

“Crystal Laughing Waters” –

Historical Glimpses of the Laguna de Santa Rosa

by

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INTRODUCTION

While a visitor to Sebastopol in 1898 described the Laguna as “crystal laughing waters” in the *Sebastopol Times*, the description is very fanciful. The Laguna is physically a very low flow stream with a fall of at most about 40 feet in the 14 miles between Cotati and the Russian River (a drop of less than three feet per mile – less than two feet per mile north of Sebastopol). While draining a relatively large watershed of 250 square miles – about 16% of the acreage of Sonoma County, the Laguna would have always been a relatively warm stream prone to cloudy water of low water quality – certainly not “crystal” – even in the “pristine” Laguna conditions prior to European settlement of the region in the 1830s. The Laguna north of Sebastopol typically floods its banks to some extent during the winter rainy season and usually does not flow during the late summer, but forms a series of ponds and dry channels. The post-European changes in acreage of habitat types and the abundance of wildlife in the Laguna area in the pristine and the early settlement period, is well established. But from a water quality point of view, post-European settlement made the “natural” poor water conditions of the Laguna highly degraded by, for example, making the water warmer yet by agricultural clearing of the riparian forest shading the waterway or by increasing nitrification of the water with farm wastes, urban sewage and cannery wastewater, etc. The presence of carp and catfish indicate that the Laguna was clearly a warm body of water in the late 1800s, but the reports in 1946 that fish were found floating “bottoms up” indicates that the Laguna was highly degraded in late summer from excessive nitrification and extremely low dissolved oxygen.

These early Laguna stories are summaries of articles appearing in local newspapers before 1903 – that is, they are at least a century old. The Laguna was an important feature of early Sebastopol. By the early 1900s there was only one cannery in the town dumping its very “strong,” seasonal wastewater directly into the Laguna, but by 1906 Sebastopol began to dump about 100,000 gallons per day of septic tank effluent from its new sewer system into the Laguna (Lake Jonive). Numerous early newspaper articles in the *Sebastopol Times* attest to the importance of a municipal sewer system as being one of the primary reasons why Sebastopol incorporated. Since these articles have already been summarized in the “Awful Offal of Sebastopol,” they are omitted from this historical paper.

Significant quotations from the summarized newspaper articles are in quotation marks. Relatively minor quoted words and phrases are often not in quotation marks, but were used in the summaries to provide a flavor of the original language and tone of the old newspaper articles.

Many of the summaries have been distorted to highlight useful tidbits of historic Laguna interest. The names of the people involved are included to satisfy the current demand for genealogical research and are faithfully spelled as in the newspaper article summarized. Alternative spelling

and descriptions of the Laguna, also faithfully copy the old newspaper articles. Readers are encouraged to read the original newspaper article on microfilm. For convenience in locating the original newspaper article, the same case is used in the titles of the summarized articles as in the original newspaper articles. Except for the *Sebastopol Times*, this is not a complete list of local newspaper articles on the Laguna, but is only met to be a representative sample.

Format: (newspaper)(date)(title of newspaper article)

Newspaper Key:

SCJ – *The Sonoma County Journal* of Petaluma
 SD – *The Sonoma Democrat* of Santa Rosa
 ST – *The Sebastopol Times*
 PD – *The Press Democrat* of Santa Rosa

SCJ – April 6, 1860. HARD ROAD TO TRAVEL

“The stage drivers find Jorden a hard road, about this time. The trip from this city to the steamboat is made by horse and steam power, the coaches landing their passengers at Sebastopol, from which point they are conveyed by the little steamer Georgina. From Petaluma to Bodega, it requires all of ‘Dill Bibbitts’ skill as an engineer to make the rifle, while the trip between here and Healdsburg is only accomplished with the utmost difficulty, ox-power being required it is said, to help the coach out of some of the mud holes!”

Considerable caution is required in correctly interpreting this early newspaper article. On the surface, it appears to be a literal description of early spring travel from Petaluma in 1860 – the steamer to San Francisco, Bill Tibbitts U S M line of Concord stage coaches to Bodega via Sebastopol, and north to Healdsburg via Santa Rosa. But that one could get off the stage at Sebastopol and take a little steamer up the Laguna to the Russian River and then go where, is not now obvious. For example, the lower Russian River communities of Guerneville or Duncan’s Mill would not be an obvious destination point for at least about another decade.

SCJ – August 3, 1860. SEBASTOPOL

Readers of the Petaluma newspaper – lovers of the beauties of nature, are encouraged to take jolly Bill Tibbitts’ daily Bodega stage for about seventeen miles and visit Sebastopol – a days trip to a resort place for parties, recreation, or hunting and fishing in the country. Joaquin Carrillo of the Analy Hotel and Mr. Wright of Wilson’s Exchange – a new hotel that will be completed in a few weeks, “will attend to the wants of the inner man to their satisfaction.” “Of vital interest to sportsmen, nearby is a fine stream [the Laguna] from which large quantities of fish are taken.”

SD – December 22, 1877. THE DRAINING OF THE LAGUNA

An announcement of a meeting of all interested parties to discuss and devise ways and means to drain the Laguna downstream of Sebastopol.

SD – December 29, 1877. LOCAL AND OTHER BRIEFS

“– Nineteen small boys, a single barrelled smooth bore shot-gun and a rat terrier, started to the Laguna for duck this morning.”

SD – January 12, 1878. DRAINING THE LAGUNA

The recent meeting in Ridgeway Hall of persons interested in the measure to drain the lower Laguna, led to a decision to incorporate a company – the Laguna de Santa Rosa Reclamation Company, and to continue this corporate body for twenty years. Messrs. John Baillif, L. Meyers, H. Clark, A. Gamble and J. H. Haun were elected directors of the new company. “The utility of such a measure has long been apparent.” “Several thousand acres of the richest land in the county will be rendered arable.”

SD – January 26, 1878. SEBASTOPOL NEWS

The storm of last week caused the upper end of the Laguna to overflow carrying away both grain and fences. Sebastopol, being completely flooded, appeared to be a total wreck.

A. Barnes suffered most from the flooding losing about \$1,500 and two thousand fish (undoubtedly carp) as the overflow washed away the dams and the fish into the creek. Although the text is ambiguous, A. Barnes appears to have been a resident of Green Valley, and the creek is not identified.

SD – July 27, 1878. DROWNED

Walter Hampton, the child of G. W. Sinclair who resides near the Laguna, eluded “its” mother’s vigilance and escaped to a pool about twenty yards from the house. The mother found the lifeless corpse of the child in the pool. “The agonized parents receive the sympathies of all”

SD – July 27, 1878. Sebastopol Notes

Some young men from Santa Rosa went fishing and hunting in the neighborhood of Sebastopol. They let down fences, etc. without putting them up again on Mr. Gannon's place. Mr. Gannon was very indignant and made the young men "put things right again." As a condition for not prosecuting them, Mr. Gannon made the boys promise to keep away from his ranch in the future. The boys promptly marched back to Santa Rosa.

Gannon's hop yard is now essentially the dairy ranch off High School road immediately adjacent to Sebastopol's north boundary. James P. Gannon (1837 – 1896) was a very prominent early settler in Sebastopol and is buried in the city's historic cemetery. His many services to the community included leading a Sebastopol group in the late 1870s to successfully encourage the San Francisco and North Pacific railroad to build a branch to Sebastopol from Santa Rosa. The SF&NP railroad finally arrived in Sebastopol in 1890.

SD – October 12, 1878. ANOTHER ACCIDENT

Melvin Stoddard accidentally shot his cousin, A. C. Stoddard, with twenty-nine shot while aiming for a flock of quail while hunting near the Laguna. The wounded boy was knocked down and was stuck in the face, however, none of the shot penetrated to any great depth "except the one that struck his nose." His most painful wound was from two other shot which passed through one of his thumbs. "He walked home after he was shot and appears none the worse for the accident."

SD – November 23, 1878. INQUEST AND BURIAL

Fred Fick, G. R. Kopf and several others were hunting near the Laguna north of the bridge near Illingsworths' ranch when they came across "the body of a man in an advanced state of decomposition." Marshal Beckner of Santa Rosa notified Sheriff Dinwiddie who telegraphed Coroner Tighe who did not respond, so Judge Cox summoned a jury to the scene. Dr. J. F. Boyce pronounced the body to be that of a Chinaman about twenty-five, who had been dead in the water for about eight months. The jury (B. F. Keim, G. R. Kopf, T. R. Reller, Will Acton, Wm. J. Lytaker and M. M. Shearer) concluded that the Chinaman came to his death in a manner unknown to the jury. Suspicions were that the Chinaman had been murdered by some Indians since a Chinaman and an Indian had had a row near A. J. Peterson's ranch last spring. The body was placed in a grave dug near the edge of the Laguna "with the earth shoveled nicely around him."

SD – December 28, 1878. CLOSE CALL

Columbus Peterson was hunting near the Laguna as a flock of ducks approached. Afraid to change his position and frighten the ducks, he carefully reached for his gun leaning against a fence. But the nozzle was blocked and the charge exploded bursting the barrel and the shot flew all around Mr. Peterson's head and tore his hat to pieces. "Singular to state Mr. Peterson escaped without injury."

SD – March 29, 1879. FATAL ACCIDENT

A Chinaman named Chung Ting employed by Wm. Illingsworth on the Laguna, found that half a can of blasting powder used in splitting wood had become wet, caked and hard. While Mr. Illingsworth advised Chung Ting to bury the can of wet powder, he tried to dry it on a fire. But the powder exploded and the badly injured the Chinaman later died in the County Hospital "in the most excruciating agonies."

SD – May 17, 1879. CATFISH

E. A. Howe of Fulton had received seven or eight hundred catfish from the U.S. Fish Commissioner and placed them in the Laguna – one-third of them near Jack Peterson's ranch, one-third at the Archer place above the "Long Bridge" and remaining third in the creek below Forestville station. Mr. Howe requests that the residents and the public protect the young fish for one year so that the streams in this section will be supplied with this fish.

The "Long Bridge" at the Archer place was approximately where River Road crosses the Laguna today.

SD – May 31, 1879. CATFISH

Col. J. B. Rue and Capt. Jas. Adams received five hundred catfish from Mr. Redding, the Fish Commissioner. Some were put in Matanzas Creek but most were put in the Laguna near Capt. Scammon's ranch in the company of J. H. P. Morris of Sebastopol.

The Scammon ranch was immediately north of the Gannon ranch on the west side of the Laguna north of Sebastopol. J. H. P. Morris was the founder of Sebastopol.

SD – June 7, 1879. CATFISH

Over a thousand catfish have been recently placed in the Laguna and other streams in this vicinity and there will doubtless be an abundant supply of this fish in a year from now. “Carp do not thrive in the [local] waters, as the young are destroyed by that disgusting looking newt called “water dogs”. They catch the young carp, whose movements are very sluggish, by the tails and devour them. Carp raisers are compelled to watch their ponds closely to keep this species of vermin out.”

The reported newt predation of young carp did not prevent carp from being established in the Laguna. Seven years after catfish were placed in the Laguna, carp were reported to being caught in the Laguna. Both catfish and carp are common in the Laguna today.

SD – June 7, 1879. A MOURNFUL OCCURRENCE

Seventeen year-old Joel Crane, son of J. Crane on Healdsburg Avenue in Santa Rosa, went fishing on the Laguna with his younger brothers, Walter and Alexander. They wandered up and down the stream until they came across a place free from tules and brush near the road leading from Petaluma to Sebastopol and decided to bathe. None of the boys were expert swimmers and after a time, the younger boys observed Joel sink and they became frightened and gave the alarm. Soon a number of persons joined the search for Joel’s body. “The parents and relatives of the deceased, have the heartfelt sympathy of all this community in this sad bereavement.”

SD – August 16, 1879. AN IMPORTANT MEETING

Residents near the Laguna are to meet to take steps toward having an outlet made for the surplus water. The obstructions have increased each season and have rendered hundreds of acres unfit for cultivation.

SD – September 13, 1879. DRAINING THE LAGUNA

The proposal to drain four miles of the Laguna above the railroad bridge by Sebastopol has been discussed for a number of years, but now “seems quite likely to be carried into effect” this fall. Press Davis has surveyed the area and has pronounced the plan feasible. Surplus water will be discharged into “Lake Sebring” and 600 acres of rich bottom land will be reclaimed.

SD – October 18, 1879. Another Unfortunate

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Word was brought to Sheriff Dinwiddie that two boys, Charley Bond and Johnnie McCann, had found a body floating the Laguna near John Molloy's house. Judge Brown, acting coroner, summoned a jury and hastened to the scene. Two Italians, Cesage Cezeri and Pirpi Pasquino, retrieved the body of a young unknown man not over twenty-six years of age. The coroner's jury (Will Acton, T. R. Roller, B. F. Keim, C. D. Taylor, George J. Dunnigan, Chancey Kane and Frank Hathaway) concluded drowning in the Laguna of no known cause. The body was interred in Wm. B. Griggs' field since the parties residing next to the Laguna objected to having the remains buried on their premises.

SD – October 25, 1879. IDENTIFIED

The body taken from the Laguna in the preceding article is supposed to be the remains of Frank Perkins, a recent inmate of the Industrial School in San Francisco. There appears to have been foul play since the entire gang of tramps camping near town have all suddenly left this section. The tramps may have strangled or poisoned Perkins and then put him in the Laguna. "Something caused them to leave here very suddenly."

SD – November 8, 1879. Board of Supervisors – TUESDAY'S PROCEEDINGS

Petition to the Honorable Board of Supervisors under provision of a state Act approved April 1872 to form a Laguna Drainage District for 561 and _ acres of overflowed land in the Laguna unfit for agricultural purposes. (J. H. Archer, 70 acres; John Molloy, 32 acres; John Bailiff, 108 acres; – Ward, 40 acres; J. Howland, 5 and 1/4 acres; A. J. Peterson, 49 acres, A. Peterson, 46 acres; Otis Allen, 30 acres; J. Morrison, 13 acres; G. N. Sanborn, 36 and _ acres; S. Talmadge, 20 and _ acres; L. Meyer, 32 acres; A. Gamble, 22 acres; J. C. Scudder, 4 acres; D. Giovanini, 30 acres; C. Cejevi, 7 acres; and H. Clark, 31 acres) The acting trustees for the first three months are: John Bailiff, H. Clark and A. Peterson,

SD – November 8, 1879. Board of Supervisors – WEDNESDAY'S PROCEEDINGS

In the matter of the Laguna Draining District, the Trustees of the District reported to the county supervisors that the cost of repairs and other expenses would amount to \$ 1,500. On motion of Mr. Crane, F. G. Hahman, J. P. Clark and Preston Davis were appointed to view and assess the amount proportionately upon the lands in the draining district.

Santa Rosa's council formed a new position and appointed the city's first City Engineer – a Preston R. Davis, in September 1885. City Engineer Davis was appointed just after Santa Rosa began to install its municipal sewer system and held the position for about five years. The county supervisors were petitioned in the spring of 1979 to approve the reclamation of overflowed salt marsh lands east of Petaluma Creek on San Francisco Bay.

SD – January 1, 1881. The Laguna Bridges

The three bridges crossing the Laguna, especially the middle bridge, are in poor condition. Considering the large amount of travel to Analy Township and the hauling, especially redwoods, merchants and others are going to petition the Board of Supervisors to alter the boundary between the Santa Rosa and the Analy road districts to the middle of the Laguna, to enable the Santa Rosa district to apply some of the funds to support the Laguna bridges. Jack Peterson and Lossen (?) Ross agree that the distance across the Laguna from the high ground on the west side to the high ground on the east side at the site of the middle bridge is about 1,000 feet. Such a middle bridge made of timber should cost about \$ 3,500.

It would appear that the three Laguna bridge crossings referred to in this article are from Sebastopol north and are now the River, the Gueneville and the Sebastopol road bridge crossings.

SD – February 27, 1886. Another Fish Story

The son of Jack Peterson was fishing off one of the Laguna bridges when all of a sudden he was pulled into the water by big fish. The boy was rescued and the fish was landed – an immense carp. “The yarn is rather fishy, but we won't *carp*.”

SD – February 27, 1886. CITY AND COUNTY NEWS – The Laguna Alive With Carp

The Laguna is reported to be “literally swarming with carp.” at the middle bridge. Mr. Winkler used a pitchfork to bring in a nice fish. The carp ponds of Mr. Aaron Barnes and of Mr. Billings, who lives on the Redwood road to Forestville, overflowed some years ago and are supposed to have accidentally stocked the Laguna with carp.

An article in the *Sonoma Democrat* dated July 27, 1878 refers to Mr. Oliver's carp pond in Forestville. Another article the *Democrat* dated September 20, 1879 refers to the carp rearing ponds of Mr. Oliver and of Mr. Davis of Forestville and of Mr. Poppe near Sonoma. Apparently these ponds were associated with the Lenni Fish Propagating Company of San Francisco. On September 27, 1879 the *Sonoma Democrat* carried a long article promoting fish farming as a more profitable local activity than growing any other crop. Apparently carp raising had been going on locally for about a decade before carp were accidentally introduced into the Laguna.

SD – December 31, 1887. LOCAL BREVITIES

“The Laguna at present is a favorable resort for hunters. The ducks are plenty and less timid than usual.”

SD – February 9, 1889. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS – MONDAY SESSION

In the morning session, S. R. Jewell and others presented a petition to the county supervisors to form a Laguna Drainage district. On motion of Mr. Davis in the afternoon session, the supervisors granted the petition to form a drainage district for the Laguna

Unfortunately, neither the process nor the descriptions of the proposed Laguna drainage project(s) are clear. The Santa Rosa newspaper articles are too brief and fractionated to correctly ascertain the actual process or a project description. The location of “Lake Sebring” is of particular interest to identify.

SD – July 11, 1891. A SENSATIONAL DISCOVERY – Bloody Shirt and Other Garments Picked Up at the Laguna

A gentleman from the western part of the county brought a bag of blood stained garments and other items he had found on the shore of the Laguna near the bridge on the Guerneville branch to the sheriff’s office and “caused something of a sensation.” Blood stains and marks in the sand indicated that a struggle had occurred. The items found clearly indicated that the owner of the items was an Italian.

SD – August 5, 1893. A Close Call

A man working for J. O. Burkhalter had a close call with death while taking some measurements on the Laguna. Wearing heavy rubber boots he went into the water only to sink into the mire and have his boots fill with water – and he steadily but certainly sank in the mud. The water was around his neck and shoulders when he was finally rescued by a boat.

ST – August 28, 1895. Miscellaneous Items

A tramp stole three pairs of pantaloons from Burroughs’ store on Main Street in Sebastopol. Deputy Constable Luth armed himself with his “popper” and promptly caught the thief in the “hobo’s resort” on the Laguna. The thief was sentenced to serve 60 days in Santa Rosa’s “Third Street hotel” (the county jail). While District Attorney Seawel was present to represent the people

at the thief's trial in Justice Thompson's court in Sebastopol, his services were unnecessary since the thief changed his initial "not guilty" plea to "guilty" as charged.

ST – August 28, 1895. Coon Hunt on the Laguna

G. N. Sanborn with G. O. Allen's hound had been very successful in coon hunting down the Laguna last Saturday morning. In the last two years between seventy and eighty coons and foxes have fallen victim to Mr. Sanborn's unerring aim and the keen scent and jaws of this old faithful hound. One coon was left in a tree in the Feri swamp in the recent hunt.

ST – January 22, 1896. Local Affairs

"The Laguna overflowed ... the water reached a point about four feet below the railroad trestle."

The note refers to the San Francisco and North Pacific railroad trestle to the north of the current bridge crossing the Laguna on the Joe Redota trail – the old Petaluma and Santa Rosa electric railway bridge. The regenerating oak woodland north of the Joe Redota trail between the Laguna and near Llano Road, is on the abandoned right-of-way of the first railroad to reach Sebastopol – a branch from Santa Rosa of the San Francisco and North Pacific.

ST – January 29, 1896. Local Affairs

"A six-year-old orange tree on Mr. Otis Allen's place north of town produced two hundred and eighty oranges this season."

ST – April 8, 1896. Fish for the Laguna

Attorney J. S. Saunders wrote the Fish Commissioners of San Francisco about placing black bass in the Laguna to destroy, if possible, all of the carp which presently exist in the stream. R. X. Ryan of the San Francisco and North Pacific Railway Company was pleased to offer the services of the railroad to transport the bass to Sebastopol free of charge. If the Fish Commissioners agree to supply the Laguna with bass, it will become one of the finest fishing points in the county in a few years.

Bass, while considered to be a better sport and eating fish than the non-native carp common in the Laguna in the late 1800s, are also a non-native fish species. Of the eighteen fish species identified in the Laguna in 1988, ten were introduced species. Carp are often considered to be a "trash" fish. Both bass and carp are common in the Laguna today.

ST – February 10, 1897. DROWNED IN THE LAGUNA

Eighteen-year-old Ed Stump drowned while attempting to cross the washed out road and swollen Laguna on horseback near the Ellingsworth bridge about four miles from Sebastopol. Young Stump of Fulton was riding to visit his sister in Cazadero. While no one witnessed the tragedy, Billy Paterson who lived nearby, saw a horseman making his way through the deep water, but when he looked again he saw only a horse dripping with water standing on an island. It is supposed that Stump, who could swim well, was greatly handicapped by his heavy overcoat and gum boots, and fell victim to the surging water. A search party using drag lines recovered Stump's body a few days later. Coroner Young's inquest verdict was accidental death by drowning and a funeral was subsequently held for young Ed Stump.

SD – February 13, 1897. BODY RECOVERED – Mortal Remains of Ed Stump Found

A greatly expanded article in the Santa Rosa newspaper about the preceding tragic drowning and the recovery of the body of Ed Stump from the flooded Laguna – including an artist sketch of the area where Stump's body was found. Stump's aged father and brother had been joined by thirty or forty others in dragging the Laguna for the body. Billy Paterson was reported to be the keeper of the saloon near the western extremity of the bridge. Stump's horse was identified by John Bailiff Jr., a neighbor of Ed Stump.

Another accident had occurred near the same place as the Stump tragedy. J. Stokes, who works on the Atkinson place, had also endeavored to cross the swollen Laguna on horse back. But his horse had been frightened by John Bailiff Jr. putting his sail up on his boat, and Stokes and his horse fell over in the water. Bailiff and his sailboat had participated in the rescue of Stokes and his horse.

The artist's sketch appears to be looking west towards "Timber Hill," northwest of what is now the Guerneville Road bridge – the site of the middle lagoon bridge in late 1800s – the Ellingsworth bridge. The accuracy of the artist's sketch is unknown, but the sketch interestingly includes a small sailboat on the swollen Laguna. Wm. Illingsworth and his brothers owned the property next to the middle bridge in the late 1870s. "Ellingsworth" appears to be a corruption of "Illingsworth."

ST – January 26, 1898. FINE FARM SOLD

Otis Allen's place, one of the finest farms in the Gold Ridge country, was purchased by L. C. Hobart. Mr. Allen and his family will soon move to Santa Rosa. Mr. Hobart is a wealthy resident of Virginia City and a relative of the California millionaire, Walter Hobart. The sale of Mr. Allen's farm was arranged by F. W. Gill and Company of Sebastopol. While Sebastopol will gain a very desirable citizen, Mr. Allen was closely identified with Analy Township and will be greatly missed.

ST – March 9, 1898. The Bohemian Girl

Irvin Ames launched his new boat, the “Bohemian Girl,” on the Laguna behind Gannon’s hop yard. The twenty five passenger craft is a perfect beauty. Mr. Ames expects to install a one or two horse power engine for propelling power next summer and launch his boat on the Russian River.

ST – March 9, 1898. A SUMMER RESORT – Capitalist Looking For a Desirable Location

Four strangers, two of whom are Eastern gentlemen, visited the laguna lake below Gannon’s hop yard and were favorably impressed with the site as a possible location for a summer resort. The visitors, however, did not definitely decide on this location since they were on a tour of the entire county. Hooker’s Falls in the northern Sonoma Valley near Agua Caliente Springs appears to be their preferred location. An additional summer resort to Inwood Farm, a beautiful resort within a few miles of Sebastopol, would attract a great number of summer visitors to the town.

ST – April 20, 1898. FUNERAL OF OTIS ALLEN

The remains of Otis Allen were sorrowfully consigned to their final resting place in the Sebastopol cemetery last Thursday morning. Rev. C. C. Kirtland presided at the Congregational Church service and the Masonic burial service was very impressive. Paul bearers were (?) Johnson, G. N. Sanborn, (?) Ross, Dr. Bruner, Matthias Sauntmayr, and Geo. Libby.

The hop growing success of Messrs. Bushnell, Allen & Company in Green Valley led to two articles in Petaluma’s *Sonoma County Journal* in 1860 (July 27 and November 9) promoting the growing of hops in the county with a much better reward than wheat or potatoes.

Amasa Bushnell and Otis Allen, two early settlers in the region, are generally credited with introducing hops in the county in the late 1850s. Amasa Bushnell’s 124-acre farm was in Green Valley north of where Graton is today and Otis Allen’s 154-acre farm was on the west side of the Laguna approximately where today Occidental Road crosses the Laguna on the Don Head bridge. The company’s first hop crop in Sonoma County was in 1859. Thirteen years later, Santa Rosa’s *Sonoma Democrat* reported that Otis Allen harvested 2,5000 pounds per acre of hops from three acres in the Laguna bringing \$0.252 per pound (more than five times the production per acre reported in 1860, but about 1/4 of the 1859 selling price). While yearly hop prices varied considerably (for example, the City of Santa Rosa harvested hops from its expanded sewer farm in 1907, but sold the crop for only \$0.105 per pound and subsequently disassembled its hop yard and sold its hop drying kilns), hops became a major agricultural crop in the county, peaking in the early 1930s with about 20,000 acres, but essentially disappearing by the 1950s.

Otis Allen was born in Maine in 1829 and was age 69 when he died and was interred in Sebastopol’s cemetery.

ST – April 20, 1898. Big Land Sale

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E. L. (Edward Lee) Walker, son of John and Eleanor Walker, as executor of the estate of his mother, sold two large tracts of land in the Laguna between the road to Stony Point (now Llano Road) and Sebastopol. One tract, was sold to Barbara E. (Ellen) Brown – about 500 acres next to the road from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa, for \$30 per acre (now the City of Santa Rosa’s Brown reclamation farm named after John A Brown, Barbara’s husband). The other tract, 419 acres immediately south of the Brown purchase, was sold to Frank P. Doyle for \$29.80 per acre.

John Walker is said to have built the first, sawn redwood house in Sonoma County in the late 1840s. In 1851 Walker formed a partnership with J. M. Miller and established the first trading post in the area – a stop on the Petaluma and Bodega stage route. The Miller and Walker store was near where the trail forded the Laguna, but the exact location of the ford across the Laguna appears to be unknown (east of the present location of the Palm Drive Hospital is a prime suspected site of the ford). Joseph H. Morris worked for several years at the Miller and Walker store before he established Pine Grove north of the trading post in 1855. By 1877 John Walker owned 4,000 acres of Joaquin Carrillo’s former Rancho Llanos de Santa Rosa south of the Sebastopol and Santa Rosa Road and east of the Laguna. When John Walker visited Santa Rosa in early February 1888 he was described in the *Sonoma Democrat* as “the cattle king of Sebastopol.” His wife wrote a testimonial for Dr. Robert’s Golden Gate Medical Syrup in the same paper about a year later and signed her name “Ellen, wife of John Walker the millionaire.”

Dr. L. H. Mathers purchased the old Walker homestead at the corner of Walker Avenue and Eleanor Street from Don Walker in January 1926. The doctor tore down the old 10-room Walker mansion and sold the lumber. Dr. Mathers was reported to be contemplating enlarging the ranch and selling some of the land for town lots. Apparently all that was to remain of the early pioneer days were the oak trees and a grape vine that had been planted in the late 1840s.

John A. Brown died of pneumonia in early November 1904 at age 69 and is buried in Sebastopol’s historic cemetery. His wife, Barbara Ellen, died of Bright’s disease in late June of 1912 in Sebastopol. Joseph Henry P. Morris (1827 – 1896), the founder of Pine Grove/Sebastopol, is also buried in the Sebastopol cemetery.

ST – April 20, 1898. GUARD THE TOWN – In Case of War Sebastopol May be Captured

Since the U.S. and Spain have declared war, it behooves every loyal and patriotic citizen of Sebastopol to assemble and organize a military company of several hundred boys to protect the town from a potential invasion by the Spanish. The Spanish are liable to come storming in on the Santa Rosa and Green Valley roads. A tall observation tower should be erected on Walker’s knoll. Gun boats with not less than six “torpedo destroyers” should be stationed at exposed points along the laguna.

Walker’s knoll probably refers to the present site of the Palm Drive hospital.

PD – June 22, 1898. Picnic at the Laguna

The Sunday school and members of the Congregational church, about sixty in all, filled three large

wagons for a pleasant day on the laguna at the Ballard place. Boating was a favorite pastime.

ST – June 22, 1898. BLOWING ‘EM UP

Black bass were being freely slaughtered in the Laguna with “giant powder” and with no regard for the law. The merciless and shameful manner of killing the bass that were introduced into the laguna a few years ago should cease immediately. “It is regretted that the offenders have not been brought to justice.” The portion of the laguna where bass are plentiful will be hereafter carefully guarded and anyone found to be breaking the law “will be given his just dues.”

PD – June 25, 1898. Using Dynamite Again

This Santa Rosa article essentially repeats the previous article in the *Sebastopol Times* calling for the cessation of the lawless practice of fishing for bass in the Laguna with “giant powder.”

ST – September 21, 1898. OUR OWN TOWN

A stranger from Cotati, John Robertson, describes his first visit to Sebastopol – “the Gold Ridge Metropolis.” Robertson fancifully describes the “crystal laughing waters” (the Laguna) at the feet of the town. (Robertson concluded that while Sebastopol was an enticing and pretty city, with beer at ten cents, the town had probably already reached the height of its popularity.)

ST – November 9, 1898. LOCAL JOTTINGS

“A four-pound black bass was caught by a fisherman in the laguna one day this week.”

ST – November 30, 1898. LOCAL JOTTINGS

“Ducks are quite plentiful along the laguna at present.”

ST – March 29, 1899. A GREWSOME (sic) DISCOVERY

George Allen, while boating on the Laguna, discovered the floating body of a Chinaman in the Laguna near the Sanborn place and immediately notified Coroner Dr. Pierce. The disagreeable and badly

putrefied remains appeared to be that of a local Chinaman who had disappeared about two months ago. The Coroner's jury verdict was death by an unknown cause. While there was no evidence of foul play, Constable Woodward believed that an attempted murder warrant had been issued on the dead man for an attack on a fellow countryman with whom he had been gambling with and lost. The Constable speculated that after firing two shots at the winner, the broke and despondent loser fled and drowned himself in the Laguna.

PD – March 29, 1899. Inquest at Sebastopol

An abbreviated Santa Rosa newspaper article of the preceding Sebastopol story of the decomposed Chinaman's body found in the Laguna. County Coroner Pierce's inquest jury was reported to have simply reached a verdict "that the deceased was found dead." "A number of Sebastopol Chinamen clubbed together to have the remains shipped to San Francisco."

ST – May 3, 1899. Bass in the Laguna

The half dozen pairs of black bass that were introduced into the laguna near the Scammon ranch about three years ago have thrived and there are now many thousands of them, but no bass fishing should occur in the laguna between now and the middle of June – the spawning season of this splendid table fish. J. Saunders, who secured the bass from the State Board of Fish Commissioners, expects to stock the lower laguna with pickerel this season.

Pickerel were not found in the eighteen fish species identified in the Laguna in the 1988 survey.

ST – May 17, 1899. JIM JOHNSTON MEETS THE LAGUNA TERROR

There have been a number of reports over the years of the "devils own creature" – "a big something" in the laguna. The Chinese all fear the "heap lob fish basket." Jim Johnston and John Boswell were fishing for cat fish near the Scammon place during twilight last Friday night. While leisurely rowing home in the gloomy light, Jim's boat avoided a "log" obstructing his way only to notice that the "log" disappeared then rose again. Suddenly a mighty wave disturbed the hitherto quiet water of the laguna as the "sea faring monster" dove again. Thinking of his wife and children and seeing the electric lights of Sebastopol, Jim bent his back and strained every muscle in his body and made fast for the landing near the springboard. While John Boswell did not see the "terror of the laguna," he solemnly declares that Jim's boat "skimmed the waves at the rate of sixty an hour."

The so called, "laguna monster," was likely to have been a large air-gulping carp.

ST – January 2, 1901. THE LIFE OF A WARRIOR BRAVE WENT OUT WITH THE DEATH OF INDIAN JOE

Indian Joe, the aged chieftain of the Walker tribe of red men and one of the oldest Native Sons in Sonoma County, crossed the styx into happy hunting grounds few days ago. Born on what is now the Walker tract, Indian Joe was in his glory as the mighty ruler of subjects from Cloverdale to the Marin boarder when Captain Joseph Walker arrived in the area in 1940s (John Walker's uncle). The Walkers were said to be kind to the local Indians. Warrior Joe lived in a hut on the Walker tract and was employed by John Walker for over 40 years. Indian Joe was one of the last old warriors and his death will be lamented by his squaw, Maria, and his son, Joaquin. Indian Joe now rests beneath the sod on the Walker tract.

ST – March 6, 1901. MAN MET DEATH IN THE LAGOON

S. D. Thrift, while strolling along on the bank of the laguna adjacent to the Hughes' place, made the gruesome discovery in the water of the badly decomposed remains of an approximately 50-year-old man who had been dead for about two weeks. County Coroner Dr. Pierce held an inquest, but the stranger could not be identified. It was assumed that the stranger had attempted to cross the high water of the laguna on one of the small bridges about four miles south of town and fell into the water and drowned. Undertaker E. F. O'Leary interred the remains in the Macedonia cemetery south of Sebastopol. A letter was subsequently received from the Hon. John Markley of Geyserville who, based on the contents of the diary found with the body, thought the remains were that of John Noonan or Nunan.

ST – July 17, 1901. HERE TO WORK IN THE CANNERY

About two hundred people are camped in the bed of the laguna on the east side of the cannery. About twenty families have pitched white tents in anticipation of the peach season. According to Manager Wetherbee of the cannery, the peach season should begin in about ten days. Last season's pack broke all records and a new mark will undoubtedly be made this year since the plant has been improved and enlarged.

The cannery at the time was east of the San Francisco and North Pacific railroad tracks, north of the railroad's trestle and next to the Laguna. The cannery's seasonal wastewater would undoubtedly have been discharged directly into the Laguna.

ST – August 14, 1901. BOY DROWNED IN LAGUNA

Claud Blakeway, a 12-year-old boy from Stockton camping at the Hughes place four miles south of Sebastopol while his family was picking berries for S. D. Thrift, and six other lads went bathing in the laguna last Sunday afternoon and found an old boat floating in the water. While rowing the boat, it suddenly capsized. Frank Cuicello, the only boy who could swim, rescued five of his companions but could not save Blakeway in time. Coroner Pierce's inquest jury (E. F. O'Leary, J. H. Hughes, J. F. Little, S. Weeks, Stephen Morse and A. Weeks) ruled death by accidental drowning. The young boy's body was interred about five miles south of Sebastopol in the Shiloh cemetery.

ST – August 21, 1901. Fell Into The Laguna

“While riding his wheel on a very narrow plank across the laguna this morning, Harry Jackson, the baker, was precipitated into the mud and water. When he emerged from the ravine his appearance was not very attractive.”

ST – March 5, 1902. FINE DAIRIES ON THE LLANO

In addition to the great number of chicken ranches, vineyards, a few general farms, and live stock farms, there are many dairies on the “cow's paradise” of the Llano, producing milk, butter and cheese for the markets of San Francisco and other Pacific Coast cities. John Brown of Sebastopol (hence Brown Street), the largest land owner in the region, leases his 1,400 acres into three dairy ranches. Joseph Lafranchi is next with 600 acres, 150 cows, and 100 hogs. Joe Bonetti also raises hogs and has 100 cows on his 550-acre dairy ranch. C. Gambini has 130 cows and the usual auxiliary of hogs on his 540 acres. Frank Piezzi has 120 cows and 100 hogs on his particularly successful 500-acre dairy ranch. Frank Doyle of Santa Rosa owns and operates a 500-acre ranch stocked with 150 cows. Morris Possi has a dairy with 40 cows and Harry Edgerton has a 120-acre general farm with 10 acres in wine grapes and 25 cows. One of the finest dairies in Sonoma County is that of Victor Piezzi (hence Piezzi Lane) – about 600 owned acres and with another 100 acres rented – producing nearly 1,000 pounds of butter a week from his fine large herd of cows. J. W. Pitt's 90-acre ranch raises grain and livestock and produces many fine horses and cattle. Peter Bussman has an excellent 100-acre grain ranch and J. Jones also devotes his 160 acres principally to grain.

J. W. Kelly has the best general farm on the Llano and he has made many improvements on his 314 acres. He keeps 15 horses, 40 cows, 50 hogs, and has a 50-acre vineyard.

J. W. (James William) Kelly was born in County Cork, Ireland in 1841, died in 1917, and is buried in Sebastopol's cemetery. He was very active in the Sebastopol community for many years. For example, Sebastopol's baseball team played on Kelly's field in July of 1897. (Sebastopol's team was rated at the time as second to none in the county, but was vanquished 10:9 by the Red Fronts of Santa Rosa in a most exciting and closely contested game.) James William's son, James Patrick (1870 – 1945), was also very active in the Sebastopol community and was also interred in the Sebastopol cemetery. Santa Rosa acquired the Kelly ranch from James Kelly's descendants (Kelly – Mulligan) in 1978.

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Santa Rosa's Kelly reclamation farm honors the name of a pioneering farming family in the Laguna.

The farms in the "Llano" district listed in this newspaper article refer to the farms southwest of what is today Hall Road. The Llano district school property at the southwest corner of the Santa Rosa and Sebastopol road and what is now Llano Road (the site of a saloon in 1877), was sold in early 1924 when the Llano School District was incorporated into the Sebastopol Union School District (originally the Laguna School District). The term, "Llano district" appears to have been gradually replaced by the term, "Laguna district" as it is known today. An article in 1929 reported that a large bull had attacked a "Laguna" dairy rancher (Ritz G. Gianai). While the word, "Laguna" was often used in the title of numerous Sebastopol area enterprises (and still is), there seems to be little doubt that at the turn of the 20th century, the "Laguna" usually referred only to the low flow channel of the waterway and its immediate flood prone surroundings, but by at least the late 1920s, the "Laguna" also referred to the general district east of Sebastopol.

ST – August 9, 1902. CAUGHT ON THE RAILROAD BRIDGE

Five young local men narrowly escaped death from the midnight express train between Santa Rosa and Sebastopol last night. The quintette of songsters (Fred Showatler, Tony Ronsheimer, Fred Scudder, Frank Rafael and Jack Axtel) were on the railroad trestle serenading the "sleeping beauties" camped in white tents behind the cannery for the opening of the peach season. The maidens awoke, were spellbound, and listened with ecstasy to the mellow tones of the "Angels Serenade." The warblers themselves were delighted with the sweetness of their own voices and for an encore, the boys sang "I Don't Know Why I Love You, But I Do." But just at the close of the encore, "ciz! bang!" – the midnight express came rolling over the bridge. The surprised boys leaped from the trestle just as the train whizzed by with two boys landing on a tent and the others boys lodged in a pool of mud and water. It was a very exciting close to a delightful evening which might have been tragic. "Moral: Carry a local time card when in the vicinity of cannery."

While the article clearly refers to old SF&NP trestle crossing the Laguna, the railroad may have been the California Northwestern at this time.

ST – August 16, 1902. DOUGHTY CHIEF MAKES A CAPTURE

Sebastopol's portly and fearless Chief of Police, Ed. O'Leary, found a wayward truant boy from Santa Rosa in the lagoon underbrush south of the railroad bridge. The town's doughty "cop" refused to accept the award money saying that he had simply done his duty.

ST – August 30, 1902. EVERYONE GOING TO HOP FIELDS

Hundreds of people will pitch tents on both sides of the lagoon for the large hop crop with a good price for picking. One dollar per hundred pounds will be paid and good wages can be made. People will leave town this afternoon for the Miller, Purrington and Peterson yards and many others will depart tomorrow. Sebastopol will be almost deserted until September 10 when the whole population

will return loaded to the “guards with coin.”

ST – September 3, 1902. STRUGGLE FOR LIFE IN LAGOON

R. C. Woods, the manager of the Ruble theatrical company, almost expired in the waters of the lagoon late Monday afternoon, but was saved by the gallant little doctor, Dr. Joseph E. Moutoux. While rowing on the “big lagoon” just back of the Scammon farm, Mr. Woods’ hat blew off and in an attempt to recover his “sky piece,” the boat turned turtle. The pair were in about the middle of the stream and both men swam to the east bank, but were greatly hampered by their clothes. Mr. Woods, although a good swimmer, would have certainly gone down if he had not been assisted by Dr. Moutoux, who was as fresh as a daisy throughout the episode.

ST – September 3, 1902. LOCAL NOTES

“The members of the Ruble Opera Company enjoyed a picnic on the banks of the lagoon Thursday.”

ST – January 2, 1903. THE BEST PART OF THE COUNTY

This article is essentially a promotional article for Sonoma County’s garden spot – Analy Township, with Sebastopol as the leading town, about six months after the town incorporated. Products of the township included fruits of all kinds (especially blackberries and raspberries), hops, wine and table grapes, hay, vegetables, poultry and eggs, etc. Sebastopol at the time, could boast bank services, money order – post office, express office, telephone, electric lights, two newspapers, four churches, two hotels, a public school, a cannery, a winery, fruit dryers, and numerous business houses.

This article includes the first mention of “Lake Jonive or the Laguna” in the *Sebastopol Times* – “a beautiful body of water a mile long, 150 feet wide, and from 20 to 30 feet deep, boarded with oaks, willows, etc., is situated within a mile of town and is a favorite place for bathing, boating, and fishing.”

ST – January 2, 1903. Metropolis of the Thrifty Gold Ridge – Sebastopol Making a Vigorous Growth

This article is a companion promotional article in the same addition of the *Sebastopol Times* as the previous article, but is primarily focused on the now incorporated Town of Sebastopol – “a community of intelligent, wide-awake people of thrifty habits.” The population of Sebastopol had tripled in the last few years and was apparently at the time growing faster than any other town of

its size in California.

The article repeats the previous articles' description of Lake Jonive, but adds: (1) that vast hop fields extended along both sides of the lake; (2) "from the clear waters of this body have been caught salmon-trout that filled the sportsman's heart with joy;" and (3) that the lake shore could be a lovely spot for a hotel.

Sebastopol voted to incorporate in May 1902 with fewer than 1,000 people.

The dimensions reported of Lake Jonive appear to be the summer permanent water dimensions. Numerous historians have described the Laguna as being up to a mile wide in places – undoubtedly at least an early spring estimate.

The 1903 report of the catching of "salmon-trout" in Lake Jonive indicates that at the turn of the 20th century, anadromous fish still transited the lake on their way to spawn in the creeks of the upper Laguna.

PD – October 13, 1903. SPORTSMAN'S CLUB ORGANIZED MONDAY

Lovers of ducks and quail shooting and fishing formed a club – the "Peterson Gun Club," and leased the shooting privileges of Jack Peterson's ranch on the Laguna. District Attorney C. H. Pond was elected president and Mr. Saunders was elected secretary-treasurer. Other members of the club are: Judge Emmet Seawell, Lawrence Pressley, John W. Ford, Rayford Peterson, Charles R. Farmer, Sheridan Peterson, L. C. Cnopius, Shirley Burriss, Fred Wiseman, E. Higby, George Wood and R. Peterson.

Jack Peterson's ranch appears to have been the property on the east side of the Laguna south of Santa Rosa Creek – an area that is leased today by a hunting club. L. (Louis) C. Cnopius – a prominent business man in the county for many decades, built the first Nationally recognized airport in the county (Sebastopol's airport/Cnopius Field) in the summer of 1925 in the southern portion of his three hundred-acre dairy ranch on the east side of the Laguna between what is now Highway 12 and Occidental Road. Beginning in about 1924 and for many decades thereafter, Louis Cnopius and other members of the Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce actively promoted plans to drain the Laguna north of Sebastopol. In 1929 Louis Cnopius and E. L. Finley of Santa Rosa completed a private drainage improvement project between their Laguna lands and lowered the level of Lake Jonive eighteen inches. Their private drainage project demonstrated what benefit there would be to drain the entire Laguna. Louis Cnopius died in September 1942.

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