

Tokens of History
by
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Last month we traced the rise and fall of Coram, California, through the O'Grady's Saloon, which became Nick Rodriguez' Coram Saloon, and followed his path through Kennett and back down here to Redding as those towns passed into history. This month we will celebrate a Happy New Year through the discovery that the most prominent feature of the Coram skyline (below) rose from the rubble and still lives among us today, and that sometimes it is a good thing when lightening strikes twice.



FORMERLY A FLOURISHING TOWN WITH A POPULATION OF 1500 NOW VIRTUALLY
ABANDONED.
Coram, Cal., where the deadly gas generated by the smelters forced the owners to shut down the plant.

The First Lightening Strike

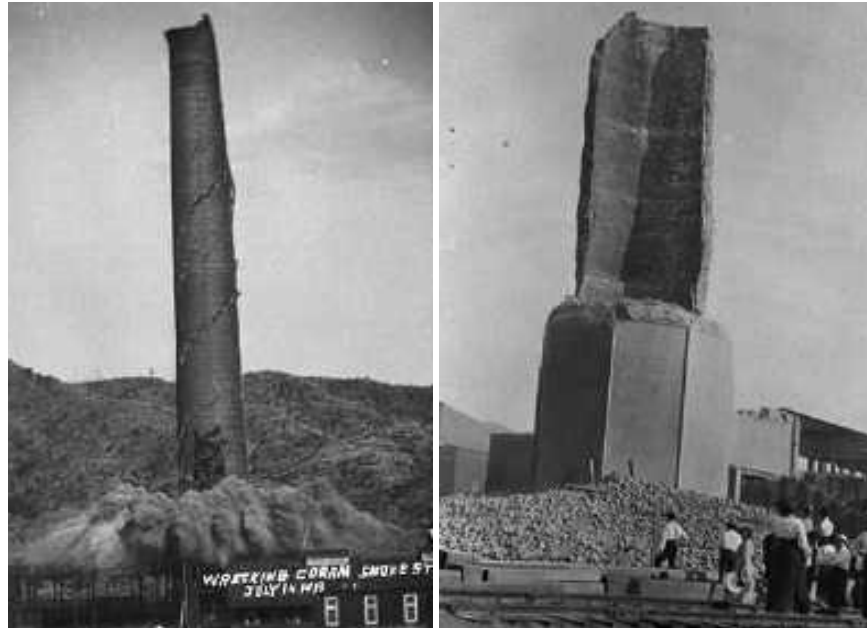
The Searchlight, May 16, 1909:

Lightning struck the 255-foot brick smokestack at the Balaklala smelter at Coram. The \$30,000 brick chimney was scarred by the strike, but supposedly suffered little damage. The bolt hit the stack 8 feet from the base and made a dent 6 inches in diameter. The electrical current zigzagged down the face of the chimney until it hit the enlarged base, where it stopped.

It appears the author of the above article was wise in saying that it "supposedly" suffered little damage, based on what is found in the *Dictionary of Early Shasta County History*:

...the stack had begun to crack and flatten on one side after only 18 months of use. Some claimed the damage was caused by lightning, others said extreme heat caused the damage.

In either case, the smokestack was dynamited to the ground some years later, and Coram's skyline would never be the same:



The Second Lightning Strike

The Searchlight, October 8, 1918:

Columbus House Is Struck By Lighting and Burned

LARGE TWO-STORY STRUCTURE DESTROYED DURING A HEAVY RAINSTORM AT A LOSS OF \$13,000 --- THE LANDLORD, O. MERLO, PUT OUT THE FIRE AT THE OUTSET, HE SUPPOSED, BUT FOUND A FEW MINUTES LATER THAT THE FIRE HAD GAINED HEADWAY ALL UNSEEN IN THE ROOF

The Columbus house in California Street was struck by lightning about 3:30 Wednesday morning, during the height of the rainstorm, causing a fire that resulted in the destruction of the large two-story frame structure and its contents.

The loss is \$13,000; insurance \$6500...little of the contents of the hotel was saved. The fire was a big one, for the large frame building, dry on the inside, made ready fuel in spite of the heavy rain falling. Embers were carried for blocks, but they were harmless as they fell on surfaces soaking wet.

Mrs. Obst's large warehouse thirty feet from the hotel on the north and a small dwelling the same distance to the south were saved with ease --- a feat the firemen would have found impossible if there had not been a heavy rain.

Frank Bort, a guest of the hotel, was badly burned in trying to save property.

The Losses

The Columbus house, long the property of Augustino and Abbondio Rasella, brothers, became the property of Abbondio Rasella on the death of his brother, who willed it to him. The owner leased it a month ago to Orlando Merlo, who had since bought a good

deal of stock for the saloon. Merlo also owned the furniture and fixtures in the hotel. Merlo estimates his loss at \$3000, with \$1500 insurance. Rasella carried \$5000 insurance and lost approximately \$10,000.

The Token:



COLUMBUS / HOTEL / REDDING / CAL. // GOOD FOR / 5¢ / IN TRADE

According to an article in the 1986 Covered Wagon (pg. 64), Domenico Mazzoni was the original owner after he migrated to America in 1890:

He was born in Albaredo (Sandrio) Italy...He moved on north to Shasta and Siskiyou counties working in copper and iron mines as well as the lumber industry. All the while he was saving his money under difficult conditions. Eventually he acquired enough money to go into a hotel business with a friend. This hotel was called the Columbus Hotel in Redding, California.

It appears from these obituaries that Domenico and his wife Catterina “Americanized” their first names in later years, and that the liquor business was a family tradition:

October 1939:

Daniel Mazzoni, 74 year old pioneer rancher residing just south of Redding, passed on Sunday following a brief illness. He had lived in Shasta County for nearly 50 years, during which time he occupied the ranch and vineyard where he passed on. Mazzoni was born April 17, 1865 in Italy. Surviving is his wife, Mrs. Catherine Mazzoni, two daughters, Mrs. Glenn Allen and Mrs. Joseph Capitto, both of Redding, a brother and sister in Italy, two nieces and a nephew.

April, 1987:

Annie Cabitto, a native of Shasta County, died at Mercy Medical Center on April 14, 1987. She was the daughter of Domenico Mazzoni and Catterina Rossi, immigrants from northern Italy. The Mazzoni family resided in Shasta County since 1908; they owned a hotel in Coram, where Annie was born in 1910. Later the family moved to Redding in 1912. In 1929 Annie married Joseph Cabitto. They worked and made their home in Redding. Annie worked for her sister, Lena Rester, at the Tehama Liquor Store for 24 years; she also worked at the Pioneer Liquor Store for many years. She was a dear and special friend to many... She is survived by husband Joseph; daughter Joanne Sciaroni of San Francisco; granddaughter Elisa Sciaroni; sister Lena Rester of Redding; nephew Bob Allen; and greatnieces Cathy Anderson and Debbie Kraft.

November, 1987:

Lena Mazzoni Rester, 74, life-long resident of Redding, died in Mercy Medical Center November 24, 1987. She was born in Redding June 8, 1913, daughter of Domenico Mazzoni and his wife Catterina Rossi, and was younger sister of Annie Cabitto, who preceded her in death. Burial was at Lawncrest Memorial Park. She was owner of Tehama Liquor in Redding for 20 years, a member of the Redding Women of the Moose and Allen's Golf Course. She joined the Shasta Historical Society in 1984. Survivors are son Robert Allen, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

At some point Domenico Mazzoni appears to have sold the Columbus Hotel to the Rasella brothers, and Abbondio later sold to O. Merlo.

An advertisement during Rasella's ownership :

COLUMBUS
Restaurant, Saloon and Winery
A. RASELLA, Proprietor,
Corner California and Shasta Streets, Redding, Cal
Standard Brands of
=Wines=Liquors=and=Cigars=
It is not what you pay for--it is what you get at Rasella's that makes his place the headquarters

(There is a Redding token from a "G. RASELLA" that may be a relative, but more likely a nickname or a typo. If any reader knows where I might obtain one, please contact me.)

It is ironic, which you will soon understand, that after selling the Columbus, Mazzoni went on to build a hotel in Coram, only to lose everything when the mines closed just a short time later.

Searchlight, October 30, 1918:

Columbus House to Be Rebuilt
O. Merlo purchases the site from the former owner, Abbondio Rasella

The Columbus house, the large Italian hotel at the upper end of California street, which was burned on October 2, is to be rebuilt either of brick or concrete.

O. Merlo, who was running the hotel under a lease at the time of the fire, has purchased the site from Abbondio Rasella. Merlo announces that he will rebuild as soon as possible under war conditions. He first has to get permission from Washington. Merlo has not perfected his plans.

Rasella sold all of the California street frontage, retaining only the rear part of south lot on which stands a little dwelling in which he will make his home.

The Coram Smokestack Rises From the Rubble

The Searchlight, December 18, 1918:

SMOKESTACK BRICK FOR REDDING HOTEL
O. MERLO BUYS THE BALAKLALA'S WRECK OF A \$30,000 SMOKESTACK

Brick from the Balaklala smokestack have been bought by O. Merlo, who will use them in building a two story hotel in Redding on the site of the Columbus house, which was destroyed by fire recently.

The brick are big ones and of special make. They are wedged shaped, being 13 inches wide at one end and 9 inches at the other. They are 6 inches thick. Laid in a straight wall they will make a solid building that will be earthquake proof.

The smokestack, which was built for the smelter, cost \$30,000. Having been struck by lightning ten years ago, it was considered unsafe. So the great pile of brick was tumbled down by a discharge of dynamite. The brick have lain in a pile ever since. They are so big and strong that comparatively few were broken in the work of demolition.

Prohibition, Schmohibition

(According to Wikipedia, adding "schm" to the beginning of a word is meant to "diminish, negate, or dismiss an argument". This is thought to be adapted from the Yiddish word, "schmuck".)

The 1928 Mercantile Guide lists Carlo Vegala [Veglia] as the proprietor of the "Columbia Cafe" at 214 California Street, with O. Merlo still proprietor of the Columbus Hotel at the same address. Prohibition has reared its ugly head, and most saloons have either closed, mysteriously burned, or been turned into cafes that supposedly only serve soft drinks. Note my use of the word "supposedly" before you read on. I don't know if Veglia's attitude was "prohibition, schmohibition", but it appears to be the attitude of those who follow him.

July 5, 1929:

Officers Raid the Columbus House, Make Two Arrests

Sheriff Sublett, Deputy Sheriff Stevenson and Deputy Sheriff Cochran raided the Columbus house Friday afternoon and arrested Tony Colbrochini, lessee of the bar from O. Merlo, and his barkeeper, T. Rusconi.

Four pints of jackass brandy, a half-gallon jug of wine and several other assemblages of liquor were confiscated.

Colbrochini and Rusconi were taken to the county jail to be booked on a charge of possession.

A few days later:

Tony Colbochini of the Columbus House Pays Fine of \$300

Tony Colochini, proprietor of the bar in the Columbus house, who had pleaded guilty of possession last week, was fined \$300 by Judge R. P. Stimmel in the township court Tuesday morning. The fine was paid.

Tony Rusconi, barkeeper for Colbochini, who was arrested at the same time on the same charge, pleaded not guilty. The time for setting the date of his preliminary examination was continued till July 29 to accommodate his attorney.

The same order was made as to the preliminary examination of J. S. Dunn, chauffeur for Mrs. Shultz, who was arrested a week ago on the charge of driving a car while intoxicated. Dunn is at large under bail.

From 1934 to 1938 the city directories list the former saloon-turned-café as a bar called the Empire, located at 1237 California Street (the addresses had changed from three to four digits), with Richard Corradetti as the proprietor of the Empire Hotel, at 1233 California.

By the 1970's the Empire Hotel and bar have been transformed into what we find there today, for one last irony, the Empire Recovery Center, founded by Norman "Butch" Williams. If you take a look at the rear of the building, you will see that the old smokestack bricks were used until they ran out, requiring traditional bricks to be used to finish the top quarter or so of the building.



Front of building, on California Street



Rear of building, from Taco Bell parking lot

Obituary from Jan. 28, 1983:

Norman "Butch" Williams, 72, founder of the Empire Hotel Rehabilitation Center, died Jan. 26. Williams and his wife, Evelyn, operated the Empire Hotel like a family home, and he had helped alcoholics for more than a dozen years. Residents ate and attended classes together, providing one another with understanding and support.



Coram's Balaklala smokestack, then and now

If the reader has any additional information about any of the people or businesses mentioned in this article, please contact me at: chetsunde@gmail.com, or (530) 244-4436. Mayan calendar, Schmayan calendar. Happy New Year!

