

“Alfonce John Bertholet”

(Son of Alfonse Benoit, stone quarrier and builder & his wife Zeliah Bertholet)

Excerpt from *The History of Yolo County, Its Resources and Its People*, William O. Russell, editor, Woodland, California, 1940, pp. 492-493.

“Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of ‘many colored, many sounding life.’ This is fulfilled in the career of the father of Alfonse Benoit Bertholet, born in Alsace-Lorraine, at the age of eighteen, joining the Foreign Legion, and served in Algiers, Morocco. Later he was in Mexico in the French Army, which was sent to help Maximilian. After Maximilian’s ill starred attempt to put himself upon the throne in Mexico, which ended in his execution, the French Army returned to Algiers, and with his term of enlistment at an end, Benoit was discharged. With the spirit of adventure still surging in his soul, he determined to seek his fortune in the New World. He came to New York, and later went to Boston. Benoit was married then, and spent two years in Boston; then went to Chicago, and engaged in the trade of stone cutting and masonry. With his wife, Zeliah,¹ who was born in France, the trip was made across the plains to Sacramento. This was in 1876, when the country was still young and there was plenty of adventure along the way and at the end of the trail, the West. Benoit was industrious and capable, and it was no trouble for him to get work. It is worthy of record that he worked on the Folsom Prison, constructing that big building, and then did work on the beautiful and historic State Capitol; and the masonry he put into that building still contributes to its beauty. From Sacramento he went to the San Francisco Bay region, worked on Mare Island, and then spent several years in the Richmond district. The first year he made his home in San Francisco, and then the family moved to Alameda. In 1884 they moved to Winters and acquired the Bertholet Quarry. His building work in Yolo County abides. Among these are the buildings in Woodland: Michael Brothers, Algiers² Building, Thompson-Diggs³ Building. In Winters he erected the Benoit Bertholet Building. He furnished six carloads of stone for the Memorial Arch at Stanford University, and the Stewart Mausoleum in Suisun. Benoit was a modest man, but exceedingly public spirited and civic minded. He died in Winters in 1910. Zeliah, the faithful wife, was a perfect type of the devoted mother, loving her home, her husband and her children. She died in Alameda March 22, 1933.

“Alfonce was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on April 14, 1876. The home then was at 976 Third Street, and this is now the site of the great Union Depot. As an infant he was brought to California with his parents. When he was old enough to go to school, the family was living in Alameda, so his education was in the public and high schools there. After graduation he determined to follow in the footsteps of his father, and worked seven years with him in the stone cutting business in Winters. He spent two years in office work, and showed his business ability and versatility in other positions. He left Winters in 1897, and went to Oakland, but returned in 1910, and bought from his brother-in-law, Leo Nehring, the Leo Nehring Candy Company. He sold out in 1924 and went into the fruit buying and shipping business until 1927. He then built in Winters the Standard Oil filling station at the corner of Grant and Richmond Streets, and ran this until 1936. He was never afraid to tackle a new venture, and in all his varied activities never made a failure. He has to his credit many of the ‘firsts’ in Winters: cash register, computing

scale, check-perforating machine, combination safe, modern service station. He was first to carry burglary and plate glass insurance.

“On March 20, 1919, Alfonce married in Sacramento Sarah Ann Clark. Her parents, Sidney and Elizabeth, natives of Missouri, came to California by ox team. Sturdy pioneers, they helped to make this country their industry and good living. Mr. Clark was a successful farmer in Napa County.

“Alfonce had one brother and two sisters: Prosper C. (Bertholet), born in 1873, in New York, died in Winters in 1937. Prosper was also associated with his father in the quarry, later entered concrete business, which he conducted the remainder of his life in Winters. A sister, Angeil⁴ (sic), born in Boston in 1875, conducted a successful dressmaking establishment in Alameda, with a clientele of wealthy patrons. Another sister, Hazel, born in San Francisco in 1877, married Lee Nehring in Winters, in 1904. Mr. Nehring was a stone cutter, later operated a candy store in Winters. He died in Winters in 1911. They had one daughter, now Mrs. George Girard, her husband being an executive in salt Lake City for the Shell Oil Company. Their home is in Salt Lake City, and their son, Benoit, is a traveling representative, for the California Fruit Exchange, and California Walnut Exchange, traveling the Eastern States, with his headquarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

“Alfonce was a member of the Elks, Knights of Pythias, Foresters, Red Men, is a member of the Republican Party, and of the Christian Church. His home, 11 Grant Avenue, Winters, is a historic building, the first built in that interesting city occupied by the Elys and later by the Brocks. Alfonce’s hobbies are traveling and roller skating, and he was once a prize skater. He has the reputation of being in advance in business and in public improvement.”

Notes:

1. Zelihah” was also spelled “Zelia” in some documents.
2. According to David L. Wilkinson, Woodland architectural historian and author of *Crafting A Valley Jewel*, the “Algiers” building referred to here is probably the Armstrong-Alge building.
3. Also according to David L. Wilkinson, the “The Thompson-Diggs Building facade was remodeled many years ago and the stone removed. It had large arched windows trimmed in stone.” This building is located on Main Street in Woodland, although today it is empty and not in good condition.
4. “Angeil” was also spelled “Angiel” in some documents.