

Historian Skip Sommer has restored many historic properties in Marin and Sonoma Counties including The Great Petaluma Mill, The Riverhouse Restaurant and Larkspur's famed Lark Creek Inn. Skip is an honorary member of Heritage Homes of Petaluma and has been the History Editor of The Petaluma Post for 20 years. He is a Realtor with CPS/Golden Land Realty in Petaluma. E-mail Skip at skip-sommer@hotmail.com

STORIES FROM THE PAST

A Kentucky Street Christmas in 1925

by History Editor Skip Sommer

- a grand old Italian grocery full of good aromas and local produce from the sea and the fields.

It was a departmentalized grocery with a fish market run by Jerry Turney, a butcher shop run by a man named Angelo (not Angelo Ibleto of Angelo's Meats on Adobe Road), a produce department run by George P. George and the general grocery run by the Moore family. "The Pacific" was a gathering place in which to meet your friends and neighbors. There was always a slice of baloney or a cookie for the children and tastes of cheese or salami for mom and dad.

Harold's Drugs was across the street. Mr. Harold, being quite progressive, had telephone number "1" in Petaluma. The fire department got number 16 and the police department was number 17. As phones became more prevalent, the operators would have to weed out a lot of "kiddie calls" - young children cranking the phones.

At that time, the telephone company was located on Kentucky Street. The operators had to work until midnight and the girls fed the old coal stove to keep warm. The coal bin provided plenty of dust for everyone - too much dust, actually.

Petaluma, being a busy

rail and river port, had acquired several "houses of ill repute" along the way. I am told the "girls" were very discrete and would not say "hello" on the street for fear of embarrassing someone.

Fanny Brown was one of the best-known proprietors and she always provided Christmas baskets to the poor each year. Fanny's house had a new-fangled pay phone. Often, the girls didn't have enough money to pay for their calls until the end of the night, so the telephone operators would collect later. It was a quiet agreement. Petaluma had grown a bit since Harold's Drugs got phone number 1. The number at Fanny's was 892.

In 1925, folks didn't go in much for outside decorations and it was traditional to "put up the Christmas" *inside* on the day after Thanksgiving. Unlike today, no one pushed the season. The Salvation Army bell ringers didn't come out until December 10 and there would be one on Western Avenue and also one on Washington Street. On the corner of Western and Kentucky was the Gervasoni Delicatessen. I am told it was a very impressive place - the first store in town with tile floors and marble counters. Gervasoni's was a "must" on any family visit to town.

Dill pickles were two for a penny and a dry salami sandwich with jack cheese and homemade mustard was fifteen cents. Mr. Gervasoni did well in Real Estate also and eventually sold the delicatessen location to Moe Goldman who opened The Leader - a purveyor of fine men's and ladies garments. Years later, the building became Carrither's Department Store and the two-story window was installed. Now that the most recent tenant, Couches Furniture, has closed, the building awaits its next reinvention. Other stores that brightened Kentucky Street were Polly Anne Bakery, Carman Candy, the I. B. Raymond and Tuft's ladies' wear, the U.S. Post Office, the Bank of Italy, the Levitt 5 and 10 cent store, Joe Milner's Sporting Goods, and, of course, Matteis Clothing. Yellow Cab and the newstand were next to the Golden Concourse. Who EVER came up with that corny name? Vern Marion ran the newstand. Clyde Gibbey and the Martinez Brothers delivered papers in a little truck. Yellow Cab (phone number 424) had a tradition of providing the night telephone operators a free ride home. Fire chief (and barber) Bob Adam would take the Yellow Cab to get to the fires. It was that kind of town.


Kentucky Street was a bustling wonderful place to shop in 1925, and, though the stores have all changed, it's still a wonderful street to shop - especially at Christmas time. You can tell them Skip sent you. Just don't ask who told me Fanny Brown's phone number was 892.

What was happening in Petaluma in December 1925?

Well, for one thing, Santa Claus was headquartered at Tomasini Hardware on Kentucky Street. He was alternately "played" by "Ollie" Olson and John Froxmeier. It was a fun excursion for children to come in from the ranches to browse in the busy hardware store. Most ranchers had accounts there and the families were royally welcomed.

Also on Kentucky Street was Antler's Pharmacy, run by Bill Nay Senior. It was a wondrous place with cabinets built all the way to the balcony. The cabinets had glass covers and were chock full of all colors of Pharmacopeias. Along the sides of the balcony were mounted the deer heads from which the establishment took its name. Kids would press their noses to the window to see the druggist roll his ladder along the walls.

On the other end of the block was the Pacific Market



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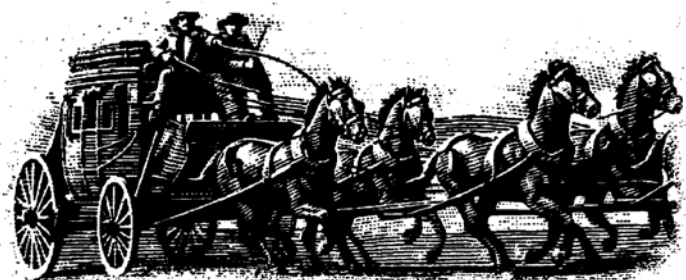
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