Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

"For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past." - Walt Whitman

NEWSLETTER

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President's Notes

Happy Holidays to everyone, it has been a great year in the Delta! We are looking forward to seeing everyone at our Annual Meeting on January 21, 2014 where Mary Ellen Burns and Elaine Corn and her husband David SooHoo will be presenting "We are What We Eat". Bring a copy of one of your historic recipes to share. Our membership has grown to 236 members. Please be sure to visit the Resource Center on Tuesdays from 10:00am to 1:00pm to view archived documents of the Delta and listen to taped oral histories of our community and ancestors! I would like to thank Esther and Bobbie for continuing to staff the resource center.

We had a nice turn out at the Pear Fair this year. Thank you to the Friends of the Clarksburg Library for bringing their many photographs. We sold many calendars, and the pins were quite a hit. Artist Dan Harris was on hand to sign the annual Pear Fair poster. Please be sure to purchase a calendar or two at the Annual Dinner to support SRDHS! Additionally, we attended the "Sacramento Archives Crawl" in October, where a bus ferried us to several historical sites. Our members have been networking this year; Vice-President Barbara Damion has been attending monthly Historical society Consortium meetings, and Tom Herzog spoke at a Walnut Grove Rotary meeting on the SRDHS's activities.

We had a wonderful program for September on the History of the Canneries and the Workers – Sacramento Region & Delta presented by William Berg. We watched a movie filmed in the delta area for our November meeting.

Thank you for your involvement with the Historical Society, Happy New Year!

Cathy O'Connor, President

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Martha Esch from Courtland Osie B. Lyon from Antelope Tori E. Lyon from Antelope

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society JANUARY GENERAL MEETING & ANNUAL POTLUCK Tuesday, January 21, 2014 at 6:00 pm **Jean Harvie community Center** 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove Please bring food for 10: A—G Salad H—M Dessert N—Z Hot Dish Please call Tom Herzog 916-871-4060 if you have any questions

Letters from Bill Hutchinson, Sr. Presented by Kathleen Graham Hutchinson

In 1938 Bill Hutchinson, Sr. on two trips East and to the Northwest investigated the Delta crop on its arrival at the auction markets as well as the farming methods of his competitors.

This is the first of a series of seven letters of various lengths which he sent back to the Delta growers at Walnut Grove.

Cover Letter:

Walnut Grove, Calif. October 29, 1938

Dear Sir:

We are inclosing herewith copy of the letters which Mr. Wrn. N. L. Hutchinson wrote to tho California Asparagus Growers Association while on his trip East last May investigating the other important asparagus producing areas, and also a letter covering his trip to the Northwest. He has drawn certain conclusions from those two trips which are also contained herein.

Sincerely yours,

California Asparagus Growers Assn.

Copy of the letter:

April 30, 1938 California Asparagus Growers Association, Walnut Grove, California

Gentleman:

I have been pretty busy ever since I left Walnut Grove, and am taking time out today to try to catch up and tell you what I am doing. As you know I stayed one day in Chicago and came on the next day to New York. I first went down to the docks on arrival and saw the asparagus which was all arriving in good condition, and had anticipated that the balance of the arrivals would be in the same good condition. I went out in the asparagus fields over in the state of New Jersey the last few days and got back in time last night to see the cars unloaded on the pier, and found that the majority of the California asparagus was arriving from poor to fairly good condition. The bad part about this asparagus was rotten tips, and a soft rot on the butts. The lots that were bad had a terrible stench, and if they were able to clean up everything last night, I would be very much surprized. I left Washington Street about four o'clock this morning and all the asparagus that was in good condition had been sold, but the poor condition asparagus was still in the stores.

There was little to choose between the air-cooled and hydro-cooled cars as far as condition was concerned. The hydro-cooled cars were much tighter in the crates than the

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air-cooled cars. These arrivals that were coming in in bad condition was the asparagus that was shipped during our hottest days--around the 18th, 19th and 20th. The American Fruit Growers had four cars selling, one car from Hinsdale (air-cooled), and no serious defects, but very slack. We had another car from Tracy (hydro-cooled), in good condition. We had two cars from Valdez (hydro-cooled), one of them in very bad condition, and the other car, fairly good. In the cars from Valdez the asparagus hauled from the ranches and put in the cars at Valdez was in much worse condition than the asparagus packed at Valdez. Those cars all arrived with cars well filled with ice. I introduced myself to all the commission merchants on the Street, and they were very nice and let me examine everybody's lots. I am going down on the Street again Sunday night, and if possible, will try to find some answer to the poor condition of the California arrivals. I certainly don't know the answer yet.

Thursday morning I hired an automobile and Thursday and Friday I toured the asparagus-producing sections of the State of New Jersey. I was very fortunate in getting an introduction to a canner in Swedesboro who in turn introduced me to the largest asparagus grower in the State. They were both very nice and spent the whole day with me, taking me through their plants and through the producing sections of Swedesboro which is the largest producer in the State. I will now try to give you some of the answers that I got to the multitude of questions which I asked them.

It is very hard to find the value of the land because there is very little changing hands. However, they put a valuation of bare land of from \$100 to \$200 an acre, and they estimate the cost of raising their asparagus to three years of age at \$150 an acre. Some of the growers spend more than that, and the reason their expense of planting is so high is that they use a lot of fertilizer. The fertilizer that they use is a commercial variety composed of 5 ammonia, 8 phosphate, and 10 potash. They put on as high as 2000 pounds to the acre in the spring, and 500 pounds after they get through cutting; also some of them put on lime at the rate of 1000 pounds to the acre. The cost of this fertilizer is \$33 a ton. These heavy applications of fertilizer however are only applied as the asparagus starts to produce. However, they start from the first planting with small additions of the fertilizer and increase it up to this point as the beds grow older. The type of soil that practically all of this asparagus is raised on is a very sandy loam, very rolling, no level land at all, and no irrigation. They depend upon their total supply of moisture from rains.

The variety of asparagus that is planted universally is Mary Washington, and a seed they call "pedigreed" which they tell me is an improved strain of Mary Washington. I was going to buy some of this seed and also ship you a crate of their asparagus, but find that they have a very serious pest called the asparagus beetle which eats on the spears after they come out of the ground, and the growers are put to big expense in dusting to try to control. They lay thousands of eggs, and I certainly do not want to ship any of them into California. They control this pest but cannot eradicate it, by dusting the fields with a composition called "Rotenone Dust." They also have another pest, the Japanese beetle, which attacks the asparagus after it has grown to fern, and they use the same method of control.

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The average size holdings of the asparagus grower in New Jersey is from 5 acres to 10 acres, with a few growers of 100 acres, and the gentlemen, Mr. Harry Black, who showed me around in Swedesboro has 270 acres, and is the largest grower in the State. He has this 270 acres on six different ranches. The average life of the bed is from 10 years to 15 years, and I saw a 15-year-old bed, and the asparagus I would say was very good.

The cutting is mostly done by Italians with a few negroes. They work very similar to the way we do, in gangs, and their compensation for this work is as follows:

When they are shipping to the market and bunching and packing, the cutters cut the asparagus, and the same crow come into very poorly-constructed packing-sheds, and pack the asparagus. The asparagus is all packed in a bunch pack and no loose at all. Most of them pack two grades, which is really just the large and the small, with no State regulation as to the number of spears or regularity, and as far as I could see each grower used his own judgment on how many spears to put in the bunch. Now for this total job of cutting the asparagus, picking it up and taking it to their packing-shed, sorting and bunching, the cutters receive 35ϕ a crate, which is for 12 bunches of approximately 30 pounds total weight. When they go to the cannery, they cut a 9 inch spear and they get a cent a pound, and there is no differential between a young bed and an old bed--they all get the same. There is one grower who has a special deal with the cannery on 6¹/₂-inch asparagus instead of the 9-inch, and he pays $l^{1}/4 \notin 1/4$ for cutting. Now this man has beds of varying age, from 2 to 15 years, and all the cutters get the same price.

While on this subject of cutting asparagus, I had better explain how the cannery deliveries are made. The grower uses a cart with lug boxes on them to pick up the asparagus whether it is going to the cannery, or to be shipped, and this asparagus is delivered either to the packing house or the cannery in the length that the cutter cuts it in the field The canner cuts the butts off and disposes of them and weighs them back to the grower; in other words, there is no such thing in this district that compares with our wash-house, or washing machines, because the asparagus is not trimmed or washed before it is sent to the cannery.

While on the subject of wages, I night say that common labor in the fields is paid 25ϕ an hour, and furnished with a house to live in, and lights. Men working steadily on the ranches arc paid by the day, at \$2.50 a day.

The cutting season starts generally around May 1. This year, however, they figure they are two weeks early, and they are in full production at the present time. I am sending a clipping from the paper showing how hot it is here, and I saw beds of asparagus yesterday that were cutting six lug boxes to the acre of as fine a looking asparagus as I ever saw. The cutting season generally ends on July 5th. However, they say there is not much asparagus cut between June 30th and July 5th.

The asparagus at the cannery is graded by representatives of the Bureau of Markets of the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Their grading, and I watched it in two of their plants yesterday, is very similar to ours. I an inclosing the New Jersey (copy) grades for canning asparagus. Those graders are paid by the State, and the

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cannery in turn pays the State \$50 a week for each one of the graders that the State puts in his cannery. I found these growers and processors awful gun-shy about talking to me until I told them something about California asparagus, and then they opened up and we really got along very well; in fact, showed me their contracts and just what they were doing. I am also inclosing a New Jersey Department of Agriculture Inspection Certificate, which you will note is from a grower of Swodesboro for his delivery on the 25th of April. Copy as follows:

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE No. 38859 Inspection Certificate

This certificate is issued under provisions of Chapter 83, Laws of 1921, State of New Jersey, and is receivable as prima facie evidence In any Court of New Jersey.

Inspection point	Swodesboro	Grade	Pounds	Per Cent
Date <u>4-25</u>	Hour	NJ #1 Large	3.00	30
Canner Heff		NJ #1 Medium	5.25	52
Grower Locust C	Grove	NJ #1 Small	.25	3
Product inspected	1	Culls		
# of containers(g	rowers count)29	Butts	1.50	<u>15</u>
		Total	10.00	100

I, the undersigned, on the date above specified, made personal inspection of samples believed by me to be representative of the lot herein described, and do hereby certify that the condition at the said time and on the said date as shown by said samples were as stated herein.

0. H. Cullen Inspector

The information below is for the Convenience of the canner and its accuracy is not vouched by the above inspector.

Gross Weight	lbs.N.J. #1 Large @\$
	lbs. NJ #1 Medium@\$
Tare	lbs. NJ #1 Small @\$
	lbs.culls
NetWeight	lbs.butts
	Value of total load \$

Now this inspector inspects about 20% of each lot, grades it as to size cuts the butts off and weighs the butts, and in this way arrives at the results indicated on this form No. 38859. I am also inclosing an asparagus contract which is being used fairly uniformly in this district for their this year's buys. This price that is being paid in this contact as far as I can find out is being paid universally in the State of Now Jersey. There is one contract, however, that is based on a 6½-inch cut with from 4½ inches to 6½ inches green, and the price in this contract is--spears between ¼ inch to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch, 2¢ a pound, and all spears $\frac{3}{8}$ and larger, 8¢ a pound. As far as I can find out, most of these contracts, and then buy on the market in packed crates the balance of their supplies. With the prices that the canner is paying, I can't for the life of me see why they all don't

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sell to the cannery immediately. But in talking to them, they say, you just wait and see. As soon as California gets off the market, we will get from \$5.00 to \$6.00 a crate for our asparagus and will make more money. In the meantime, however, these growers are getting from \$1.25 to \$2.00 a packed crate for their asparagus, and the canners are buying quite a little of it. Now these packed crates are brought in to the town of Swedesboro, and in the center of the town there is an auction and speculators bid on it and take it out to the large centers of population. In the areas that are closer to New York City, these little ranches sell a big proportion of their produce, including asparagus, on roadside stands and also they consign directly to jobbers in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, just as we consign to jobbers in San Francisco and Los Angeles. The canners prices in 1937 were the same as they are this year, and in 1936 they were a cent cheaper than the 1937 and 1938 price.

The growers cut their fields once a day, but they say in peak productions they cut two and three times a day. This seemed like an exaggeration to me, because with the productions they were getting yesterday, it was well into the afternoon before they got once over. They figure it takes one man to cut 4 acres, and that is about the size crews they have on their properties. The canning season starts when the canners can get enough asparagus to run on in the spring and closes July 5th.

The grower delivers his own asparagus to the cannery in his own boxes, and as near as I can find out, this is a universal custom. The canner only pays for No. 1 grass; there is no such thing as a No. 2.

There is no white asparagus canned in the State, and the green pack is put up in the following grades: Jumbo, 8 to 14 spears; Mammoth, 17 to 24 spears; Large, 25 to 35 spears; Medium 36 to 45 spears; Small, 50 to 70 spears. These are all packed in one size cans, which is round and a No. 2 standard. They also pack Picnics in two grades in No. 1 cans, and Center-cuts in gallon and quart cans. I think we call the Center-cuts, Soup Cuts. I bought a case of this asparagus with a variety of these sizes, and they said it would carry to California much better if I let it stay in their plant for a week or ten days, because they feared that the tips would be all broken if it were shipped too soon after canning. Now I shipped this case to myself at Walnut Grove, so if the case arrives before I do, will you please see that my family do not eat it all up before you have a chance to examine it. These canneries look like well-operated, economical plants to me. It is all graded and sorted by girls on conveyor bolts. It is trimmed into one length and the middle cuts made by rotary saws in one operation. From this sorting table, it goes on conveyor belts through the steam and hot water washing and placed in trays which are taken to the canners and the canners pack directly out of this tray. There is not half the handling by labor in those plants that there is in the California plants. This last sentence is probably an exaggeration, but it is done with much less help than the plants I have seen in California. Most of these canning plants run a season from the time asparagus starts to the end of November, canning vegetables and fruit that come in that season. However, most of the canning is asparagus, beans, tomatoes, and pumpkins. There are a few canners who work the year around using pork and beans to run on when fresh vegetables are not available. I expect to have a meeting with a canning broker tomorrow, and find out the list price of these different grades of canned asparagus from different States.

The Jersey growers all have the idea that they have an exceptional flavor in their asparagus. However, this is a point that I told them I would debate with them, and on sampling the two, I could defy anybody blindfolded to tell which came from California and which came from Jersey. Their large stalks of asparagus are sometimes a little woody at the butt, but not bad. The planting in the State of New Jersey is on the increase in tremendous proportion. The universal answer you get from growers is, the only thing we are making money on is asparagus, and believe me, they are making money; and they are putting out asparagus just about as fast as they can get roots and finances to plant it. In going over some canning figures with one canner, it looked to me as if they were very easily making a 4000-pound production and it is obvious with the cutting rate that they pay with this production and selling for 8¢ a pound, there will be plenty of asparagus planted.

The highest labor wage paid in canneries is women, 35ϕ an hour; men 40ϕ . I have not been able to run this down but they say in some of the smaller plants the scale is 20ϕ for women, and 25ϕ for men. All of them are scared to death to talk about wages to anybody that comes from California because they are afraid that I'd tell what wages are paid in California. But I do know that in this large plant at Swedesboro, that 35ϕ and 40ϕ is the wage paid in that plant.

A large percentage of the asparagus growers do their own work, and the landowner and his family harvest the crop. The women, the men and children all do the cutting, packing and what work there has to be done. On the larger ranches the work is done by foremen who hire extra help as it is needed. Small ranches use mostly mules for cultivating and those who have ranches large enough to use a tractor, use Farmalls and small McCormick Deerings, all with rubber tires. The rows of asparagus are planted from 41/2 feet to 5 feet apart--planted 9 or 10 inches below the surface of the ground, and the roots are dropped from 15 to 18 inches apart. Because there is no artificial irrigation there are no weed seeds brought on the land, and a weed in an asparagus field is very scarce. For this reason a minimum of cultivation is necessary. The cultivation method in the year starts in the spring when the tops are completely dry. They take their tractors or their horses using discs just like our ridging disc and disc out first and then throw the dirt back again, and they claim in this process that the tops are completely chewed up and worked into the ground. They say by springtime here the top is very brittle and cracks right to pieces. Then there is nothing more done on the ground until asparagus starts to come. During the season they run the tractor or horse disc down the rows and throw up a small ridge which they cut on, this ridge being just high enough so the crown of the asparagus will not be injured. Outside of the fertilizer that is used, and the expense of dusting for asparagus beetle and the Japanese beetle, they have a much cheaper operation than we do. They never burn their tops, and they have no irrigation expense. The asparagus growers are all making money, and it is obvious they could not help making money at the prices that they are getting.

As I told you before, the asparagus for the market is all bunched and is put in a container very similar to ours with the exception that it has no centerboard. I have purchased some of the different types of lug boxes that are used, and also the shipping containers, and if I can get them fumigated to be sure they do not have any

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asparagus beetle eggs In them, I am going to ship them out to you. None of them use any moss in the crates, and here I will try to tell you the method used in packing. The asparagus is hauled into the packing sheds, and as soon as the crew is finished cutting, they go into the sheds and start packing. In the bottom of the crate they put a piece of waxed paper which has a turn-up all around the edge, and makes a"tray" in the bottom of the crate. These trays are then set on the floor, which is generally dirt, and left there with no water in them until about an hour or two hours before it is shipped at which time they add about two quarts into these waxed containers, and that is the only preservative that the asparagus gets. This Jersey asparagus is very seldom shipped any farther than Philadelphia and New York. There are no cars loaded, and for this reason there is no pre-cooling done. In fact, the only asparagus that is arriving in cars in New York City and the seaboard markets is California and part of the asparagus from Carolina. A large part of the Carolina asparagus is trucked. It costs the Jersey grower about 10¢ a crate to truck to Philadelphia and 15¢ to New York. When we get the reports that there are 6000 crates of asparagus in New York City, we generally take the idea that the Jersey grower has shipped all of his asparagus in here. The indeterminate factor however in knowing how many crates the Jersey grower is producing, is the amount he sends to all the little towns and boroughs around New York and Philadelphia. Before the Jersey asparagus comes on the market, the buyers from these small towns and boroughs outside of these large cities come into New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, and buy their asparagus and take it out to these small towns. Then just as soon as Jersey asparagus comes in, these small truckmen and farmers completely supply these small markets, and it takes the buyer out of New York City with the corresponding result that even tho you have a small number of crates of Jersey asparagus in New York, your buying power is limited with corresponding cheap prices. Now this same thing is true not only in New York but in Illinois and in every other section.

In looking at the temperatures in New York, we generally think that it is fairly moderate in New York City; that there will be no asparagus produced in New Jersey. This is true as far as the fields just outside of the city, but yesterday, for instance, I was in Swedesboro in the southern part of the State where we were warm walking around without a coat, and in New York it was overcast and quite cool.

I have not been able to find out from anybody what their cost of cultivating their asparagus is. The universal answer to this question is, we don't know, because we raise sweet potatoes and beans and tomatoes, and we work them all in together, and we have never kept track of it.

There are tenant-farmers and farms operated by foremen, and landowners who operate their own farms. The tenant-farmers farm on this basis: It's a 50-50 split on the returns from shipping or cannery. On the market asparagus tho grower and tenant, or rather the landlord and tenant divide the cost of packing. The landlord furnishes all of the fertilizer; the tenant plants the asparagus and furnishes all of the equipment. These tenants are financed to start out with, sometimes by the landlord, and in some cases (which arc exceptional, the banks finance them), and you also have production credit financing, which as far as I could find out, is not very popular, and unless a man has an asparagus bed, he is having a tough time getting financed.

One of the questions that was asked me by one of the boys from California was, if possible, make an acreage survey. This is absolutely impossible, because there is asparagus raised from one end of the State of Jersey to the other, mostly in 5- and 10-acre fields. For this reason to trying to get the age of the beds through an agricultural statistician in town, he thinks there are some records in the county and Government files which will get some idea of the age and numbers of acres planted in various sections. This man was recommended to me by the American Fruit Growers, and they say anything he does will be as accurate as can be obtained. He is getting his information from county agents, and the Federal Government, and I have agreed to pay him at the present time, \$25 for assembling this information. I expect to meet him Monday morning and go over with him again. The backyard patches of asparagus are innumerable, especially close to the big markets. When I speak of backyard patches, I mean acreages from 1 to 4 acres.

The Jersey asparagus grower as a rule does not cut his spear full green for the market, and varies from 4½ to 6 inches green, with a few growers who cut from 7 to 8 inches green. The tips of their asparagus I think have more open heads than ours, and they say that is the reason they do not cut greener asparagus.

From people I have talked to, they say the same conditions prevail in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, as prevail in Jersey.

As far as the packing and cutting of the asparagus, the Pennsylvania asparagus is the best of the local crop on this market. However, California asparagus arriving in good condition in any of these markets outsells the local asparagus. If the local growers, however, would use the same amount of care in packing their asparagus, I see no reason why they would not sell at least as well as the California asparagus.

Wm. N. L. Hutchinson.



HISTORIC CROP — Famed for many other things, the Delta also long ago was known as "The Aspargus Capital of the World." In the late 1920's, about 38 percent of the world's asparague was produced in the Isleton area and other nearby asparagus lands. This photo shows one of the canneries in operation in that era. During the season these plants ran day and night shifts at the peak of the pack. The Sun Garden Cannery in Isleton still operates during the season but other such facilities have centralized in other places, although much asparagus still is produced in the Sacramento County Delta.

January 21	General Meeting/Annual Potluck			
February 18	Board Meeting			
March 18	General Meeting			
April 15	Board Meeting			
May 20	General Meeting			
June 17	Board Meeting			
June Newsletter				
July/August	Summer Break			
September 16	General Meeting			
October 21	Board Meeting			
November 19	General Meeting			
December	Board Meeting			
December Newsletter				

RESOURCE CENTER NEWS

Remember to come get your 2014 SRDHS Calendar featuring 12 new Pear Labels from Jim Dahlberg's collection. Available at the resource center every Tuesday morning from 10 am to 1 pm. Or fill out the order form on the last page of this newsletter and send it to us.

Thank you for your donations to our resource center! We are recording each item in our data base – many collections are done, but many still need to be entered. **Would you like to help?** We work almost every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and need people to enter data (it's already handwritten and just needs to be typed.) Please call Bobbie at 777-6792 or Esther at 777-2227 to make sure we will be there and join us.

MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

We would like to thank all those who made memorial contributions to the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society.

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DO YOU WANT TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THIS GREAT PUBLICATION???

Then make sure you pay your 2014 dues – Use this form or one of our handy dues envelopes

Name:	
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 I'm paying Annual dues for the following year(s): 2014 Other \$25.00 a year for Annual Membership 	
□ I've enclosed \$150 to become a Lifetime Member	
- I'd like to register as an Honorery Member - Free to	

I'd like to register as an Honorary Member – Free to members 80 years and older

Please mail this form with a check payable to SRDHS to:

SRDHS Membership P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690

INFORMATION

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society web site is <u>srdhs.org</u>. Please view and enjoy the information. If you wish to email the resource center, the email address is <u>srdhs@riverdeltawireless.com</u>.

NEWSLETTER STAFF

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*The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the Sacramento River Delta Society

NEW "2014" SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR AVAILABLE AT RESOURCE CENTER

This is the cover of the delightful 2014 Calendar representing more Pear Labels from Jim Dahlberg's Collection? Each month shows a different Pear Label and there is one page with explanations of each of the labels shown.



The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society's "Pear Label" Calendar for 2014 may be purchased at the Resource Center and at the Society Meetings. You may also purchase the calendar by filling out the form below and mailing it with your check to:

> SRDHS P O Box 293 Walnut Grove, CA 95690

The price for each calendar is \$15.00 (plus postage if applicable)

If you wish to have the calendar(s) mailed please <u>add</u> the following postage:

1 Calendar \$15 plus \$2 postage

2 - 6 calendars \$15 each plus a total of \$3.00 postage for media mail (7-12 day delivery)

Or

2 - 6 calendars \$15 each plus a total of \$5.25 for priority mail (2 to 3 day delivery)

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society Calendar Order Form					
Please send calendars @ \$15 per calendar					
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