

Fair Oaks History

The great fiesta of 1949

With the Fair Oaks Fiesta coming up June 5, 6, 7, the San Juan Record is publishing a series of how the Fiesta first started. The story is assembled from the Record's files and from interviews with people still living in the community who participated in those events.

There has never been a Fiesta, before or since, to equal the great Fair Oaks Centennial Fiesta of 1949. The State Highway Department estimated that 40,000 people visited the community during the three-day period, although others say this was somewhat exaggerated. At any rate, there were many people and a vast variety of events. When it was all over there were horned toads hopping over the countryside, a lot of strained marriages and a net profit of only \$25.51.

This was somewhat disappointing, inasmuch as the whole purpose of the event was to raise money to build a community swimming pool. (Now 30 years and 20 fiestas later there still isn't a swimming pool)

The story actually begins in the spring of 1948. Local residents, disturbed by drownings in the American River, began talking of the advantages of a pool in which to teach their youngsters to swim. Finally three people, Bob Massey, Amos Smith and Ray Cutter began to drum up a local effort to build a pool as a community project. They formed a Citizens Swim Pool Committee and began soliciting pledges of labor and materials. They sent out questionnaires and found overwhelming support for the project. There were some however, who were against it. One resident said, "No, we've got a damn good pool down there in the river and it doesn't cost us a cent. Build a pool and they'd still use the river. I'm getting tired of having my taxes raised ever year."

Then, there was the matter of location. Various sites were considered, but the poll showed 90 out of 91 respondents preferred the park by the Community Clubhouse which was known as the "Civic Center."

In the meantime contributions were pouring in. Cutter, who had a gravel plant, offered concrete mix

and equipment. Frank Brugger of Pacific Coast Aggregates, offered to split the concrete mix donation with Cutter. Douglas Harmison offered a mixer and labor. Henry Huiting volunteered carpentry. T. E. Lawson and Joe Codina offered hauling. F. C. Fritz, architect, said he would design the pool. Labor or help in buying cement was volunteered by Amos Smith, Bob Massey, Bob Brown, Frank and Pete Campoy, S. L. Stevens, Dan Rice, M. G. Wood, Clyde Kemp, George Scott, Ed Eubanks, Paul Wantz, Burk Broadley, Dr. N. A. Archer, and Guy Roediger, who offered the use of his concrete mixer.

The committee sought help wherever they could find it. E. A. Fairbairn, county engineer; Albert Zipf, county health officer; and Walter Cameron of the Red Cross all offered help and cooperation.

The first hurdle was the park board. It voted in favor of the Civic Center site and also approved the idea of making it a living memorial to Fair Oaks men who died in World War II, but Chairman W. E. Spangle said "There must be enough materials, labor and money pledged to assure completion of the project in order to protect taxpayers."

Robert Broadley, speaking for local businessmen, promised their support in picking up the difference in case there was only a small gap left in the budget. They would expect to be paid back out of pool fees once it was in operation.

Norman Langness said the county would probably help with finances if a major part of the work could be done on a volunteer basis.

The board finally approved the project on September 16 after E. H. Sagehorn had done a revision of the plans. The cost was estimated at

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\$10,000. The board said it would submit the plans to the Board of Supervisors when 75 per cent of the cost had been pledged.

The next big obstacle was the Fair Oaks Irrigation District. In those days it really was an irrigation district dominated by agricultural interests. Folsom Lake had not yet been created and the only source of water was from wells. Frivolous uses of water, such as swimming pools, were viewed with great skepticism.

A leading opponent, Louis Rahlin, pointed to Rule 18 of the irrigation district which prohibits the use of water for swimming tanks unless the drainage is used for irrigation. He said the board could not make an exception of this for a public pool because it would be discriminating against private pool owners. Mrs. Richard Codman opposed any grant of water for the pool on the basis of agricultural needs.

Apparently in those days, too, the idea of recycling the same water in the pool had not been widely adopted. Pool water would have to be completely changed at least once a week for health purposes.

Despite repeated pleas by the pool committee and the proposal by Fire Chief George Payne that the pool be used as a reserve tank for fighting fire in downtown

Fair Oaks, the irrigation board refused to budge. They even cancelled a proposed survey of water users on whether or not they would favor letting water be used for a swimming pool. District secretary Sim Green admitted that pressure had been put on him to drop the pool under the threat of a suit to contest the district's board election if the poll was held in conjunction with it.

The upshot of it all was that the committee did drill its own well at an expense of around \$1,200 which turned up a flow of 330 gallons per minute at 140 feet without any draw-down on other district wells. The drilling was done as one of the events of the Fiesta in 1949. (During last summer's drought the irrigation district thought it might like to activate the old well, but they couldn't find it.)

The pool committee launched a series of benefit card parties, raffles and talent shows and by November the fund had grown to \$2,250.

But something more dramatic was needed, so plans were laid for the Centennial Fiesta. It was an all-out effort. President Harry Truman and Governor Earl Warren were invited to attend. A whisker growing contest was started and in April Town Marshall Sully Elledge and 20 deputies began arresting clean shaven males who were clapped into a wooden jail cell for their sins. George Frazier imported 150 horned toads by air from Texas for a horned toad derby.

Sheriff Don Cox was named parade marshal and began recruiting entries for the big parade on May 22. He had so many entries it took almost an hour to pass the reviewing stand. Sheriff's posses of both Sacramento and El Dorado counties were on hand, as well as the Sacramento Ladies Mounted Patrol, West Sacramento Riding Club, Rio Linda Riders, American River Riders, Fair Oaks River Riders and the Kit Carson Mounted Men from Jackson. Mather AFB sent its band which joined bands from Sacramento Junior College, San Juan High and Folsom High Schools. The VFW and Eagles sent drum corps and Sacramento Bagpipe band was there in full dress. There were numerous floats, a 100-year-old stagecoach and an American Legion "40 & 8" locomotive.

Some 300 mining men from the Sierras were invited to a lunch at the Elementary School served by the ladies of the PTA. Superintendent Virgil Allread dismissed school for the day. The Lentz Construction Company demonstrated modern construction equipment for the miners by grading the Fair Oaks school grounds for free, saving the school district \$3,000.

The queen contest was done by vote ticket sales. Shirley Schulz of the Business and Professional Women's Club won the crown, followed by Beverly Perry, sponsored by the Eagles and Laura Porter by the Rotary Club.

The Fiesta officially started on Friday morning with the arrival of a Maidu Indian runner, Larry Marino, in Fair Oaks carrying the official Centennial Flag.

Friday and Saturday evening, saw production of the "Fair-O-Fiesta", a western musical extravaganza, written, produced and played with local talent. It went on for two hours with western music, dancing, roping and comedy. Among the local acts was a comedy skit "Pony Boy" by Bob Massey and Amos Smith as a horse on a tandem bicycle. "I played the rear end of the horse," Massey recalls. Lucille "Minnie Pearl" Heim sang Pistol Packin' Mama after which she gave her guns away to two lucky children.

One of the more ribald events was a bonafide gambling casino run by Frank Campoy. It was illegal, but Sheriff Don Cox, who was also parade chairman, promised to look the other way. Complications arose when a virtuous citizen wrote a letter to the Bee which started an uproar. Cox regretfully advised the gamblers to "close it down".

There was a rodeo, carnival, Indian dances, a Centennial Ball and an air show at Phoenix Field complete with stunt flying and parachute jumps.

MORNING AFTER

It was a tremendous affair but after it was all over the committee totaled up its figures and found that it had spent \$5,534.09 and had taken in, from all sources, \$5,559.60, for a net profit of \$25.51. One of the biggest expenses was insurance amounting to \$809. Of this \$441 was to cover the entire town from April 6 to May 31 and \$319.60 for the rodeo. This amounted to 87 per cent of the total rodeo receipts.

The brunt of the blame for the financial debacle fell upon chairman Bob Massey. "I admit I made some mistakes and ruffled some feathers," he says today looking back on it all, "but it was a great event and did a lot for the community."

(Next week: The Fiesta of 1950 -- and why it soured everyone on fiestas for the next nine years.)



FIESTA VIGILANTES Above are some of the leaders in putting on the great Fair Oaks Fiesta of 1949 who are also acting as vigilantes out to arrest males of the community who fail to grow beards. The man in the center foreground is Robert Massey, general chairman of the event and chairman of the Swimming Pool Committee. The others are, from left, Sully Elledge, Beverly Hiting Brown and George Frazier who put on the horned toad race.

The Fiesta of 1950 ...

Chapter II of a series of the early Fiestas of Fair Oaks

Despite its grandiose scale, Fair Oaks Centennial of 1949 failed to make any money. As 1950 dawned, the Fair Oaks Swimming Pool Committee held a meeting to decide whether or not they should try it again. The opinion was that they should, but avoid the pitfalls of the previous year. Unfortunately however, the event turned up some new pitfalls which so disillusioned the community that the swim pool plan was abandoned and no fiesta was tried again for nine years.

Ted Robles, who had replaced Robert Massey as chairman, called a meeting on February 21. He proposed a two-day Fiesta with a carnival, country fair, parade and if possible, a queen contest, but without miners' exhibits, a rodeo or other features which lost money the previous year. He said it would be a great thing for the town and would raise enough money to put the pool fund over the top. He was hopeful that construction of the pool would actually be under way by the time of the fiesta to give it added impetus.

By the end of February the plans were well set. Chairman Robles was to keep a firm hand on finances. Professional gamblers were ruled out by request of Rev. Ralph Fellersen and the parade would be at 1 p.m. to leave time for traffic from the church service to be cleared away. Somehow the rodeo managed to slip back into the lineup. Clyde Kemp was asked to find a new rodeo site and devise a means of crowd control.

The big objective of course, was to finance the swimming pool. Evan Thomas of the Red Cross had suggested a somewhat smaller pool and the county engineer's office had agreed to draw the plans. The active members of the Swim Club included Les

Gordon and George Beers of the Civic Club; Earl Hadler and Jerry Cross, Firemen's Association; Ann Reynolds, Firemen's Auxilliary; Orin Page and William Gallaher, Grange; Kennedy White and Fred Breece, Boy Scouts; Bill Mandell, Eagles; Anson Longtin, Fair Oaks Business Association; Russell Hutchinson, Federated Youth Fellowship; Bob Massey, Amos and Gethel Smith, pool committee; Selden Menefee, eidtor and Ted Robles, pool chairman.

Things looked so good that on April 6 the Red Cross provided funds for a scholarship for one person from Fair Oaks to take a complete training course in life saving, swimming instruction and pool maintenance with all expenses paid.

So, with high hopes, the Fiesta of 1950 began on Friday, June 23 with the crowning of Queen Margie Wood by County Executive C. W. Deterding. Her princesses were Sara Bailiff and Donna Luhrs. Again it was a ticket sales contest and turned in a tidy profit of \$250.

Other Fiesta events included a Children's Pet Parade, gold panning contest, canoe race, a big parade, carnival and bingo. There was a Fireman's Centennial Costume Ball run by Fire Chief George Payne, Paul Wantz and Al Steinke, (father of Jerry Steinke who is chairman of this year's Fiesta).

The parade and ball drew a big attendance. A crowd of 15,000 is estimated to have watched the parade which had over 100 entries.

But the talk of the town was the rodeo. This was billed as one of the biggest ever to be staged in the Sacramento area. Called a "Cowboy Reunion" it was managed by Texas Slim Jackson. It starred Harvey Rex and his family of famous trick riders and ropers. Also participating were the O'Neill twins of Citrus

“He went thataway”



Heights with their trained donkeys. The rodeo included saddle bronc riding, calf roping, wild cow milking, bareback bronc riding and horse racing. The rodeo arena was at the east end of Sunset Avenue.

But, alas, it came to a shabby end. The San Juan Record of June 29 reports, “Texas Slim Jackson’s rodeo was a first rate show but failed to gross enough to pay the bills Jackson had accumulated. On the final day it developed that Texas Slim could not account for a considerable amount of money paid in advance to him by the cowboys as entry fees, which should have been set aside as prize money.

“In order to put the show on Sunday night the pool committee promised the cowboys that they would be paid out of Jackson’s share of the gate receipts. In the end it turned out that all of the gate receipts above taxes were still not quite enough to pay the cowboys what was due them, but such money as was available was stretched as far as it would go by Ted Robles.

“Jackson’s remaining creditors are understood to be taking legal action against him. The pool committee is in the clear since its contract with Jackson specifically excluded responsibility for any of his expenditures.”

Texas Slim quietly left town and has not been heard of to this day.

On July 13 the Swimming Pool Committee met to assess the situation. Chairman Robles reported that net proceeds from the Fiesta were \$139.86. The rodeo failed to make a profit. An accident to Irving Gum’s truck cost \$65. Too few local organizations put in concessions. Cash in the pool fund amounted to \$1,500.

On November 2 the committee met again. Treasurer John Holst reported a current bank balance of \$1,366 after \$474 had been paid on the well drilled in 1949. After the remainder owing on the well has been

paid, around \$700 would remain. This would be held as a trust fund until such time as the pool could be built.

Chairman Robles told the committee it was useless to try to build the pool in the immediate future because of a shortage of such materials such as cement and steel. (The Korean War was then on) He then resigned because of the “pressure of his work.”

With that, the pool project slowly faded away as did the Fiestas. Everyone was too tired and discouraged to try again... at least for nine long years.

As for swimming, the committee took steps to establish safe swimming conditions at Sacramento Bar at the foot of Pennsylvania Avenue. This turned out to be a big success with no drownings reported during 1950. It soon developed however, that the majority of users of the swimming area were coming from outside of Fair Oaks. When this fact became known the community ceased giving support to the project and it, too, slowly faded away.

Somewhat more controllable, though more restricted, was a swimming program made available by private pool owners. The program was sponsored jointly by the Fair Oaks PTA, Red Cross lifeguards and the Pool Committee.

In the late fifties a swimming pool was put in at Bella Vista High School. This seemed to take care of the instructional problem for children and reduced the pressure for a community pool. In the meantime the neighboring communities of Carmichael, Citrus Heights and Rancho Cordova all built elaborate pool complexes financed with park district funds. A few years ago a pool was included in the Fair Oaks Park District master plan to be built in Fair Oaks Park near the library. However, according to Park Administrator Jerry Steinke, it is not in this year’s budget, nor will it be in next year’s.