

Exploring 1913, a Placer Perspective



What a difference a century makes. Look back to 1913. For me, it was the year Dad was born. It was at home on a ranch on land where the Maidu once flourished. The ranch became known as El MoVoJo, my grandparents' novel way of honoring their three children, Marjorie, Virginia and John Otten. The ranch, now part of the Sierra Gardens subdivision off Douglas Boulevard in Roseville, then was a buggy ride outside of town off a narrow lane known as Rocky Ridge Road.

If any of the Ottens then were able to take a look today, they would be dumbfounded at what they would see just as I might be if able to take a look at what Placer County might look like in 2113 compared to today.

By my reckoning of various state reports, Placer County's population grew from about 18,335 to more than 355,000 in the last century. Auburn's population grew from less than 2,400 in 1913 to 13,468 as of last year; Roseville had shot from some 3,000 residents to more than 122,000, Colfax went from less than 600 to 1,977, Rocklin, from under 800 to 58,296, and Lincoln, from less than 1,400 to 43,572.

In 1913 Placer County seemed like train and agricultural county USA. In Auburn there were six passenger trains passing through daily both east and west bound. There was seemingly unbounded growth in the Southern Pacific yards in Roseville, still accused by some in Rocklin of stealing its roundhouse in 1909.

Yet 1913 was still an era of horse and buggy for most, stagecoaches continued to operate and fire, like now, was a major danger. Auburn City Trustees were pushed to install service phones in the city's three hose houses. Auburn's sewage plant was described as inadequate and Trustees were pushed to hold a bond election to erect a new one.

W. B. Lardner, a primary founder of the Placer County Historical Society and one of Auburn's leading lights, wrote glowingly of the county seat in 1913. "We have a fine water system, under heavy pressure, a good sanitary sewer plant, and plenty of electric lights, wrote Lardner for the Placer County Republican.

"The last and greatest satisfaction is to know that Auburn and Placer County are on the great inter ocean Lincoln Highway" that was dedicated that year. Lincoln Way was then called Railroad Street.

Gambling was prohibited wherever liquor was served with the City Marshal warning Auburn saloon keepers they could lose their license. An Auburn Taxpayers League was organized to assist in opposing prohibition on moral and financial grounds. The city and county continued the \$5 poll tax: \$2 went to the state, \$2 for the hospital poll tax and \$1 for the road poll tax. Banks were paying 4 percent interest on savings, a princely sum compared to today's rates. City Clerk L. F. Morgan salary was \$30 a month. For City Attorney William Lardner, it was \$25.

The (Women's) Improvement Club of Auburn not only placed garbage cans all over the city, took care of Sierra park and planted a rose garden at the train depot, they installed a drinking fountain in the plaza in front of the Shanghai Restaurant dedicated "To the memory of Placer County Pioneers: Lest we Forget, 1848-1913." It was torn down in 1950. Can you find the plaque today?

A. W. Kenison Co., Placer County agents for the Buffalo Brewing Co. of Sacramento, ran this ad "Good Advice to those who are tired or run down or who are affected with 'that tired feeling' is to try Buffalo Lager Beer. There is nothing so bracing, so appetizing, so healthful as a glass of BUFFALO LAGER BEER." Next to it was an ad for "Hall's Family Pills for Constipation," sold by all druggists for 75 cents.

Senator E. S. Birdsall and Assemblyman William A. Dower introduced legislation to construct an approximate 130-mile scenic bridle trail to connect Lake Tahoe and Yosemite with strong support from the Native Sons of the Golden West Auburn Parlor 59. There was a joint meeting of the Placer and El Dorado Boards of Supervisors on a permanent boundary line between the counties.

District attorney L. L. Chamberlain died from spinal meningitis. George W. Hamilton appointed to take his place on a 3-2 vote of Board of Supervisors. John Henry Robie, who organized the Auburn Lumber Co. and Auburn Savings Bank, died after a long paralytic illness. Survivors included son E.T. Robie and grandchildren Wendell and Edwina Robie.

Considerable improvements were made to the County Hospital with the old jail building moved nearby to "accommodate insane persons when necessary."

Birdsall Shoe Co. on Central Square advertised Grover's handmade shoes for \$4. The Auburn Restaurant, A. M. Sather, prop., phone Red 57, boasted the "best restaurant in the county for oysters prepared any way."

Placer County Coroner J. G. Bisbee reported a prolific year for death in 1913, requiring 67 inquests, including 15 on Southern Pacific tracks and another on the Mt. Quarries railroad. Five involved suicides and 11 homicides by gunshot.

One touching death was that of Florence White, 6, who appeared to have been slightly injured when bitten by a dog while with her father, Edward White, the Wells Fargo agent at Bowman. She died about three weeks later at the home of her grandparents, the Walter Connelleys, in Newcastle.

Lake Spaulding Dam was put in operation with the Drum Powerhouse activating "Pacific Service" that included completion of carrying electrical energy from the summit to Cordelia Junction.

Yes dad, 1913 was quite a year. We planted a new Mr. Lincoln rose.