



Local Color: Sheriff “Sunny Jim” Monroe

excerpts from the Memoir of James William Monroe, Sheriff of Yolo County from 1911 until 1939
on the 100 year anniversary of his becoming sheriff for 28 years.

OCCUPY THE CAPITOLS? NOT A NEW IDEA!

Having recently visited Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington, as well as Wall Street in New York, and even Vancouver, BC, Canada, and walked through the peaceful and well-organized “Occupy” camps, I have been thinking about social unrest and our economic hard times--and how those who don't feel “heard” get their point across.



A sign in “Occupy Portland”

It reminded me of a section in my grandfather's memoir about “a strange ‘army’...marching across the face of California, it's watchword, ‘Storm the Capitol!’” While this

army never made its way to western Yolo and the greater Capay Valley, it is interesting and timely enough to share here, I think. As taken from Sheriff “Sunny Jim” Monroe's Memoir:

“Coxey's Army” was formed during the lean year of 1913. Nearly as bad as the '29 crash, the earlier depression left men hungry and unemployed.

So thousands of these men formed themselves into an army of irregulars. Divided into companies, they selected their commanders and started for Washington, determined to force a showdown with the President.

The size of the northern unit of the army intimidated Oakland. That city furnished the marchers with railroad tickets to Sacramento, handing an acute problem outright to the state capital.

Sacramento met the army with a more spirited defense. When tickets were demanded

to Reno, the capital city authorities bluntly refused to come across.

Seven hundred angry marchers were driven from their camp. Scores of Sacramentans were deputized secretly. Armed with pick handles and accompanied by the city's fire trucks, they pounced on the dejected army...which retreated under the blows of clubs and the forceful streams of water from the fire hose.

The army's line of retreat lay across the bridges into Broderick. They arrived, a wet, furious lot...and plenty dangerous.

Food Soothes

Their spirit crushed by their treatment at the hands of Sacramento citizens, Coxey's Army came into Yolo County in no gentle mood. Hunger gnawed at their stomachs, and their dispositions were correspondingly bad.



Yolo County obviously had not the force to deal with them as Sacramento had done. Nor did it have the wealth to treat them in the manner chosen by Oakland.

I knew that the only thing that would keep them peaceable was food. I sorta wanted to feed them anyway. Anyone who has been hungry--and all miners know what hunger is--can appreciate how I felt towards those poor fellows.

I drove out and had a talk with them. They were sullen and wary. I knew they were estimating the pitiful forces which I had at my command.

Jobless Cheer

“But before we talk any more,” I shouted, “I’m going to FEED you! You look powerful hungry to me!”

Suddenly they cheered me. Their faces grew eager and even friendly.

For ten days Yolo County provided those fellows with food and fuel. It gave them a chance to rest their blistered feet and to fill out the hollows in their cheekbones. With mulligan in their bellies and

warmth for their bodies, they were willing to listen to me.

“You fellow know that the county can’t keep feeding you,” I told them. “We’re glad to give you a hand...sure. But...”

Reason Wins

I saw the men were nodding and whispering. And I knew they were going to be OK. They saw my side of the question all right enough.

“Besides that,” I continued, “There’s danger of typhus infection...both to you and to this entire community. Your camp here has no sanitary facilities. It’ll be a pestilence hole if you stay in it much longer.”

On the March

They were darn decent about it. Without a complaint, they gathered up their scant belongings and went...all except about 150 stragglers. These were mostly IWW radicals, the worst of the lot. There wasn’t any use wasting sympathy and reason on them. I issued an ultimatum, assuring them that we would outfit them with provisions and not molest them.

I said earlier the stragglers weren’t worth any sympathy. But I changed my mind when I saw those poor fellows, with their blistered feet, drop to the side of the road out of sheer fatigue.

So I loaded my car with five or six at a time and hauled them out of Yolo County.

Labor Grateful

Labor unions were not ungrateful for this. The office here got dozens of letters from various unions. All commended us on the “humane” way we handled the situation. To this day, labor organizations have been friendly to Yolo County [written in 1938].



Top Right: communal kitchen; Bottom Right: community garden at “Occupy Portland” Oregon; police wandered peacefully around, chatting with occupiers.