, and Paddy ranches, all of which were later sold by his heirs. The income from these was inadequate, however, to meet the heavy building expenses, and Hastings obtained a loan of \$85,000 from his brother-in-law, the affluent Jordan of the firm of Jordan-Marsh, one of Boston's leading department stores. According to Jordan's will, that debt was later completely canceled.

That \$85,000 was approximately the cost of constructing the house alone,

while the complete furnishings, all in the approved fashion of that period, brought the total outlay to something like \$350,000.

Hastings was his own architect for the home, which represented an ideal he had cherished through years of activity and hard work. A native of Newton, Mass., Hastings was born in 1821, and after living in several New England towns as a boy, moved to Boston at the age of fourteen. There he entered the provision business, until 1849, when he went to New York, and booked passage on the *SS Florida* for Chagres, Panama, since through tickets to California were not available at that time.

After four days in Panama, he continued his journey to San Francisco, arriving December 1, 1849. He obtained a position as a carpenter for a salary of \$12 a day, and at the end of the week had so impressed his employer with his ability, that he was supervising the work of eight men and earning \$20 a day.

In 1850, Hastings set out for Sullivan's Creek, and tried his hand at mining near Stockton. Another short stay in San Francisco preceded his coming to Benicia, where he built a small butcher shop and occupied the property four months.

In 1852 he leased the property and went east to bring his family to California. Accompanied by his wife and their sons, George A., who was born in Boston in 1846, and William F., also born in that city in 1848, Hastings returned to Benicia aboard the *SS Onward*, coming around Cape Horn and arriving December 11.

Arriving home, he found his property in possession of the sheriff, and an expenditure of \$1,600 was necessary before Hastings could recover it.

In 1862, he sold out his business and retired, owning at that time three-fifths of 44,000 acres of land. He took an interest in city affairs, held office under the city government of Benicia, and served as city trustee.

Three more children were born after the Hastings' return to Benicia—Hannah, in 1857, and Alice and Eben, twins born in 1862.

So into their home moved the Hastings family; yet strangely enough, instead of enjoying their palatial surroundings which understandably were the envy of their entire circle of friends, there was from the very first a hint of dissatisfaction and worry connected with it. Perhaps it could be traced to the fact that Hastings, ordinarily a jovial

and cheerful person, was increasingly worried as he realized how deeply he had involved himself financially.

While Benicia's younger generation eagerly awaited invitations to the round of parties they felt would inevitably follow the family's installation, Mrs. Hastings, a small woman, quick and capable in her manner, and her daughter found themselves far too rushed trying to take care of the forty-five rooms to further complicate matters with lavish entertaining. There were, of course, several parties, but nothing on the scale as elaborate as the house suggested.

The servant problem was in itself a momentous one to the feminine members of the household. To care adequately for the four stories, a small army of servants was required, and aside from the expense of such a staff, few servants remained at Hastings for more than a few months, apparently finding too arduous their duties which involved climbing four flights of stairs to polish the woodwork, keeping the many recessed windows gleaming and having the marble spotless at all times.

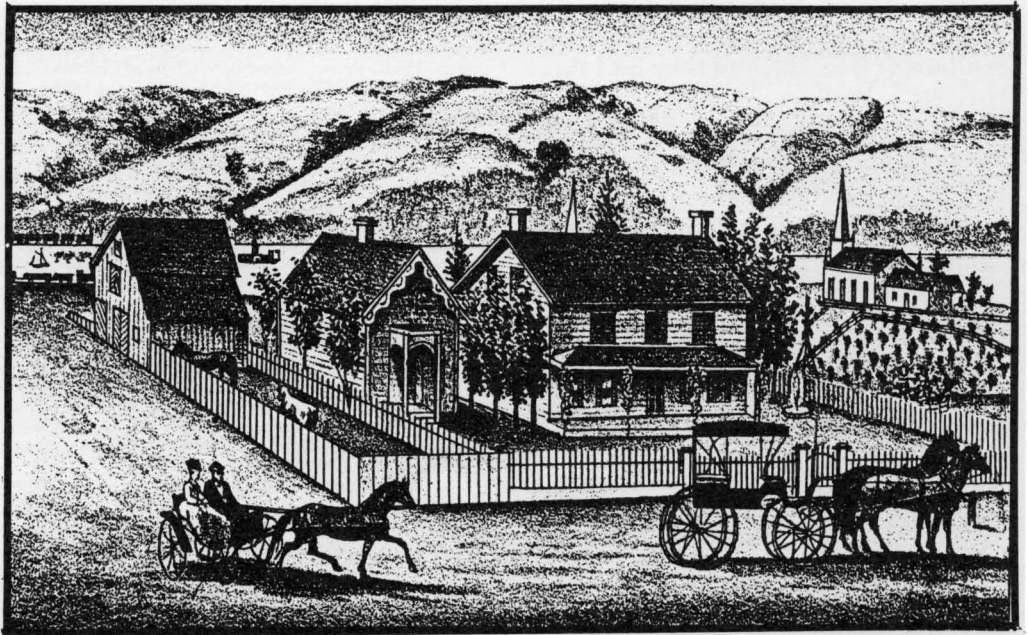
Hannah and Alice frequently brought home schoolmates from Mills Seminary for an inspection of the showplace, or for a quiet evening with the family on the wide veranda, which was illuminated with bright lanterns during the summer months. George was sent east to Harvard, but returned to Benicia for holidays and summer vacations, bringing to his sisters and their friends exciting stories of life at the eastern college.

According to gossip, George sent home for money following his graduation, whereupon Hastings, Sr., refused with the commentary, "if a Harvard education has not prepared one to earn his own way, it was none too soon to learn the rudiments of business."

Some weeks later, George arrived in Benicia, his clothes showing hard wear, far from the smart attire expected of a recent college graduate.

The first of the series of tragedies that pursued Hastings' family from the time of the home's completion was the suicide of their second son, William. Moody and depressed over the loss of an arm in a hunting accident, Will was further plunged into unhappiness by a romance to which his family objected, and shot himself.

Grieving over Will's death, and realizing the financial impossibility of maintaining the home in comfort, the family decided to move to San Francisco shortly after the turn of the cen-



The Lansing Mizners' modest home in Benicia

ture. Rather than leave the house unoccupied, Hastings asked Charles M. Prince, Benicia realtor, if he and his wife would make their home in it. For three years, Mr. and Mrs. Prince occupied the place until in 1906 the Hastings family was stricken by another misfortune.

Their new home in San Francisco, on a much simpler scale than their former residence, but nevertheless comfortably and attractively furnished, was wrecked by the San Francisco earthquake and fire. For the first week or two after the tragedy, they camped out with hundreds of other refugees in the city, guarding the few possessions they had managed to salvage.

Arranging with the Princes to return to Benicia, the family again moved into the mansion for the few months it took until their San Francisco home was again ready to be occupied.

Upon their departure, they were again confronted with the problem of leaving the house to the mercy of prowlers, so it was decided that Eben, commonly known as Zeb, should remain there until arrangements could be made to dispose of the property.

Alone in the gloomy, silent house, with memories of the place as it had been when first occupied, Zeb, who was crippled, found pleasure chiefly in his phonograph, which was one of the first owned in Benicia. With a large collection of recordings, Zeb spent much of his time at the open window of his room, playing the selections for the little groups of listeners who frequented the adjoining park for the informal concerts.

As negotiations progressed for the disposal of the house, his brooding increased, and shortly before its sale, he died. Although he had been in poor health some time, worry and unhappiness over loss of the home were believed to have hastened his death.

Actual details of the property sale are vague, but its reported purchase price was \$10,000. It was bought by a Catholic priest, Father McQuaid, who obtained it chiefly to provide a home for his mother. Until her death, she occupied one of the upstairs suites, and was visited frequently by her daughter, Sister Christina, from St. Catherine's Convent, and other Dominican nuns.

At Mrs. McQuaid's death, the property was deeded to the nuns, who utilized it as a dormitory for the older boys boarding at the convent school. Much of the remaining furniture was removed and stored, with some of the elaborate framed mirrors, whatnots, and other articles, stored in the two-story laundry building and storehouse in the rear of the lot.

According to rumors, some of the most beautiful of the marble mantels were removed and presented to various churches to be used in the construction of altars.

Until 1936 the house was occupied by the schoolboys, who brought noise and life again into the big rooms after years of silence.

Finally, however, the dormitory was abandoned, due to the fire hazard and to the escapades of the youngsters in scaling the cupola and exploring the roof, to the concern of the Sisters.

As for the Hastings family, their contact with Benicia became increasingly

slighter during their residence in San Francisco. George had married Anna Wallace of Benicia, and they had three children, Wallace, Aida, and Zeta. Alice became the wife of Charles Hunt, a San Francisco insurance broker.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hastings died in San Francisco, and all their sons and daughters have passed away. Thus the final chapter in Hastings' Folly was begun when the home was purchased by Ray Boldt of Vallejo, who started immediately on the job of wrecking the house, a task that took at least three months to complete.

Publicity given its wrecking attracted many curiosity seekers to wander through the empty mansion, pathetic in its bareness and decay. Trying to imagine each room as it once might have been, they only saw dismantled fireplaces with a few loose bricks on the bare hearth; tarnished chandeliers, one or two cracked flower pots with hardened soil in the empty conservatory, deserted rooms with remnants of handsome tapestry, wall papers and ornate moldings as reminders of better days.

And listeners in the little city park across the street no longer heard the melodies from Zeb's phonograph in the late afternoon—instead they heard the shouts of workmen and the beat of the wreckers' hammers sounding the death knell to Hastings' Folly.



Gift Suggestion

A membership to the **Solano County Historical Society** is a fine Christmas gift for any Solanoan or former Solanoan. It will assure him or her of receiving the first two issues of the *Solano Historian*. (Copies of this issue are for new members.) To purchase a gift membership, send to the Society a check (\$7.⁰⁰ for a single, \$10.⁰⁰ for a family), the name and mailing address of whomever it is for and the name and address of the donor.

We respectfully thank the following for use of photographs:
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Benicia Museum

Frisbie — pp. 1 - 3

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