

SACRAMENTO IN 1876

The first Christian Brothers School opened during a decade in which a deep current of popular discontent ran beneath the whole course of California history. A business depression set in about 1875, caused chiefly by the great panic in the East 2 years earlier and aggravated by a 20 year wild period of local speculation in mining stock which centered in the Nevada silver companies. The speculation caused the closure of the Bank of California, the largest bank in the state in 1874, as well as many other banks.

Industry and agriculture were not yet sufficiently developed to absorb the surplus labor force caused by the slowdown on the mining industry and the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Thus a shortage of jobs and lower wages resulted, and gave Dennis Kearney the opportunity to start the Working Man's party in California. This organization took out its frustrations on the Chinese people and led to riots in many cities. A great deal of political graft on both the federal and state level were being exposed by the newspapers.

The economic situation was not as severe for the people of Sacramento. The transition from Sutter's Fort to the Capitol city was completed by 1876. From the beginning it was a city fed and developed by transportation: wagon teams, freighters, river boats and iron rails. The city had now entered the industrial age on its own terms. It was a manufacturing center as well as a commercial enterprise. It had several breweries, brick yards. Carriage factories, coffee and spice mills, flour mills, foundries, saw and planing mills, box factories, tanneries and wood mills.

What really saved Sacramento's economy was the Central Pacific, the city's leading employer. It was the greatest industrial enterprise in the West, and their maintenance and construction yards produced wheels, cars, machine parts and locomotives. The recreated passenger depot currently on Front Street, the first terminal in California for the transcontinental railroad, was built around 1876.

STREET LEVELING

Several floods during Sacramento's formative years put the city's future in

Jeopardy. There was always the threat of having the capitol moved to another city and some companies were reluctant to move here. To help eliminate flooding, the city took on the greatest enterprise in its history. It raised the street level up to 12 feet on I, J and K Streets from Front to 13th Street. Most of the buildings had to be raised accordingly. Some were not and their first floor became the basement.

The property owners were also responsible for raising the sidewalks in from of their property. It was very dangerous to walk on the sidewalks since all owners did not raise them at the same time. It was advised not to walk and drink at the same time.

The streets when filled in were not always immediately surfaced. This made it hard for the wagon drivers, and in some instances they toppled over where the soil had not been compacted properly. The area in front of the Brothers' school was not put out for bid until July 1876 and wasn't completed until 1877. Cobblestones were probably used--it must have been a mess when the school opened. In 1893 the main streets were replaced with asphalt and wood sidewalks.

MEDICAL PROFESSION

The medical profession was in its infancy in the 1870's. In 1876 Robert Koch announced to the world that Microbes were the cause of disease. In the same year the state legislature began its first monitoring of the profession by enacting the Medical Practice Act, which set up a neutral board of examiners to check on the qualifications of the applicants.

In his first biennial report on August 1, 1877, Doctor Frederick Hatch, Secretary of the newly formed (1870) State Board of Health, noted that in 1876 there were 2552 deaths of children under the age of five, which represented 31% of the total deaths of the state. In Sacramento it was 24%. Parents, he cautioned, should do a better job of feeding and clothing their children, and they should not violate the laws of hygiene which caused the transmission of disease from parent to child. He further stated in the same year that there were 8,028 cases of malaria with 22 deaths. In northern California malaria caused more deaths than cholera.

Doctors also cautioned the public in their use of indoor plumbing since the toilets were hard to clean and when flushed, allowed sewer gases to come into the house.

A new county hospital was built in 1870 at the site of the present day U.C. Medical Center. It was destroyed by fire in 1878 and was rebuilt and ready to use in one year.

SCHOOLS

In the year that Christian Brothers school opened, the public schools had 2850 children enrolled with an average daily attendance of 1982 students. 1009 children did not attend school. Education apparently was not the priority that it is today. The public schools were integrated in 1874. In 1872 a grand public school (Mary Watson) was built at the current site of the Memorial Auditorium at 15th & 16th on J Street. It was three stories and had 15 rooms. The first public high school was also opened on August 31st of that year at 9th and M Streets. It contained four rooms, one of which was designated as a laboratory. Prior to that, the high school shared space with different grammar schools and had very few books and supplies.

In 1879 the average salary for 73 teachers in the public schools was \$72.83 per month. In 1882 a resolution was adopted by the school board that "thereafter, when high school exercises were held, a premium of \$20.00 would be offered to the young lady pupil who would attend in the least expensive and most appropriate dress". Apparently they also had dress code problems in the early Sacramento schools.

Perrys Seminary for Young Ladies, a high school and college prep, opened in 1876 with 190 young women. I'm sure some of the Brothers boys were around the school since it was located on 10th and 11th on I Street.

ATMOSPHERE

There were many different smells in the city other than from the students creations in the chemistry labs. There were several dairies, a number of hog yards, a glue factory and several slaughter houses located in the city limits.

There was a constant traffic of livestock and horses on the city streets. Because Sacramento was built on flat lands, water in the open drainage ditches formed reeking stagnant pools. Breezes wafting into the city passed over such pools, particularly at the intersection of Broadway and 18th Street. The area was known as "the terra of the South winds". I suppose the good part about this situation was the students didn't have to worry about deodorant.

Sutter Lake, located at the present site of the Union Pacific train depot, was also a source of great concern. Into the south side of the lake (I Street) the Chinese emptied their refuse and waste water from the laundry house. On the northern shore, the Union Pacific also dumped their waste. One year, it burned because of the excessive amount of inflammable material. Beside the foul odor the lake gave off, it was a breeding ground for mosquitoes that carried malaria to the workers. In 1876 the Central Pacific planted 300 Eucalyptus trees around the lake, and in 1877 they planted 2700 more. It was thought that these trees combated malaria.

WATER

In 1854 the city erected the first city water works. A replica of the building now stands in old town. It was in use in 1876 with many modifications along the way. During the days of hydraulic mining, sediment was washed down from the mountains and into the city's water system. It gave the water a brownish-tan color and resembled a shot of whiskey. It was jokingly referred to as "Sacramento Straight". The city of Wheatland brought the first suit against the hydraulic miners in 1876. The problem was resolved when the courts eliminated hydraulic mining in 1884.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The city of Sacramento has laid claim to the fact that it had the first fire department in the state of California. It was established in 1850 and made up entirely of volunteers. After twenty two years of service, the city decided that it would be better to have a paid fire department. On September 15, 1872 the city established engine company No. 1 on 2nd Street between K and L Streets (the Firehouse Restaurant) and engine company No. 2 at 10th Street

between I and J Streets. These stations used some volunteers along with the paid personnel.

1872

First paid fire departments were set up in Sacramento.

1874

The State Capitol was completed.

1876

1. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. In 1879 Sacramento had its first continuous telephone line that ran 5 miles over roofs and tree tops to sever 29 businesses.

2. The battle of the Big Horn was fought on June 24, 1876.

3. Horse drawn cars on wooden rails ran down K Street to 10th Street to provide public transportation for the students. Steel rails were added in 1880. Cars were pulled by 3 horses and could hold 22 people.

4. United States was 100 years old.

5. Eleven years had passed since the end of the Civil War.

6. Formation of the National Baseball League as we know it today.

7. The city of Elk Grove with 700 to 800 people erected the first buildings in the downtown area.

8. It was 26 years after California became a state.

9. An ice plant was located between 10th & 11th on K Street. It could make 10 tons of ice every 24 hours, which sold for 1 cent per pound.

1878

The Governor's mansion on 16th & H Street was built for Albert Gallatin. It was purchased by the State in 1903 as the first Governor's Mansion.

1879

1. The first free public library was opened.
2. Free postal deliveries began in Sacramento.
3. Thomas Edison developed the incandescent light. It wasn't until 1895 when hydraulic electricity was transported from Folsom that it became cheap enough to be used by the general public