

Nuggets from the Past

By Norman McLeod

Todd's Valley School project left a legacy of local history

Back in 1933 a rather remarkable 93-page booklet was composed and printed by nine sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students of the old Todd's Valley School, with a foreword by Kenneth L. Lonergan, the Placer County superintendent of schools.

The title was, "Bits of Todd's Valley History." Its authors all were students under Sophia Drone. On Page 4 is a photo of the authors, and it is noteworthy that at least eight of the nine were from local Indian families, the Hansens, Porters and Drones.

On Page 5 is a freehand map giving a bird's-eye view of Todd's Valley (Old Town,) showing locations of roads, homes, schoolhouse and cemetery.

Page 7 reveals a brief history of the town, taken from Lardner and Brock, that informs us it goes back to 1849 when a trading post and hotel were founded by a Dr. Todd who fenced his land and pastured horses for \$5 a week. We're also told the rich mining field did not open until 1852, from which date the town grew rapidly until 1859, when most of the settlement was destroyed by a great fire. The town was immediately rebuilt, including Masonic and Odd Fellows halls and two temperance orders, one hotel, a theater (the Long Island Opera House,) a post office and blacksmith shop, one brewery, a large livery stable and a butcher shop.

The main road into town was called the Mill Road. It descended from the ridge top where the Johnny White sawmill stood. The lumber for the schoolhouse, a one-room structure, was made in this mill. Page 8 includes an old 1911 photo of Todd's Valley, taken from the schoolhouse porch. Two boys on the road approaching the school are Clair Storey and Tom Liddicoet.

In 1933, only one building was still standing in the town's old downtown district. This was a two-story brick building called Nick's store. Its owner was a Swiss-Italian named Nick Quirolo. Its upper story was occupied by the Odd Fellows Lodge, and when Nick died he is supposed to have willed his property to the lodge in Auburn.

The book gives a brief history of most of the town's homes, with usually a snapshot of each one. A 1931 photo shows the old Porter home located on the Mill Road, near where is today the entrance to the Ermine Duccini place. This structure was set on fire by a small boy playing with matches.

One home, a fine looking two-story building owned by the Garbe family, was sold and torn down by its new owner, who moved it to Lincoln.

The town's school was well-attended in 1857, with 60 students, as compared to 90 in Auburn, 71 in Michigan Bluff and 68 in Yankee Jim's. By 1923, attendance had dropped to six, but by 1931 enrollment had increased to eight.

A Mr. Tracy was the first teacher in the new school building, in 1881. Apparently he found teaching difficult, as "there were many big boys whose chief delight was to carry him out bodily if they could." Irish Louise Rooney taught in 1882-83. She is described as staging an "exhibition" at Christmastime, and even included a real Christmas tree in the schoolroom, the first the students ever enjoyed.

The 1884 teacher was the "very pretty" Mary Spaulding, "with chestnut colored hair." She became very ill before the end of her term, had to give up teaching and died of tuberculosis shortly thereafter. William Lininger taught for only three months in 1887, due to a case of malaria on top of severe lovesickness.

In 1892 came Sophie Cadwallader. "She had a pink and white complexion and was very beautiful. She was also a good teacher." Bessie Hobbs, a delicate girl,

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taught half a term in 1893. She also died of tuberculosis. Then there was Savina DeMaria of 1894-95. "She was a very conscientious teacher." Effie Langstaff taught in 1895-96 and in 1896-97. Her class consisted of between 17 and 20 pupils. And so on.

A.G. Read was born in Boston in 1826 and was descended from the early Puritans, the youngest of 12 children. He arrived in California in 1850, made several attempts at gold mining in the foothills and in 1853 came to Todd's Valley, where he engaged in the retail store business successfully. He built a large brick store and a fine residence, the latter on the site where today we see the giant cork tree that Read planted. In 1887 he moved his business to Foresthill. He died about 1912 and lies buried in the Todd's Valley Cemetery

On the ridgetop road to Foresthill once stood Sam Frazier's Roadhouse, where he lived and worked for many years. Todd's Valley residents used to pick up their mail here, after the post office closed. "Old Sam" died about 1916, and he is also buried in the Todd's Valley Cemetery.

Charles Hansen, one of the book's authors, relates how his folks described frequent visits to the town by mountain lions. "They used to follow everybody along our road. They could see a lion following them in the moonlight along the bank. That was a long time ago."

In 1913 some excitement was stirred up when two lions padded from out of a manzanita thicket, sniffed around the schoolhouse on a Friday afternoon but were not seen by those inside. "Old Nick" Quirolo saw the two lions, but he had no gun and he had no boots with which to chase the lions through the snow on the ground. Next day a neighbor trailed the animals but did not see them.

Christina Hansen wrote, "One day long ago a large bear chased Mr. Porter's grandfather down a trail below the schoolhouse. The trail passed under a large oak, so he jumped and grabbed a tree limb and the bear shot by underneath."

Long ago two highwaymen planned to hold up a stage at a place called Bear Trap. Sombdy tipped off the driver about the planned holdup, so the two stage messengers were prepared. The driver was ordered to stop and the messengers stepped down on each side of the vehicle. The robbers at first thought the two men were passengers and were taken by surprise when the guards opened fire. Both highwaymen were shot and killed, later buried in a shallow grave outside the fence at Todd's Valley Cemetery. The grave was so shallow the robbers' boots protruded from the ground, where they were seen by children on their way to school.

These are some of the numerous stories contained in this entertaining volume. We understand our local library has two copies of the booklet; one can be checked out and the second must be read inside. Much credit to its success must be given to the late Sophia Drone, who instilled in her students the interest and desire to leave at least a little history behind for us to enjoy at a later date.
