

What Has Become of Happy Valley?

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SAN PEDRO

HAPPY VALLEY, What was it?
It was sexy.

Back at the turn of the century, when the ships were in, seafaring newcomers would ask the question:

"Hey, Jack, where do I get a girl?"

The reply: "Why, Happy Valley."

"Where's that?"

"Just keep walking till you hear the pianos playing. When you hear the music—well, those are the houses. That's where you'll find the girls."

So Sailor Bob and Sailor Bill, and many other sailors would set forth on their wenching parties.

And then they'd hear the music. True, it sounded a little square. But then the houses looked imposing.

A knock on a door would bring a well-dressed matron.

"Er—are you the madam?"

"I beg your pardon . . ." And the door would be slammed shut.

Trouble was that the direction-giving Macs were unaware of the musical inclinations of the residents of swank Nob Hill, which lay on one side of Happy Valley. The Nob Hillers also could afford pianos.

So that's how the pianos of Happy Valley came to be stilled. The San Pedro City Council (those were the days before annexation to Los Angeles) passed an ordinance prohibiting piano-playing in Happy Valley's saloons and notorious houses.

The pianos were turned to the wall, and no longer could mariners use music for a compass.

THE VALLEY was tough.

It lay in a canyon surrounded by Nob Hill (now gone), New Sweden Hill (also bulldozed away) and Barton Hill (still standing), and Butcher Ralph was the man who made the rules.

Butcher Ralph was a stockily-built, foul-mouthed man who ran a saloon. He liked horses and women.

Especially horses. In his buggy he liked to race other residents down San Pedro streets. He was proud of his speedy steppers.

He'd boast about his horses to people who came into Butcher Ralph's. People like Stingaree Red, Breakwater Kitty, One-Eyed Annie and Dirty May.

He displayed a collection of fancy whips above the bar.

One day Mrs. Butcher Ralph, who was beautiful, irritated her husband by her drinking and her attention to other men.

Butcher Ralph grabbed one of his rawhides from the display, chased his wife into the street and gave her a sound whipping.

In Happy Valley love was a many-splendored thing.

HAPPY VALLEY was uproarious.

It roared during the late 1880s, the 1890s and up till about 1909.

It roared with humor, too.

People in the Valley especially liked Jimmy. And when you liked a man, you played a joke on him.

Jimmy wouldn't have hurt a flea, although he could have. For Jimmy was the town's dogcatcher in those days. And since everyone had a nickname or title, Jimmy was Jimmy the Dogcatcher.

He was never known to have put a dog to death. In fact, many of his captives got away.

His was an appointive job. But one day in the Focsle, a Valley bar, Jimmy got a jolt while discussing the forthcoming election with a friend.

On sudden inspiration, the friend blurted out: "Say, Jimmy, did you know your post is to be elective from now on?"

"You don't say."

"Yeah. And you know what that means?"

"No, what?"

"Well, Jimmy, you're going to have to get out and campaign."

Jimmy did. He had cards printed up, cards with his picture. They said: "Vote for Jimmy for Dogcatcher."

Another day, at another bar, Jimmy encountered his friend.

"Say," said Jimmy, "I don't know why I'm campaigning. I can't find anyone who's running against me."

"That's because your opponent is a 'dark horse'."

"So that's it."

"Yeah. So don't stop campaigning."

On election night the Valleyites assembled in a bar to watch returns posted on a special board. On the board was a place for Jimmy the Dogcatcher. Also listed was the "dark horse."

It was a see-saw battle all evening between Jimmy and his imaginary opponent.

Whenever Jimmy trailed, his friend urged him to buy drinks for the house. Jimmy did, and his vote-count immediately rose.

Early in the morning, when Jimmy could no longer make out the numbers, he was assured he had been elected dogcatcher by an overwhelming majority.

HAPPY VALLEY was beautiful.

The Valley's tough element, old-timers say, was restricted to about a block and a half. In adjacent areas, though, were many fine homes and trees.

That's how the Valley got its name, say the old-timers.

"People were happy there."

TODAY HAPPY VALLEY is only a memory. To find where it once stood, drive through the residential district bounded by Santa Cruz, Palos Verdes, Centre and 2nd Sts.

It's so peaceful and law-abiding now that Butcher Ralph would be furious.



Butcher Ralph grabbed one of his rawhides, chased his wife into the streets of Old San Pedro and gave her a sound whipping.