

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWS

Rev. Vernon Doerksen, Pastor of Grace Church in Lockeford will be the speaker at our annual dinner scheduled for 7 p. m. on October 28th.

Rev. Doerksen will talk on "Native Tribes of the Belgian Congo." The talk will be illustrated. The speaker is the son of Missionary parents, and spent his high school years in the land he describes.

The event will be at the Evangelical United Brethern Church, corner of Elm and Central Avenue.

On August 10th, a chartered bus trip was enjoyed by members. Our destination was Monterey, where interesting adobe houses had been opened to the public for inspection.

Another memorable event was the trip to Volcano on October 13th. The town and points nearby proved to be rich in historic background.

HISTORIC FACTS

We are including some interesting facts about Woodbridge. They were presented at a meeting by Mrs. Erma Reese, Principal of Woods School for 20 years (1927-1947).

EARLY HISTORY OF WOODBRIDGE

The first inhabitants of the site of Woodbridge were French Canadians, who trapped beavers on the banks of the Mokelumne. They built a log cabin sometime in the 1840's, and in 1850, G. W. Emerson, Jacob Brack and the Sargent brothers arrived. It was the Sargents who erected a log house (more than a cabin), thus competing with Staples Ferry near Lockeford in living standards.

In 1851, where the little town of Woodbridge now stands, Sargent and Brack sowed forty acres of barley, and in the bottom land planted ten acres of potatoes. Both crops failed. It was the driest season in history!

J. H. Woods reached the Sargent place with his family in 1852 and camped until a house could be built. . . That same year an incident occurred that tells us something about the presence of mind and courage of the women in those pioneer households.

Mrs. Woods had left fresh meat hanging outside the cabin. It attracted a hungry bear, a huge shaggy grizzly. A noise caught the attention of the woman. When she looked up from her household chores, she was face to face with bruin. . . . He was blocking the doorway -- curious about the interior.

Mrs. Woods thought first of the children. She thrust them to safety on the stringers of the cabin -- then turned to the beast. Bruin regarded the woman a moment, appeared to lose interest in the whole affair, faced about and ambled off to the wilderness. . . .

In 1852 Mr. Woods and A. McQueen bought the Sargent brothers' claim. The former proceeded to construct a ferry boat and to establish a crossing known as 'Woods Ferry.' He petitioned for a public road by way of the ferry. The route is the present Lower Sacramento Road. Woods made it more attractive by offering the stage lines free transportation across the river. Before, the stage had been using upper Sacramento Road, which ran through Staple's Ferry.

A flood inundated the country in '52 except for a few high places. Wild game was driven out of the tules on to higher ground, and it was not unusual to lasso an elk, exhausted by running.

The next few years were taken up with numerous ventures, such as packing salmon caught in the Mokelumne, making and selling wooden plow handles and in construction. A hotel was put up in 1854 and in '58, Mr. Woods put in a bridge at the old ferry crossing. The bridge cost him \$1,000.00 and brought \$9,900.00 in tolls the first year. Rates were \$1.00 for a span of horses and wagon plus \$.50 for additional team and wagon.

On December 27, 1861, the bridge was carried away by high water. It was towed back and again rested on the previous foundation. This bridge served the public until 1874, when the old toll bridge was torn down and a free one substituted. The cost of the structure was met by subscription.

In April, 1859, Woods Ferry was surveyed as a town plot; and to it, the name of "Woodbridge" was given. The first town lots sold for \$500.00, but Mr. Woods never perfected his title to the land that he conveyed. The government didn't put the land on the market until 1865, at which time it was open for preemption.

By 1871, the new town had four churches, the Nevada Asylum for the insane, several lodges and numerous business houses. The town had an excellent school, a large merchandise store, a hotel, flour mill, tinshop, harness maker, jeweler, boot-maker, wagon maker, butcher shop and two saloons. The asylum was moved to Stockton in 1877.

The first elementary school in Woodbridge, a one room affair, was located at the intersection of Turner and Woodbridge Roads, diagonally across from the present home of Mrs. Alice Towne.

A large square cast-iron stove furnished the heat. The bigger boys gained their physical exercise cutting the fuel (not that they always needed exercise) - not after

walking to school. Some lived three and four miles away. Subjects taught were reading, writing, arithmetic, plus a smattering of geography and some U. S. History.

Lunches were brought from home. The noon hour often turned into a barter session when an apple went for a doughnut, a piece of pie for a wedge of cake. Drinking water came from a common dipper hung above the bucket filled at the pump in the school yard.

As the school grew, a new location was found. This time classes were conducted in the Masonic Hall on the lower floor. The building was on the banks of the Mokelumne at the eastern edge of town. When this too became inadequate for the growing community, Woods school was housed in a two story structure near the Elbert Covell home. It had two teachers and was financed by direct tax.

It was in the local butcher shop that the idea of starting a high school or "seminary" (as they called it then) was born. Money for the venture was raised mostly by subscription. The United Brethern in Christ founded the "Seminary" in 1879. Sixty-four pupils were enrolled. From the start up to 1883, the school continued to expand, to add new courses and to enlarge the faculty. It was chartered by the state in 1883 and named "San Joaquin Valley College." The college had great value to the life and the culture of the community. Lack of funds caused it to be closed, and in due time the structure, along with its surrounding seven and one-half acres, was purchased for \$197.00 by the Woods School District.

The old building was used for several years until a beautiful spacious school took its place in 1921. Six years later the State Department of Education selected the District for a State Demonstration School. For the next three years, more than 1500 teachers and supervisors observed class-room procedure.

In December 1933, the school was destroyed by fire. Temporary quarters were set up in a fruit shed, and in October 1934, students and teachers moved into the present Woods School.

State Historical Landmark No. 520 was dedicated by the San Joaquin County Historical Society at the site of San Joaquin Valley College on May 19, 1956.