

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 16, No. 1

JUNE 1996

SOCIETY NOTES

The annual Potluck Dinner was a great way to start the year. Close to 100 guests watched slides of "Then and Now" presented by Robert James. A selection of historical sites were re-photographed in 1995. Starting on the Rio Vista waterfront, we worked our way up the Sacramento River to Clarksburg. The slides presented an interesting contrast. Many of the new slides had more trees, which was a surprise since we were all aware of the removal of trees from the levees. Some of the scenes were unchanged. Many of the buildings had been remodeled. Some of the buildings were still used for their original purpose. It was a fascinating show and we are much indebted to Robert as photographer and presenter, along with Jim Dahlberg. Thanks gentlemen! Kudos another year to the stalwart dinner committee headed by Joanne Wiseman with the help of Gene, Leonard and Lillian Souza, Elsie and Joe Tapella, Warren and Kathy Merwin, Becky Wheeler, Don Quesenberry and Mary Fulster. Our thanks to all of them and the wonderful cooks who created dinner.

The Historical Society Board has lost some long-time, faithful, and productive members. Jerry Waterworth, James Dahlberg and Becky Wheeler have retired from their directorships. They performed many years of generous service, and we look forward to their continued support. Many thanks and a big HURRAH to them! They are replaced by new faces that bring much enthusiasm with them—C.J. Jensen, Helen Towne, June Werhan, Frances Bates & Maryn Whitney.

For the past several years the Bates Elementary School has celebrated "AG. CONNECTION WEEK." During this week students are made aware of the activities around them in agriculture and their local community. Judy Culbertson has ably chaired this event with help from various community groups. This year one of the themes was local history, and Cathy Hemly, President of SRDHS joined in planning and execution of activities. There were slide shows, walking tours, bus tours, field trips and speakers. The 1996 committee included, in addition to Judy and Cathy, Sandra Ogilvie, Debbie Chan, Sharon Brown, Darcy Seppi, Tami Enos and Becky Elliot. There were also 40 community volunteers, some of whom are: Betty Seppi, Leonard Souza, Jane Alchorn, Nels Eddy,

Debra Pope, Jane Wheeler, Terry Alchorn, Cathy Baranek, Jan Quesenberry, Jim Babcock, John Callis, Clarice Jonson, Gene and Joanne Wiseman, Tom Herzog, Tim Wilson, Fred Wheeler, Lincoln Chan, John Wheeler, Pan Van Loben Sels. The Bates teachers were enthusiastically supportive and everyone enjoyed themselves. Yes Virginia, there were stables at Bates School for the horses that had ridden to school.

The Walnut Grove School has been devoting some time to studying local history and among the many activities was a presentation of the slide collection of Robert James which relates the history of the Delta with graphic precision. It is gratifying to know that the staff and students of our local schools are interested in their heritage.

The officers for this (1995-96) year are: President Cathy Hemly, Vice President Terry Alchorn, Recording Secretary Fran Bates, Corresponding Secretary Carol Watson and Treasurer Joanne Carr. Board meetings are held the third Monday of February, April, June, August, October and December as needed.

The March meeting was another hilarious hit from the historic houses lecture series. Eileen McDowell and Judy Smith bared all the family skeletons and house frameworks. Strangely enough there was a marriage that united the two houses and a competition that carried across Grand Island. (See article p.3)

Our President went on a one-woman membership crusade. If you know our president, you know she is generally successful. We want to thank all the new members, new Life members and those of you who have renewed. There is still time if you haven't gotten around to it. We really appreciate your support. By the way, the picture on the membership brochure was of the Courtland Ferry taken by Al Hemly.

The Historical Society will be participating in the Historic Exhibit at the Pear Fair July 28. Be prepared to help set up and maintain the display. Call Tom Herzog to VOLUNTEER before you are drafted.



PEAR FAIR

JULY 28, 1996 • COURTLAND, CA

NOVEMBER MEETING

Pete Hunn introduced us to California in the 1830's and 40's. The Territory belonged to Mexico and was inhabited by Indians and "Californios." There were few settlers in the Central Valley which was a very large swamp. Captain John Sutter received a Mexican Land Grant and established Sutters Fort near Sacramento and a farm to the north known as the Hock farm. Pete was dressed as a California gentleman of the 1850's, in a coat, red vest, black neckerchief and black hat.

Pete explained that Ezekiel Merritt was a mountain man, an illiterate, stuttering backwoodsman who could not read or write and therefore wrote no journal. He entered California between 1836 and 1840, probably in 1837. He was described by John Bidwell as "an old mountaineer trapper who lived with a squaw." Merritt drank, killed Indians and notched his tomahawk. John Charles Fremont characterized Ezekiel as a stern man over 40 with a savage nature who loved risk. Fremont named him a field lieutenant in the Bear Flag Revolt. There is no proof of Merritt having lived on the Island named for him though he was rumored to have lived with his Maidu wife and children on Sutter Island.

Pete then introduced Gordon Frey, a "mountain man." He was dressed in buckskins. Mr. Frey explained that these were the fur trappers who sent beaver hair to Europe to make felt hats. The Indians did the trading until the 1820's. Then the frontiersmen took over when the Indians died of the diseases introduced by the settlers. The Mountaineers were company men, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, the American Fur Company and locally the Hudson's Bay Company. The trappers used a vile smelling bait "castorium" on their traps in the water. It appealed to the beaver's mating instinct and when he was caught the heavy trap pulled him underwater and he drowned. The men received \$12 a pelt at a time when factory workers earned 50 cents a day. The hair was shaved from the pelt, boiled and matted to form felt.

In 1838, Beau Brummel ended the fur trade with the introduction of the silk hat. The mountain men were out of work so they turned to otters which they sent to China for Mandarin collars. (The Russians were at Fort Ross to hunt sea otters.) They dressed to impress the Indians, i.e., "I am an American frontiersman rough and tumble. Don't mess with me!" They were armed with rifles, Northwest fusil smooth bore muzzle load that were accurate for 50 to 100 yards or American Rifles that were flintlocks, grooved, and would carry 400 yards. They also had Bowie knives and Colt revolvers. The pistols were to shoot their mustang horses if they ran away with them! They wore spurs, beaver hats and buckskin coats and trousers to protect themselves from the heat and other elements such as insects, brush and rain. They also carried powder horns.

Pete Hunn picked up the story of Ezekiel Merritt continuing with his entry in California about 1837 at the age of 30. In 1841, John Sutter employed Merritt to go to Fort Ross, which the Russians abandoned because of the bad climate. Merritt was to bring back the cattle to Sutter's Fort.

In 1844, Merritt was a squatter south of Chico. He became involved with Sutter's Rifle men who went to Southern California in the losing cause of Governor Micheltorena. After capture, Sutter was released and returned to his fort in Sacramento. In 1845 there was a Mexican mandate against settlers--no foreigners to acquire land in California. In 1846 Fremont spent a few days with Merritt near the Sutter Buttes. Later in 1846 Sutter's diary notes the arrival of horses under Lieutenant Arce at his fort. The horses, to be used against settlers, had come from Vallejo by way of Santa Clara to avoid the Delta. Merritt led the foray to capture the horses which were held at Murphy's rancho on the Cosumnes River near Elk Grove. Then on to capture Sonoma. Merritt and William Ide, the rebel leader, passed through Knights Landing via Cache Creek. They were joined by William Todd, a relative of Abraham Lincoln.

On Sunday, June 14, 1846, a band of robbers surrounded Governor Mariano Vallejo's house in Sonoma. There were only two soldiers on duty and the rough uncouth party captured Vallejo. Reportedly a good time was had by all (Vallejo's wine cellar). Negotiations were completed and Vallejo was taken to Sutter's Fort. The documents of surrender contain Merritt's signature even though he couldn't write. 24 Bears stayed at Sonoma and 9 took persons to Sutters Fort where they arrived on the 16th of June.

The Bear Flag of white cloth and a red petticoat was raised in place of the Mexican Flag. To make the Bear Flat they needed a bear which was painted by William Todd. It looked more like a pig than a bear. The words "California Republic" and a red border (blood?) were added. In 1911 the Bear Flag was adopted as the California State Flag.

John Charles Fremont had nothing to do with anything sent to Sutter's Fort. Merritt later fought with the Fremont Battalion in Southern California. He died in 1848.

This is a great story of early California and the mountain men frontiersmen, rough but honorable, who participated in the State's development. The talk was illustrated by slides of Bear Valley, Sutter Buttes, Fort Ross, Sonoma, etc. -- areas that were visited by Ezekiel Merritt.

MAY MEETING

Frank Schmiedel opened the meeting with a brief history of the Boathouse where the meeting was held. This year meetings seem to be featuring the California Transportation Company. George Augustus Smith's house and the "Boathouse" were both projects of the transportation giant. The building was put up between 1905 and 1912 as a packing shed. The Southern Pacific Land Company turned the facility into a railroad and steamship center. River traffic used red lights at night and red flags during the day to signal a stop. There were three railroad tracks and 80 to 100 cars. Space was rented to different packing companies and they loaded cars during the day and switch engines moved the produce at night. Crops shipped included every and anything grown in the Delta: peaches, plums, cherries, celery, asparagus, pears, etc.

(See MAY MEETING, p.5)

THESE OLD HOUSES III

Henry William Meyers came to Grand Island from Germany by way of Ohio. He arrived in 1857 and reportedly stayed with his Uncle Fredrick. He later built the house on Steamboat Slough, about three miles down the Slough from the Sacramento River. It is a lovely Victorian style home with a porch finished with arches. His son Edward Henry Meyers later occupied the house. Edward's brother Louis Meyers built the italianate "Mansion" a mile further down the slough. (The Mansion was reportedly built in competition with a Smith "Castle" on the front of the Island, although the families were friends.)

In 1932, the Meyers' victorian home was sold to James Russel and in 1948 it was sold to Charles and Elaine McDowell. Their granddaughter, Eileen McDowell, recounted the story of the farm home.

The house was probably built in 1876 and remodeled in the 1890's. Two sides still have the plaster garlands or "Wedding Cake" ornamentation also known as "gingerbread." The columns of the arches on the front porch are complete. There were shutters on the seven foot eight inch front windows and there are still double front doors in the main (front) entrance. The caretaker's house and aviary are no longer on the grounds and the tennis court is also long gone. A swimming pool was added to aid in a daughter's recovery from polio.

The first floor contains a sun porch, two rooms which were probably front and back parlors, a dining room, a small den, kitchen, pantry, a laundry room and a bathroom. The sun porch has lattice work and ornate tiles in the corners of a cement floor (it also contained a sailfish and deer heads at one time). Between 1910 and 1925 wood paneling and wall sconces were added. The dining room has a beautiful chandelier, brick fireplace, wall sconces and ceiling rosettes, the buzzer in the floor to summon the maid, wall paper (over some redwood and some ordinary tongue and groove wood) and all hardwood floors. The front parlor or living room is 30 x 14 and 12 feet tall. It contains two brick fireplaces, wall sconces, inlaid hardwood floors and a brass chandelier.

There is a beautiful stairway to approach the second story. It had many coats of paint which have been removed to expose the original wood. (Rumor mentions the current master of the house sliding down the banister as a young boy.) The second floor has four bedrooms, a master bedroom and three baths. The attic had two bedrooms which are now used as a storage area.

In the late 1950's the McDowell's began interior remodeling which continues today. They started with the most important room: the Kitchen. It was transformed from a small dark area to a spacious and sunny room with modern equipment. Continued remodeling added new windows to cool the house and bedrooms and bathrooms were remodeled. It is believed that there are some original plumbing fixtures in parts of the house today. The ground floor basement which contains a stockroom, office, laundry and canning kitchen was built to take water. The house grew from the original eight rooms in 1876 to twenty-seven rooms today.

The second half of the meeting was narrated by the "fourth" Mrs. Smith (Judy). George Augustus Smith was born in Bavaria in 1831 and moved to Joliet Ill and thence to the Sacramento River Delta. By age 24, George had purchased 56 acres on Grand Island fronting Steamboat Slough, and built his own wharf. In 1859 he returned to Joliet (walking across the Isthmus of Panama) to marry Margaret Hale and brought her back to the Grand Island property. In 1881, he purchased 160 acres and a house 1/2 mile south of Courtland. This was to become the Diamond "S" Ranch. Meanwhile, George A. became a director of the California Fruit Exchange, the California Transportation Company, the Farmers and Merchants Bank, and acquired 600 more acres on Grand Island which became Hiawatha Farms.

George A. and Margaret had four children, William J., George S. (who died in his boat in the middle of the river at 18), Ed (who had polio as a child) and Ida. William J. met Wilhelmina Marie Gutenberg(er) ("Minnie") during house and garden renovations in the late 1880's. They were married in 1890 and George William Gutenberg Smith and his sister Cathryn were born. Cathryn married Morris Meyer whose father owned the current McDowell house. George W.G. married Elizabeth Archer and lived for a while in San Francisco. They had two sons George W.G. Jr. and Dudley. George Jr. was killed in a marine plane crash and Dudley married Judy and eventually, after many weekends on the ranch, they moved to the Diamond "S" Ranch in 1989 with three children. Thus, Judy, the fourth "Mrs. Smith."

In 1881, when George A. traded for, bought or otherwise acquired the Diamond "S" Ranch, the house which was built in 1876 was one-half the size that it is today. The south half was added in the early 1880's including the ornate ironwork fences created by the Gutenberg Ironworks of Sacramento, it was at this time William J. and Minnie met and married.

The house is redwood and much of it has the original siding. The original wood columns support the porch roof. The "acanthus" leaves decorating the tops of the columns are metal. The exterior of the house has aluminum siding on the south and asbestos shingles on the east. This protective work was done in the 1970's. Some of the balustrades were removed and if anyone knows of them they would be gratefully received again. The tower is entered by a small opening and gets to a gorgeous view of the river. It is from here that arriving boats were observed so that the fruit could be put out to go to market. The big red barn unfortunately burned down in the 1960's. In the early years, a rowboat was used to get from the house to the barn during floods!

Both halves of the Diamond "S" house were well appointed for their time. The old part has porcelain door handles; the new part has ornate brass handles. The old part has wider floor boards and 2 over 2 windows; the new part 1 over 1 windows. Trim in both parts of the house are closely matched. Very little has been changed. The "new" (1880's) part downstairs contains the living room and dining room

(See THESE OLD HOUSES III, p.6)

BRANNAN ISLAND

Brannan Island is located north of and across Three Mile Slough from Sherman Island. It lies along the Sacramento River and is bounded on the south by Seven Mile Slough and on the east by Jackson Slough.

The island was named after colorful Sam Brannan, who was California's first entrepreneur. He had a store next to Sutter's Fort and after he had stocked it with all the available mining supplies, he announced the discovery of gold to the world at large. At various times Brannan owned a quarter of Sacramento and a fifth of San Francisco. He is also remembered for his toast to the Saratoga of California as the "Calistoga of Sarafornia" thus naming the resort of Calistoga in the Napa Valley. Wealthy as he was, he became the first victim of California's community property laws causing him to die in poverty.

The island was settled in 1852. Reclamation started with the formation of Reclamation District #31 on January 9, 1862. A. G. Winn was head engineer and there were 6931.57 acres included in Brannan Island. Eventually, the island included 7680 acres. The Tide Lands Reclamation Co. was a major landowner on the island. Some of the earliest levees were built by hand using Chinese laborers. However, the company had better luck with machine built levees, although not always were they so lucky with the machines themselves. In 1872, the company contracted with one Stuart Boschke of San Francisco who built a dredge for levee building on Brannan. Towed to the district in September 1872 to begin work, it was out of service by April 1873. It is speculated that either repairs were extraordinarily time-consuming or the machinery could not cope with the tule mat and fibrous peat soil. Notwithstanding the setback, in 1873 the company enclosed 8200 acres of the island. The "Sampson and Goliath" dredges owned by Joel Parker Whitney, "an entrepreneur with various interests in the west," did contract work on Brannan sometime before 1878-1880. "Goliath" built retaining structures for the sand pump on southern Brannan. Each of these two dredges were assembled in Stockton in 1875 from 170 tons of machinery manufactured in Troy, N.Y. Among the larger tracts reclaimed, Brannan, like Sherman has never owned a clamshell dredge. Instead the island contracted out the work. In 1880 it was reported that the cost of levee maintenance for farmers was \$12-\$15 and that the levees were in good condition at that time. There was a wharf on the island and the principle crops were grain and vegetables. Ranches were reported to vary from 100 to 1000 acres with the average holding at 200 acres.

Some of the history of Brannan Island is told in the following article from the 1926-27 special edition of the Byron Times. The land had been farmed by large corporations and the newspaper tells of the first public offering of land on Brannan Island. "The California Subdivision Company headed by J.H. L'Honniedieu, a reclamation and civil engineer,

and E. Sebbelov, a former agriculturist for the Natomas Company, offers land located on the south half of Brannan Island. The land is bounded on the south by Seven Mile Slough, on the east by Jackson Slough, on the west by the Sacramento River and on the north by other lands. 3400 acres is offered on 20-and 40-acre tracts. About 500 acres on the Sacramento River frontage is ideal for pears. All of this tract is suitable for growing of celery, onions, potatoes, beans, asparagus, sugar beets and other vegetable products like tomatoes, etc. There is now some 700 acres in asparagus and it is contemplated to put in 1000 more acres."

In 1913, a large slide of the island was removed when the Sacramento River was widened, deepened and straightened as a flood control measure. Nevertheless, the endless battle with subsidence, tides and waves caused levee erosion. This was never more apparent than when in June 1972 an Andrus Island levee collapsed and Brannan Island flooded via the land bridge which connects the two islands.

In 1921, a swampy area of 335 acres located on the southern tip of Brannan Island was acquired by the Army Corps of Engineers for use as a "spoils area." From 1926 to 1929, the area was pumped full of sand and silt as the Sacramento River was dredged and widened. Is this where Wood Island went? The dredging filled the area to twenty to forty feet above water level. The surrounding peat land is at least 10 feet below river level. During the next twenty years sand was sold to contractors, garbage was dumped, and fishermen and campers squatted on the land. In 1950, the Rio Vista Chamber of Commerce managed to get the Army Corps of Engineers to release the land and the State Reclamation Board transferred it to the State Division of Beaches and Parks--now the Department of Parks and Recreation (1964). Travis Air Force Base was allowed to establish a boat harbor in Seven Mile Slough for Air Force personnel. Trees, shrubs and grass grew on the fill and campers used the tract. In 1954, Brannan Island State Recreation Area began to develop. Now (1996) there are facilities for camping, fishing, boating and wind surfing. Bird watching, picnicking, family canoe trips and campfires are more of the recreational activities offered on the former "spoils area."

In the early years, there was ferry service to the island from Rio Vista provided by the "Triangle Ferry" which operated between Rio Vista, the foot of Grand Island and the point of Brannan Island. Later, the State Hiway followed the west levee and the island, in 1917, was connected with Rio Vista by bridge. Brannan also benefitted from the Isleton Bridge built in 1923, which connected Grand and Andrus Islands. In 1937, the old Grand Island Bridge was recycled and floated down river to Three Mile Slough where it linked Brannan and Sherman Islands. The Mokelumne River Bridge, opened in 1942, carries Highway 12 across the Mokelumne River linking Brannan to Bouldin Island.

MAY MEETING (continued)

In 1955, the building was retired by Southern Pacific--this building and Stillwater, in Hood, are the only riverside packing sheds left in this area. In 1968 Mr. Schmiedel bought the plant to use as a marina. He has the original drawings used to build the facility and the George Locke deed. The building, along with the town of Locke, are listed in the Historic Places Register. Since no tax exceptions have been taken the building may be modified.

Stan Garvey, author of the recently published and very readable book "King and Queen of the River," was the featured speaker. He told of his infatuation with Mark Twain and the mystique of the river which led to his love of the saga of the King and Queen. River steam boating began during the Gold Rush and continued until 1940. There were river boats from Red Bluff to near Fresno; 280 boats over a 90-year period.

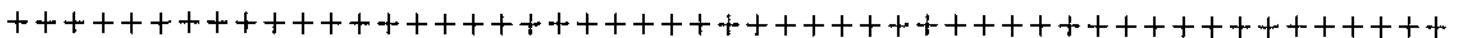
The hulls for twin ships, the Delta King and the Delta Queen, were created in Scotland at the shipyard of Wm. Denny & Brothers in Dumbarton. The California Transportation Company ordered the steel hull plates and machinery which were then shipped to Stockton, California. The ships were built (assembled) between 1924 and 1927. They carried both passengers and freight on overnight trips between Sacramento and San Francisco. One ship started in each port and they passed somewhere around Rio Vista. Navigating at night was not easy and in dense fog they bounced their whistle sounds off of sounding boards and levee banks to stay on course. From 1920 to 1940 one could dine, dance and sleep, awaking in the other port the next morning. They went 10-11 miles per hour. Fighting the tides and wind they made the 100-mile trip in 11 hours. At first it cost \$1.80 one way or \$3.00 round trip. During the depression rates were reduced to \$1.50 and \$1.95. Staterooms cost more. The steamers were luxuriously appointed and decorated with beautiful wood and glass works. They were pushed by paddle wheels in the stern and had a single stack. Pete Budnik, who rode the Queen on her last voyage in 1940, remembers, as a boy, trying to toss sugar beets from the elevated Walnut Grove bridge into the King and Queen's stack--never successful but stressful for the deck.

In 1940, the Navy took over the ships and they ferried people from San Francisco, Treasure Island, Alameda and Camp Stoneman near Pittsburgh. At one time there were reportedly 3200 men on one ship, a real overload. Some servicemen said the steamboat ride was the most terrifying experience of their tour of duty.

In 1946 the King and Queen were part of the mothball fleet in Suisun Bay. In 1947, they were auctioned. The Delta Queen was purchased for \$46,250 by the Green Line which had operated steamships on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers since 1890. She was boarded up and towed, 5000 miles, through the Panama Canal to New Orleans and then, under her own power, up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers past Cincinnati to Pittsburgh, Pa., where she was refurbished. She was taken back to Cincinnati where she was redecorated and put into service 21 years after her maiden voyage. The Queen's drive shaft broke and somehow mechanical parts of the King found their way to Ohio as spares for the sister ship. The Delta Queen steams the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers to this day (1996).

In October 1947 the Delta King was auctioned to the Southeast Asia Importing and Exporting Co. of Siam for \$60,168. The Delta King remained in mothballs through many auctions and finally in 1952 (after removal of the machinery and paddle wheel) the ship was towed to Alaska and used as a dormitory. The King was landlocked (on dry land) for seven years. In 1959 the Steamer was in Stockton and things got really sad. Liens and auctions, threats to junk, scrap, etc. On July 19, 1969, the Delta King was pirated to Sacramento. This poor hulk was taken to Collinsville where it sank twice, then to Rio Vista in 1978. Finally in 1982 in Richmond the King really sank. There were two of the five decks out of water at the stern. This was almost the end of the boat however the steel hull, the spirit of the ship saved her. The Delta King was refloated covered with barnacles and mussels and east bay mud. In 1984 the Coyne family bought a majority share of the King. After being cleaned up and made sound, the boat was moved from Pacific Dry-dock in Oakland to a Rice Grower's Dock in Yolo County across the Sacramento River from Sacramento. The King was moved up river to its old River Lines dock near Sacramento and restoration was started. In 1987 the Delta King arrived at its present mooring site in Old Sacramento. In 1989 she was opened as a luxurious hotel and restaurant. The King is still operating in this capacity although there are stories about a diesel engine and touring on the Stockton, Sacramento, Napa route.

(Many of our members remember as small children being carried aboard these ships asleep and then waking up in San Francisco. If you have enjoyed this outline of the saga of the King and Queen, the details are delightfully told in Stan Garvey's book "King and Queen of the River." Beware! If you start reading this book, you cannot put it down.)



ASK A FRIEND TO JOIN

Do you know someone, family or friend, who would enjoy hearing about and supporting the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society? It's fun to be part of preserving and sharing our local history.

- Regular \$10.00
- Family/Business \$25.00
- Patron \$50.00
- Life \$150.00

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The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (SRDHS) NEWSLETTER twice a year (December and June).

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THESE OLD HOUSES III *(continued)*

and the upstairs contains a large bedroom, a small bedroom and a bath. One small room on the second floor has become a bath. It is the only room that does not have the original lath and plaster. There is even some original mauve and turquoise paint with touches of gold. There are several chimneys but only one mantel--a marble one--the chimneys were for stoves. There were never gas lighting fixtures. Kerosene lamps were used until the 1920's when electricity was brought into the area. The original electric fixtures remain in place.

George A. died in 1910 and Margaret died in 1916 leaving the house to their son Ed. At this time, Wm. J. and Minnie lived in a house on Hiawatha Farms on Grand Island. In 1916 they extensively remodeled to build a castellated house: "The Castle." This was a result of the competition between Mrs. Wm. J. Smith and Mrs. Louis Meyers. The Wm. J. Smith family had a rather nice life style during the roaring twenties. One of the high points during these years was the marriage of Cathryn Smith to Morris Meyers. Traffic was backed up for miles on Grand Island. The State Police tried to guide the traffic and Anson Weeks played for the ballroom crowd. An earlier event was the grand opening of the Grand Island Bridge which crossed the Sacramento River from Grand Island to the Pierson District. After the ribbon cutting, a surrey carrying Minnie Smith, Mrs. H.D. Kercheval, and other dignitaries' wives and daughters led the parade across the bridge. (More about the bridge next issue)

William J. did well with the family fortunes but as a result of the agricultural depression following World War I, fireblight in pear orchards and just bad timing, in 1929 the W.J. Smith estate was auctioned. The auction catalogue indicates that there were over a million dollars worth of furnishings, i.e. oil paintings, oriental carpets, marble pieces, ivory carvings, etc. William J. Smith died in 1929 and the Diamond "S" is all that is left of George A's vast holdings.

The house, like the family, fell on bad times. "Uncle Ed" is reported to have sold the furniture to Breuners Department Store during the 1920's. His chairs and dogs caused some trouble for the flooring. At one time school teachers boarded the house. By the 1930's Cathryn had remarried and she, her husband and two daughters, and Minnie Gutenberg Smith were living on the Diamond "S". Ed lived in a hotel in Sacramento. George W.G. and his wife and two sons arrived for a brief stay on December 7, 1941, and stayed for the rest of their lives. George

was able to get title to the property by taking a huge mortgage. It had belonged part to Ed, George, Cathryn and the Pacific Fruit Exchange. Minnie died in 1955 and Ed died in 1957. Cathryn moved to Sacramento and the George W.G. family continued to live on the Diamond "S".

(These stories made a very entertaining and informative March meeting enjoyed by a capacity crowd.)

AT LAST, a reproduction of our publication "Historic Houses of the Sacramento River Delta" is available. The book will be available by mail from the Society or call Cathy Hemly (775-1238) for local arrangements. The price is \$10 including tax, plus \$2.50 for mailing.

BRANNAN ISLAND *(continued)*

The Brannan Island School District was formed in 1870 with 11 students and Mr. John Shafer, of Rio Vista, as Clerk of the Board. The school house was located in a curve of the Sacramento River at the upper end of the Island. In 1877, John Schafer was still Clerk but had an Isleton address. Probably a change of address only due to the opening of a post office in Isleton. Shafer remained clerk until 1882 when he was followed by P. Kuhn, Jos. L. Hodapp and James Derosier. In 1910 Rosa Zeile taught. She was followed by Mercedes McGinnis, when there were 17 pupils enrolled. The student population ranged from 10 to 23 until the Brannan District became part of the Isleton Union District in 1921. The school was probably a true community center since the rest of the island was devoted to agriculture.

In the 1870's-80's Hart Fellows Smith owned a large acreage near Isleton and built a palatial house. Another fine old home was owned by John Shafer. An early Chinese community flourished on the banks of Jackson Slough near Isleton.

(Ed. Note: We are indebted to the Delta Natural History Association publication "Brannan Island Breeze" for information about the Brannan Island Recreation Area and Sam Brannan and "The Tulebreakers" by John Thompson and Edward Dutra.)

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Editor Kathleen Hutchinson
Co-Editor Carol Watson
Typist Judy Johnson

SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 293
WALNUT GROVE, CA 95690

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