

Upcoming Member Event

Walking Tour- History of Santa Rosa Creek

August 17, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
See HSSR Website for details

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A Grand Admission Day Celebration - September 9, 1911

by Denise Hill

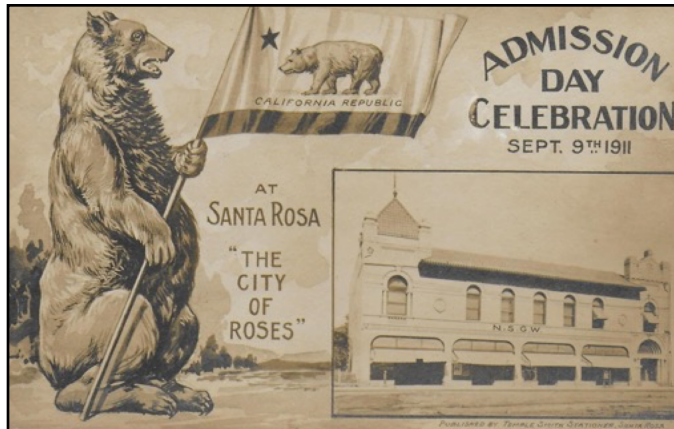
It is September 1, 1911 and you and other Santa Rosa residents are fairly buzzing with anticipation for what is being promoted as “one of the most spectacular parades the city has ever witnessed!” The parade is less than two weeks away and will be a celebration of the 61st anniversary of Admission Day honoring the day California entered the Union as the 31st state: a free, non-slavery state by the Compromise of 1850.

25,000 visitors (which, if true, would be over three times the population of Santa Rosa at the time). Local newspapers printed pleas by event officials encouraging residents to make available any and all rooms for this huge influx of overnight visitors.

Downtown businesses were encouraged to give their employees the day off and to hang bunting in the official event colors of red, white, blue, and gold, but cautioned to only use these colors and to avoid hanging old, faded bunting. The Fashion Stables at Main and Second Streets advertised that their horses could be rented for parade participants.

The festivities would cover three days starting on Friday September 8, the eve of Admission Day. On that night a parade was scheduled, along with a fireworks show with a reception for visiting Native Son and Daughter Parlors arriving by train. Unfortunately, many of the special trains delivering Native Sons and Daughters and other visitors didn't arrive until midnight or later, missing the festivities.

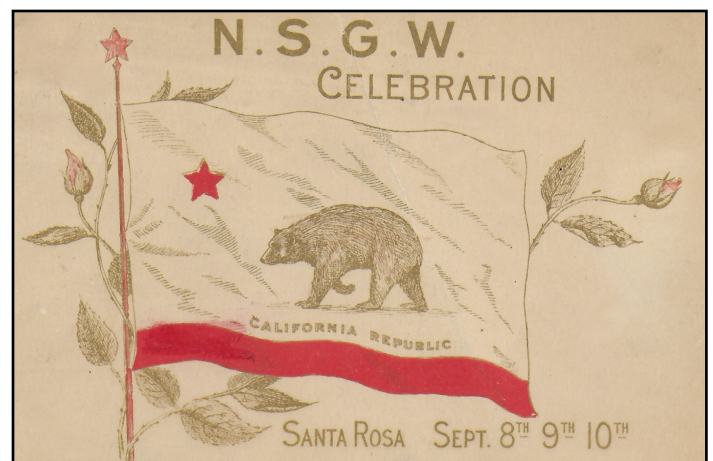
On the big day, Saturday September 9, the Grand Parade of Parlors of Native Sons and Native Daughters started at 11:30



Over time, Admission Day celebrations had become the realm of the first generation of sons and daughters born to California pioneers. Known also as "Native Sons' Day," its observance was mainly in the hands of the many Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West parlors.

Already, 34 Native Sons' Parlors and 8 Native Daughters' Parlors (some as far away as Yosemite) were expected to participate in the celebration. Two Native Sons' Courts of Honor were set up on Fourth Street – one at Fourth and A Street and one at Fourth and B Street. Both courts were illuminated with electric lights, and the Courthouse was dazzling with 1,500 electric globes.

The local railroads - Southern Pacific, Northwestern Pacific, and Santa Rosa electric - had made preparations to schedule extra trains to handle the immense crowds expected to descend on the city - projected to reach an astounding



*Images this page courtesy
Hill-Lilienthal Collection*

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Message from the Board

Are you looking for something to do this weekend? Check out the Sonoma County History hootboard for ideas! At this online site, you'll find posts by local historical and cultural groups offering special events, tours, and fun places to visit.

In a recent scan of the board, there were posts about tours at the Santa Rosa Rural Cemetery, an opportunity to help restore a train car with the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Historical Society, a classic car show at Santa Rosa High School, Sonoma County Historical Society's Finding History Day, and a walking tour of Santa Rosa Creek sponsored by HSSR! These and many other enriching experiences and events are listed, so check it out at https://www.hootboard.com/b/519711/Sonoma_County_History

In anticipation of the upcoming creek tour, our newsletter includes an article about the pollution-plagued Santa Rosa Creek of 100 years ago. We hope you'll join us at Prince Gateway Park August 17 at 10 a.m. to enjoy a walk along and to learn about Santa Rosa Creek.

100 Years Ago



This 1920 aerial photograph of Santa Rosa's Courthouse Square is from the *Sonoma County Library Photograph Collection's Gaye LeBaron Historical Photograph Collection, 1871 - 1989*. The Courthouse was dedicated on May 6, 1910 and demolished in 1966.

*Answer to Spring 2024 "Where in Santa Rosa?"
Juilliard Park, 1953*



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The HSSR seeks Santa Rosa-centric memoirs and research-based articles for the newsletter. For more information, contact us at Newsletter@HistoricalSocietySantaRosa.org

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Santa Rosans Sow Wartime Victory Gardens

by Karen Stone

As the United States joined World War II in late 1941, huge amounts of resources were needed to arm, feed, clothe, and transport the military. In January 1942, the National Office of Civilian Defense encouraged local communities to implement Victory Garden programs. The government wanted to ensure that there was enough food for everyone - civilian and military. Americans were encouraged and taught how to grow their own fruits and vegetables.

The victory gardens were a way for citizens to feel patriotic and contribute to the war effort, and they provided 40 percent of vegetables grown in the United States. Millions of victory gardens were planted in backyards, vacant lots, and public parks. Eleanor Roosevelt started a victory garden at the White House.

Regional Civilian Defense Director James C. Sheppard said, "Every vacant lot should be made into a victory vegetable garden. School grass plots should become school gardens. The beanstalk should replace the hollyhock — flowers are good to look at, but mighty poor to eat."

Santa Rosa's Chamber of Commerce launched a "Food for Victory" campaign to stimulate wartime production of vegetables in victory gardens. Santa Rosa High School's Agricultural Department offered night classes in "Backyard Farming," designed for gardeners intending to participate in the Food for Victory campaign.

The Chamber of Commerce proposed a plan for the City to provide free water or reduced water rates to victory gardeners. In 1943, the City Council approved a plan to reduce water rates for victory gardeners. To be eligible, a gardener must first register with the City. After registration, a meter reader would inspect the property to confirm a garden had been planted. The reduced water rate was "based on 50 percent of an amount over and above the

average amount they paid during the months of June, July, August and September for the past two years" according to the March 19, 1943 Press Democrat.

Noah Bonham's one-acre victory garden on Sebastopol Avenue produced corn growing over six feet tall, as well as other huge vegetables. On Bush Street, Frank Erwin grew a 16-pound zucchini in his neighborhood co-op victory garden.



Santa Rosa victory gardeners are having a chance to display their produce at the Sonoma County Fair this year. Typical of the exhibits is this 16-pound zucchini, grown by Frank Erwin of 933 Bush street in a three-family co-operative victory garden. It is shown being held by one of Erwin's young neighbors, Erwin is a local insurance man.

Press Democrat, September 5, 1942

In July 1942, John Guaspari pulled a "victory carrot" - a double-pointed carrot forming a perfect V - from his Corby Avenue victory garden. Philip and Charles Guenza of Bennett Valley harvested a four-pound V-shaped carrot from their victory garden in November 1942. In 1943, Dr. A. McKinney on Bennett Valley Road discovered an airplane-shaped potato - including wings - growing in his victory garden. McKinney speculated (tongue in cheek) that it was because of all of the airplanes flying low over his property.

Spring Street neighbors Wilbur Wilson and C.W. Gillett planted a victory garden in the vacant lot separating their homes. They grew corn, string beans, tomatoes, onions, peppers, squash, melons, peas, and cabbage. They planted a "V" of flowering plants in the foreground, facing Spring Street.

There were non-residential victory gardens. The army airbase north of town cultivated a victory garden to help feed its personnel. Burbank Gardens planted a vegetable section in place of some of the flower beds. Inmates at the County jail requested permission to plant and tend victory gardens. Two jail victory gardens were cultivated: one on the roof of the jail and one in the courtyard. Radishes, green onions, and lettuce were grown and used to make salads for the inmates.

PLANTS

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Vegetable Plants

Imwalle Gardens

End of West Third Street

FULL LINE OF HOME-GROWN
FRESH VEGETABLES

Press Democrat advertisement, April 11, 1942

In September 1942, an eight-day wartime version of the Sonoma County Fair opened with a "food for victory" theme, highlighting what farmers were doing toward the victory effort.

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The Redemption of Santa Rosa Creek, Part 1

by Jeff Elliott

Editor's note: This two-part article is from Jeff Elliott's blog SantaRosaHistory.com.

Note to Santa Rosa: When things are so bad that you're on the opposite side from the Women's Auxiliary, you might want to rethink your position.

It was 1923 and the smell of tort was in the air – among other things. Pressure was coming from neighborhood groups, which were either threatening suits against the city or demanding Santa Rosa sue its worst polluter. The state Board of Health was sending threatening letters to city hall because nothing was being done to fix serious violations of public health laws. And then there was the lawsuit filed early that year by a man who charged the city was responsible for his young daughters being sickened with typhoid and diphtheria. What all of these complaints had in common was that they involved Santa Rosa Creek in some way – either something bad was being intentionally dumped into it or the city's inadequate sewer farm was overflowing and flooding the adjacent creek with raw waste.

None of these were new problems. Complaints to the City Council about the abuse of Santa Rosa Creek dated back over thirty years, to 1891. Ordinances against pollution were passed but not enforced and court orders were ignored – as for the sewer

farm contaminating the creek, the city was violating a perpetual restraining order going back to 1896.

In February 2021 I was part of a Historical Society of Santa Rosa webinar about Santa Rosa Creek. (*View this webinar on the HSSR YouTube Channel.*) My portion, "The Stink of Santa Rosa Creek," which begins in the video at the 32:00 mark, covers much of the history of pollution in the decades around the turn of the century, but I did not have time to discuss the pivotal year of 1923, when prospects greatly improved. This article is a companion to that presentation and wraps up the story. Before we waded into that muck, however, first the fun stuff: Lake Santa Rosa, take III.

In early 1923, the Chamber of Commerce hosted a luncheon for an expert in urban planning and development to tell them how to best turn its city-owned property north of town – now the Junior College campus – into what was intended to become the "Luther Burbank Creation Garden." Seemingly to their surprise, his focus was instead on beautifying Santa Rosa Creek.

Thus inspired, come that spring Ward W. Von Tillow, head of the Chamber's "Clean Up committee," announced plans to restore several miles of the creek to its natural state. But the committee wasn't going to stop there; they would build dams to create "ole' swimmin' holes" for the town's youth. They also wanted to ask property owners along the creek to give away their strips of land immediately adjacent to the creek so "walkways, tennis courts, bath and boat houses can be built." In short, they wanted to turn the creek into a full-blown waterpark.

This proposal probably led many in town to wistfully recall that about a dozen years earlier there was a short-lived effort to dam the creek (<http://santarosahistory.com/wordpress/2013/09/the-rise-and-fall-of-lake-santa-rosa/>) to create "Lake Santa Rosa." That plan was sabotaged both by upstream pollution and an obstinate landowner who maintained his property line extended fully into the middle of the creek. (Legally true, but meaningless in practice.)



And even before that there was a proposed 1906 waterpark (<http://santarosahistory.com/wordpress/2009/07/santarosas-forgotten-future/>) that included a bandstand, but that design was quickly forgotten after the Great Earthquake struck.

The 1923 ambitions likewise went nowhere. The creek revitalization

by the committee was not mentioned again, as they turned to their routine springtime duties in getting the town "dolled up" for the upcoming Rose Festival. Homeowners were asked to sign a pledge to make their house and yard as presentable as possible, while volunteer crews and Boy Scouts picked up trash in alleyways and vacant lots, painted old fences and such.

Perhaps the Clean Up committee was so distracted by its pre-festival chores that it plumb forgot about creating a waterpark with "ole' swimmin' holes," but it's more likely they were discouraged by the outcome of a meeting that happened on exactly the same day. City Manager Abner Hitchcock held a summit between city leaders, the Women's Auxiliary and the Chamber of Commerce directors. The topic: What to do about the public nuisance caused by the Levin Tannery. There were then three tanneries in Santa Rosa (see "TANNERY TOWN" (<http://santarosahistory.com/wordpress/2012/06/tannery-town/>))

Continued on page 5

and the largest was the Levin Tannery, which was at the current location of 101 Brookwood Ave. extending all the way to the creek – larger than a typical square city block.

Pity anyone who lived downwind of that place; the stench was offal (sorry, old pun). The tannery also dumped the untreated refuse of its tanning vats into the creek and the concentrations of lime and other highly toxic agents, including cyanide, quickly killed what few fish still ventured into the waters. Complaints about these problems dated back many years and were ignored until the new threat of lawsuits against Santa Rosa itself brought City Manager Hitchcock to call the meeting. Still, he included the proposed waterpark as an agenda item: “Beautiful parks, roses, swimming pools, wistaria vines and tannery dumps do not mix,” he conceded.

Predictably, nothing came from the meeting except for an agreement to meet again at some point to discuss zoning. (Probably meaning they wanted to rezone that entire section of town as industrial, making it easier for the city to justify ignoring odor complaints from nearby residents.)

The Levin Tannery got away with being the town’s worst water and air polluter because it was also its largest employer. Yes, the tannery discharges into the creek were illegal and yes, the company was sued over that as well as the smells. Each time the tannery promised to be a better citizen but did nothing, and the city let them get by with it out of fear they would take their hefty payroll to Petaluma or somewhere else.

It’s worth taking a moment to reflect on Santa Rosa’s remarkable degree of cognitive dissonance in that era. On one hand the town and its Chamber heavily leaned into PR that this was Luther Burbank’s garden paradise and the lovely city of roses, hoping to attract visitors and new residents. But at the same time, they were aiding and abetting the tannery in its ongoing destruction of the creek and its blanketing the town’s air with stomach- turning smells.

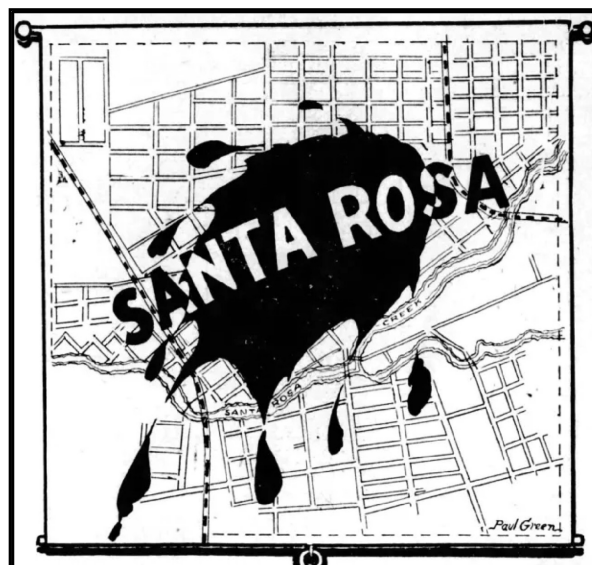
The State Board of Health had no interest in coddling the tannery’s illegal dumping, however, and sent Santa Rosa a blistering letter charging that pollution of the creek was “beyond any that exists anywhere else in the state,” and if the city didn’t take immediate action the Board would file injunctions against the polluters itself.

(A little Believe-it-or-Not! sidenote: The waterpark plan

announcement, the summit meeting over the tannery smell and the arrival of the letter all took place during a single week in early April.)

As the Press Democrat noted at the time, the town had to prevent at all costs the state from taking action against the polluting industries, as “it would mean the losing of these plants to Santa Rosa, since they could not dispose of their own sewage and compete with competing plants more favorably situated.”

Santa Rosa was now faced with promptly solving a crisis thirty years in the making. Naturally, the city did what it’s always done: It hired an out-of-town consultant – and then mostly ignored his advice. As I emphasized in my presentation, almost all of the creek’s problems were linked to the town not having an adequate sewer system until 1925.



Sewage disposal cartoon representing the blot on the fair city of Santa Rosa as viewed by City Engineer George Comstock, who was in favor of a bond measure to construct a modern plant
Press Democrat, February 9, 1924

Santa Rosa Creek was an open sewer until the first city sewer main was built in 1886, with “numerous” privately owned redwood sewers dumping raw sewage into the creek from downtown hotels and other large businesses. Some of those private lines were still in use until 1902, when they were banned by the city. (Aside from sources transcribed below or found in related articles on the creek (<http://santarosahistory.com/wordpress/category/santa-rosa-creek/>), most of this older research comes from The Sewage of Santa Rosa (<https://northbaydigital.sonoma.edu/digital/collection/EHDC/id/2435>)” by John Cummings.)

That first city sewer poured into the creek just west of Railroad Square (it’s always polite to welcome visitors with something fragrant) until 1890, when a sewer line was extended out to the newly constructed sewer farm, about where the Stony Circle business park is today. It was purposely built next to the creek so any overflow from the evaporation ponds or other parts of the system would spill into there along with the semi-filtered wastewater gushing from the outflow pipes.

The sewer mains were undersized from the start and upgrades always seemed to be about ten years behind current needs. Around the turn of the century, every winter Second and Fifth streets backed up with sewage seeping out of manholes during storms.

Continued on page 7

Admission Day, continued from page 1

a.m. and lasted over an hour. It was headed by a platoon of officers and members of the San Francisco Police Department, a splendid body of well-drilled, well-uniformed men. They escorted the parade and Grand Marshal J. C. Smith, who rode a black charger. Smith was handsomely uniformed and plumed and looked the part. He was accompanied by Senator Louis W. Juilliard, his Chief of Staff, and his chief Aide William W. Skaggs.



J. C. SMITH, of Santa Rosa Parlor, Grand Marshal, who will Head Parade.

Next came the splendid Patriarchs' Military Band of Petaluma, followed by the Grand Officers of the N. S. G. W., with whom rode President Thomas J. Proctor of the Santa Rosa Parlor, the host of the celebration, and the Grand Officers of the Native Daughters of the Golden West. Last but not least, the many Native Sons' and Daughters' parlors, some complete with their own drum corps, proudly marched along, escorted by Santa Rosa Parlor members wearing white duck suits with white shirts and collars, a gold tie, a white felt hat with gold band, and tan shoes. This natty outfit was topped off with a gold sash. Teddy Bear mascots were at the head of a number of the parlors in line (in honor of the Bear Flag Revolution). But it remained for the Sebastopol Parlor to have the real offering: a bear cub named "Sebastopol," captured in Mendocino County and kept especially for the celebration. The unfortunate little creature had been in training for two weeks in preparation for its debut at the parade.



Santa Rosa Sept 9 - 1911

The parade was followed by festivities including band concerts and street performers along with receptions at various parlor headquarters that lasted late into that evening. Added attractions not included in the official program were aviation and harness races at the nearby track.

H. C. Lichtenberger, the Grand President of the N. S. G. W., was the President of the Day and he delivered this inspirational speech: "From the heart of every Native Son there springs a throb of exultation when the name - California - and the Ninth of September is mentioned. The sons of California should be proud of their inheritance, California, with her inspiring history and sacred memories,

with her wonderful natural resources, with her industries stimulated by a progressive people, with her sublime scenery and matchless climate, is indeed a State to be proud of. In all the world there is no land so blessed, no such noble-hearted and generous people, no such devotion to land of birth, no such sacred shrines at which to worship a romantic history, no such charity to soften the selfish instinct and no such loyalty and patriotism to arouse devotion and love for state and country. Blessed with prosperity and happiness, having earned for herself the respect and wonder of the entire world, California anticipates a still greater future. That future lies in the hands of the Native Sons of the Golden West."

To wrap up the festivities, on Day 3, Sunday, September 10, a "Sacred Concert" took place at the Courthouse at 1:30 p.m. (clearly set at a sensitive time allowing participants in the day-long celebration on Saturday a chance to sleep in and



recover from any over-imbibing of celebratory drinks). Father Gleason closed with this benediction:

*"In that sun-kissed land of flowers where the dew-drops kiss the rose,
In my dreams I often wander as of yore.
And the rustling of the breezes bids me a sweet repose,
The redwoods seem to welcome me once more.
Within those gates of heaven where Nature's gifts abound,
My memory's dearest fancy, ever dwells,
For amongst sweet orange blossoms ring the dear old mission bells,
In dear old California's sunny dells."*

The concert included a solo by Mrs. Lulu Empanan, one of General Vallejo's daughters. Those who stayed through Sunday afternoon also had a chance to enjoy a baseball game between the newly founded Santa Rosa Moose Lodge team and San Francisco's Native Sons All Star team.

The entire event was deemed an "unparalleled success" beyond any previous Admission Day celebrations held in other places in California. The organizers were showered with compliments during the event and for many days after.

Images this page from Press Democrat, Hill-Lilienthal Collection

Victory Gardens, continued from page 3

In early 1943, the Chamber of Commerce created a “junior victory garden committee” to encourage children to plant victory gardens. More than 400 children pledged to plant gardens. In return, they were provided with free vegetable seeds that had been donated. As an incentive for the young gardeners, the Chamber offered \$25 war bonds to be awarded for the most outstanding gardens. The junior victory gardens ranged from those in vacant lots to backyard gardens. In May 1943, the committee toured hundreds of gardens to judge them based on planting plan,



U.S. War Department Poster

efficiency of cultivation, and growth of planting.

According to the National Park Service, “Half of all American households grew a Victory Garden - in their yards, in window boxes, at their jobs, in school yards, and in community spaces. Incarcerated people of Japanese descent also planted victory gardens. By 1943, Victory Gardeners had planted over 20 million acres of land and by the end of the war, produced about 8 million tons of food.” A U.S. Department of Agriculture survey revealed that 18,500 victory gardens were grown in 1944.

Santa Rosa Creek, continued from page 5

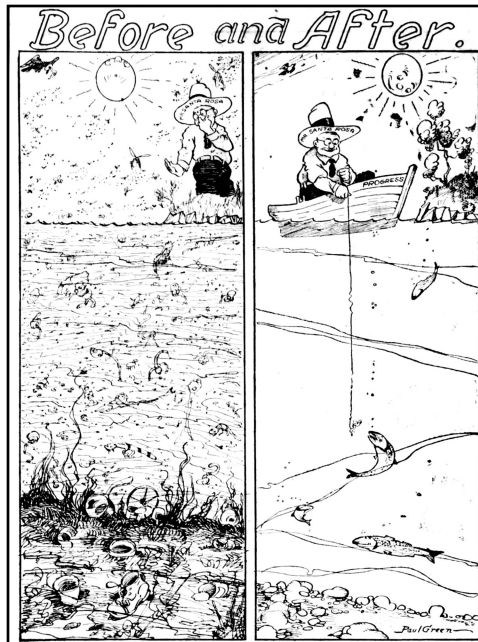
Being perpetually at full capacity (or beyond), for years Santa Rosa limited which businesses or industries could hook up to the sewer. The city allowed only one laundry to connect and even that sometimes overtaxed the sewer main on Second. The other laundries presumably just discharged their soapy alkaline water into the creek, although they were supposed to be using large cesspools.

The Levin Tannery never used the sewer system but the city’s other major creek polluter, the cannery, finally connected in 1925. Before then the sewer farm could not have possibly handled its waste, which was about 100,000 gallons per day during peak canning season. California Packing Company’s Plant No. 5 on West Third Street (survived by that big brick wall just past Railroad Square) also created a terrible stink in the west end of town due to its enormous garbage heaps of food waste allowed to rot along the banks of the creek.

C. G. Gillespie, director of the bureau of sanitary engineering of the State Board of Health wasn’t threatening action over Santa Rosa’s inadequate sewer lines in 1923, however. Besides the cannery and Levin dumping waste into the creek near downtown, the object of his fury was the sewer farm, where he wrote in his letter there were “utterly intolerable conditions.”

That was because in 1895 the sewer farm moved its wastewater outflow pipes farther west. As a result, several farms downstream were flooded that winter. The city paid damages but Mrs. M. A. Peterson took the city to court and won a perpetual restraining order, “prohibiting the city or its officers, agents and employees from polluting or poisoning the waters of Santa Rosa creek by discharging any sewage, garbage, filth or refuse matter in the creek from the sewer farm.” Come 1923 and her son, Elmer, sued Santa Rosa for \$12,000 damages (about \$183k today) to cover medical

expenses for his daughters allegedly having contracted typhoid and diphtheria because of the contaminated creek water. Another case at the same time which was apparently settled quietly had a Laguna farmer claiming creek water had killed 13 of his cattle.



City Engineer George Comstock’s version of how Santa Rosa Creek looks at present and how it will look when it is cleaned up
Press Democrat, February 8, 1924

Unbelievably, it seems that the city actually stepped up the volume of discharges as the Peterson case awaited court hearings. The Petersons claimed that the sewer farm discharges were now continuous, and the judge ruled for the city to be held in contempt of court.

And despite further nastygrams from Director Gillespie (“conditions are getting more unbearable than ever before”) the city still did nothing about the dumping situation. Finally in November the state Board of Health dropped the hammer on Santa Rosa and declared the pollution of Santa Rosa Creek a “serious public nuisance and menace to health” and the city in violation of the Public Health Act.

The story will continue in the Fall 2024 HSSR newsletter.



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