# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

**NEWSLETTER** 

**VOLUME 28, NUMBER 1** 

**JUNE 2008** 

# President's Notes

I hope you are all enjoying a great summer, and I want to begin with an apology for our newsletter being late!! All my fault, due to work obligations and a graduation, I'm behind! On to getting on track and again, wanting to begin with recognizing our Newsletter Chairperson Esther Koopman and writer Kathy Hutchinson! Kudos for handling our biannual mailing!

We started the year with our annual potluck on January 16 with a great turnout of more than 150 attendees. Our featured speaker was Dick Marshall who did a fabulous job of describing Clarksburg's Old Sugar Mill and the history of sugar beet production. Our next meeting was on March 18 when Carol Jensen shared highlights of her book "Images of America - The California Delta" which was a book started by the late Hal Schell. Her stories were enjoyable and very informative. Bill Wells also spoke personally about the life of Hal Schell, a local Delta legend.

April and May's highlight was an exhibit at the Sutter Club in downtown Sacramento featuring the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society and our rich agricultural history. Debbie Chan, Tom Herzog, my husband Jim and I designed and set up a display that was shared with folks for 2 months. We then were the featured topic at a luncheon on May 14th. It was a great venue for accomplishing yet another one of our Society's goals to educate and expose others to our rich delta history.

Other activities have been continuing throughout the past 6 months - We've progressed with oral histories and work on the Locke Boarding House project. We are also working to make our membership data base current. We are proud to have 205 members at last count, and we need to make sure memberships are

current. One more accomplishment is all the work that is done in the Resource Center each week. Big thanks to Bobbi Collier and Esther Koopman for their diligence and dedication to the preservation of historical treasures!

Mark your calendars to join us for the next General Meeting, September 16<sup>th</sup> at the Jean Harvie Community Center! Enjoy a great summer!

Judy

# **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS FOR 2008**

Jack Carmany from Sacramento
Jerry & Greta Dusa from Walnut Grove
Wm. P. Rick Dwyer from Folsom
Carl W. Jones Jr. from Roseville
Derrell & Lorna Kelsa from Clarksburg
Jason Peltier from Walnut Grove
Kevin Thompson & Kate Bould from Walnut Grove



36th Annual - July 27, 2008

# WATER TRANSPORTATION

Part One

Schooners, Packets and Freighters
By Kathleen Graham Hutchinson

Between 1850 and 1930 "the blast of the steam whistle and the splash of a paddlewheel" was common on the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. The CTC's "Fort Sutter" would sound a long deep throated whistle approaching Courtland at 9 p.m. which indicated a landing; two whistles indicated an imminent departure. It would arrive in San Francisco at 9 a.m., leaving at 6 p.m. and arriving at Courtland at 3 a.m. daily.

In modern time, the earliest vessels to ply the river and sloughs were sailboats. This was an arduous task. Not only was the river very winding in places but the riparian vegetation, notably tall tress, cut the wind from the water's surface. It took ten days to five weeks to reach Stockton or Sacramento. "The 'delta breeze' vigorously ruffled the tops of the trees, but [rarely] reached the surface." Becalmed sailing boats resorted to warping upstream long stretches. Using a rowboat to warp, a deck hand took a towline ahead of a craft, fixing the line to a stout tree. The line was slowly pulled in until the boat was abreast of the tree; one reason a considerable number of sailing vessels did not return to the San Francisco Bay and became converted hulks in Sacramento and Stockton.

Steamboats were subsequently introduced. In 1848 the first side-wheel steamboats "Senator" and "New World" began service followed closely by the "McKim".

Rates on the	McKim::
Cabin passage to	\$30.00
Deck passage to	20.00
Berth passage to	5.00
Meals (cabin SF to Benicia	1.50 15.00
Heavy freight per	2.50
Measurement of	1.00
McGowan, Sac to S	SF Shipping, p. 47

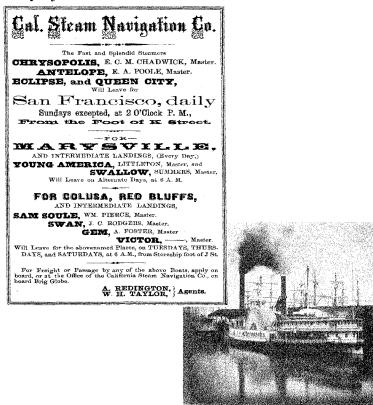
Quickly built and modified small "Mosquito Boats" swarmed the waterways (rowboats converted to steam power – oil luggers with boiler – and extended whaleboats.) These early steamboats used wood to fuel the boilers to satisfy the need. Almost all the riparian forest was harvested. By 1900, most used fuel oil, the use of which was delayed a number of years after the oil-fired "Julia" exploded in Vallejo in 1888.

Generally, the larger steamboats tended to have a 9½ foot draft and usually a single stack aft the pilot house and sternwheel. The early boats carried both passengers and freight and some were designated U.S. Mail packets. The swift "Antelope" was called the "Wells Fargo Gold Boat." It carried California gold bullion and Nevada silver bullion from Sacramento to San Francisco. Among the specialized

areas aboard the larger ships was the space labeled the "China hold" for passengers from the "Celestial Kingdom" (China). These shallow draft vessels were the Delta's lifeline to the outside world, linking socially and economically San Francisco, Sacramento and Stockton.

Between 1852 and 1853 410 ships maneuvered the river between San Francisco and Sacramento carrying 165,000 tons of freight and some 1500 passengers. Some of each continued upstream to Colusa or the head of navigation Red Bluff. By 1910 the lower Sacramento River between Rio Vista and its confluence with the San Joaquin River was straightened and dredged removing a bottleneck of bends placing the channel to the east against the Montezuma Hills. The old channel was left to meander along the east side of Decker Island.

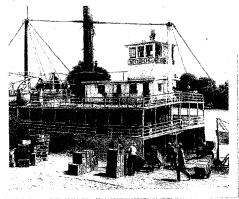
The most glamorous early side wheel double stack steamboat was the famed "Chrysopolis" which steamed overnight from San Francisco to Sacramento between 1860 and 1875. She set a record on the run never to be broken. She was noted for her fancy cabins, fine art displayed (Thomas Hill, Charles Nahl, William Keith, Albert Bierstadt) and service. During the era she received many challenges to race, notably from Captain Kidd's "Nevada" and from the "Washoe". Her running mate was the ill-fated "Yosemite" whose starboard boiler burst October 12, 1865 while at Rio Vista which resulted in heavy injuries and loss of life.



"Chrysopolis"

Steamboat races were a popular gambling sport in the early years - terrible boiler explosions resulted from overheating or from taking a bend too sharply thereby exposing the boiler ribs. Tar pitch and later oil used when racing are highly flammable. Often chunks of potato were used to plug weak spots, acting like glue. The boats tailgated thereby losing a stern or were forced up a mud bank, thereby losing a bow. Steamboat Slough was a drag strip because it contained fewer snags and shoals and was a shorter distance point to point, notwithstanding bends. The last steamboat races were in 1938 and 39 between the retired mail packet "E.R. Chase" and the "Delta Queen" in '38 and between the "Delta King" and the "Delta Oueen" in '39. The "Delta Queen" lost both. The book "Historical Sites and Shipwrecks Along the Sacramento River between Sacramento City and Sherman Island" both catalogs sites and discusses the river wrecks extensively. A surprising number are near Rio Vista, Cache Slough, north of Steamboat Slough, foot of Grand Island, etc. although the wrecks are found everywhere.

The California Steam Navigation Company dominated river commerce beginning in 1854. In 1880 the "Modoc" and "Apache" were put into river service. In 1871 it was bought by Southern Pacific interests. Until 1907 the former CSN boats were the only ships offering regular overnight service between San Francisco and Sacramento.



Considering the daily routine of steamers docking at river landing sites, it is surprising that few photographers captured the event. Here, in a classic image of Sacramento River life of the early 1900s, the Southern Pacific's Modoc receives a shipment of cantaloupes with Chinese farm workers performing the labor.

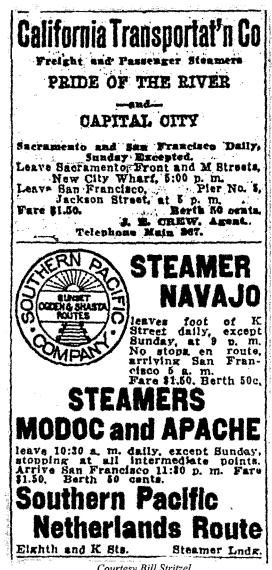
SACRAMENTO ARCHIVES & MUSEUM COLLECTION CENTER Eugene Hepting Collection 1985/24/3868

S.P. Bulletin August 1919 Fruit Boats in Service.

Steamers Apache, Cherokee and Fruto have been placed in service to handle fruit shipments from points on the Sacramento River to Sacramento, for shipment by rail to Eastern markets. This is the first season the Apache has served as a fruit boat, after having operated for 38 years in the passenger and freight service be Francisco and Sacramento. between

When the repairs to the steamer Navajo were completed she relieved the Apach e Francisco-Sacramento route, made the Apache available for the fruit service. Owing to the large carrying capacity of the Apache she has proved a valuable addition to the "fruit fleet.

Captain D. F. Petziner is in command of the Apache, Captain Eldon Chipman of the Cherokee, and Captain Thos. F. The California Transportation Company (CTC) formed in 1875, became one of the largest river transportation companies. Among local Delta stockholders were Reuben Kercheval of Grand Island and Solomon Runyon of the Pierson District. George A. Smith of Courtland eventually owned 50% and in the late 1890's until 1900 he was President.



Courtesy Bill Stritzel

In response to the river silting as a result of hydraulic mining, CTC removed its large ships from river service until the river scoured itself. Among those removed were the rebuilt "Yosemite", "Chrysopolis" (which was to be reworked to be the double-end Bay Ferryboat "Oakland") and the "Capital City". They returned the boats sometime after 1884. During the interim a fleet of smaller boats roamed the waterways and among them were the "Julia", "Amador", and "Sacramento."

CTC owned a shipyard on Wood Island off Rio Vista where the company built the "Reform 2" (1898), "Onisbo" (1900) and the "Isleton" (1902). In 1904 the company bought the Union Transportation Company of Stockton. The "Capt. Weber" came in the deal and the company made it into a premier passenger vessel plying between Stockton and Clarksburg. A heavy emphasis was placed on accommodations. In 1907 the company began to occupy a prominent location at the new City Wharf in Sacramento at the foot of M Street (Capitol Ave.) and inaugurated through passenger and freight service between Sacramento

# Passenger Steamers "Pride of the River" "Isleton"

SAN FRANCISCO - SACRAMENTO

ANI

RIO VISTA, ISLETON, RYDE, WALNUT GROVE, COURTLAND AND WAY LANDINGS

Leave

Arrive

San Francisco. 6:00 P.M. Sacramento. . . 5:00 P.M.

Sacramento ... 7:00 A.M. San Francisco . 6:00 A.M.

THE DELTA ROUTE



The C.T. Co.'s handsomely designed Isleton is shown leaving the dock at Sacramento sometime around 1930, with a full load of passengers. As illustrated by the period timetable, the Isleton, along with her running mate Pride of the River, provided a class of passenger and freight service that had long been the standard of the river trade. By the early years of the Great Depression, it was no longer financially feasible to continue their operation. The Isleton and Pride of the River were retired in 1932.

SACRAMENTO ARCHIVES & MUSEUM COLLECTION CENTER

McCurry Company Collection 1973/003/0246

and San Francisco. In 1910 Alfred E. Anderson, son of a CTC co-founder Nelson E. Anderson, decided that the CTC needed to compete in passenger service with the Southern Pacific (formerly CSN). The "Capital City" was launched in 1910 followed in 1913 by the "Fort Sutter". The "Capital City" was built in San Francisco at the Hunter's Point Shipyard by Schultz, Robertson and Shultz and christened by George A. Smith's sister. In the 1890's passenger traffic was less than 15,000 but in 1913 alone it had reached a zenith of 213,000. Traffic was cyclical increasing in the spring and summer months.

The "Fort Sutter", "Pride of the River" and "Capital City" were all express packets and only stopped at town wharves. The "Delta Queen" and "Delta King" stopped

only at Rio Vista. It has been said that George Greene on Merrittt Island sometimes successfully signaled them to stop. He then bribed them with a wagonload of watermelons for the crew.

The Southern Pacific had upgraded and launched the "Navajo" in 1909 and the "Seminole" in 1910. Other SP boats were the "Modoc", "Apache", and "Cherokee". The CTC held an advantage over the SP because of negative feelings toward the SP caused by SP's business practices.

Nevertheless, the SP provided "street car service". The Southern Pacific bay boats "left San Francisco at 8 o'clock in the morning, carrying mail and express as well as freight for river ports. They had comfortable steamer chairs for the broad upper decks and they were famous for their meals. The sternwheel steamers had a very easy motion in contrast to propeller steamers. The boat first stopped at Benicia, thereafter, since it was an "express steamer" it stopped only at Rio Vista, Isleton, Walnut Grove, Courtland, Freeport and Clarksburg and finally Sacramento."

Freight, however, was the biggest reason the riverboats plied the waterways. In the beginning there were over 200 landings at which the boats would stop when casually heralded. In 1919 the SP hauled 700,000 tons.

In the Delta's early days "farmers traded the produce of their fields for all sorts of merchandise which the boats carried. On the return trip the boats were loaded down with poultry, pigs, calves, wild game, garden truck, fruit, hides, dairy products, and anything that could be raised on the low land. Deck hands offered another friendly service by tying newspapers and magazines to a stick and throwing it to farmers waiting for the trading boats to pass by."

By 1918 there were 120 landings, but the companies found that casual stopping to pick up insignificant loads slowed their schedules by two to six hours. In order to "consolidate" landings they petitioned the California State Railroad Commission (now P.U.C.) for authority to make a minimum charge of \$2.50 per "special landing". Before the late '20's and early '30's most produce was hauled to the market by boat.

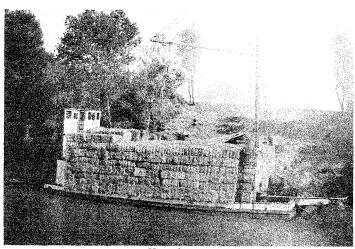
If a shipper didn't have a formal landing, a brush landing of prunings was made on a flat spot. The riverboat captains' knew the owners of the landings whether it was day or night. For a "special landing" a red lantern or flag signaled the CTC or a white the SP. If the flag or lantern was out, the captain would sound the whistle before docking. The boats always came alongside the wharves and landings, never prow first. Lug boxes of pears waiting on a landing, stacked five feet high and held together by a nailed on strip of board were rolled by the stevedores up

the gangplanks on hand trucks (dollies with steel wheels). Sacks of beans were handled similarly: The men would push the hand truck of sacks down the levee on a steep run which zigzagged to the dock. The run was curbed with six by sixes and the stevedores crimped the hand truck wheel against the curb to brake, but on the last straightaway to the gangplank, they 'let her out and whooshed" down onto the deck running with 600 pounds of beans.

A farmer could ship to a broker in San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento or Stockton, using one of the shipping lines or he could use the commission broker's boat, such as those of Hunt-Hatch of San Francisco and Oakland, Porter Bros. of Sacramento, Thacker Bros. of Chicago, or the Earl Fruit Company. Boats also carried produce to the local railheads at Locke and Hood and to and from the canneries on the river bank. (Del Monte shipped heavily via CTC.) It is reported that the Southern Pacific warehouse in Locke shipped 50 railroad cars each of pears and celery per day in the high season, which testifies to the amount of produce the boats hauled.

These large wharves accommodated tiers of boats, i.e. three boats parallel and usually employed a wharfinger to direct traffic.

Hay alone remained to be shipped under sail in specialized hay schooners. Large quantities of hay were shipped on scow schooners to San Francisco for the city's equine population. The hay was bound in 5-wire bales each weighing 300 pounds. Growers moved the bales down slides on the levee to the moored schooners. On the schooners the hay was piled as high as possible. The yardarms were raised to accommodate the load. The helmsman steered from a platform atop the hay. (One of these boats belongs to the San Francisco Maritime Museum.)



Hay schooner

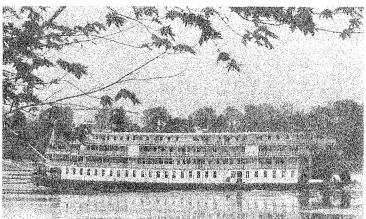
By the 1930's truck transportation, auto or bus transportation and rail transportation ate heavily into river boat traffic. In 1930 the SP discontinued service. In 1932 the CTC merged with the Sacramento Navigation Co (SNTC) and the Fay Transportation Co.

The SNTC was founded in 1869 by Thomas Dwyer as the Sacramento Wood Co. In 1885 it became Sacramento Navigation Transportation Co. In 1920 it merged with the Farmers Transportation Co. Its business was almost entirely upriver from Sacramento and was severely affected by the sludge from hydraulic mining which filled the river. It merged with the Fay Transportation Co. and the two became known as Sacramento-San Joaquin River Lines. By 1932 they had merged with the CTC to become known as the "River Lines".

The Fay Co. was formed in the early 1900s. The two Fay brothers operated a small steamer between Sacramento and Walnut Grove. Remember the name "Cap Fay" in Walnut Grove? In 1907 they leased space at the new Sacramento City Wharf. Later they moved headquarters to Rio Vista and were known as N. Fay and Son Company. In later years they returned to Sacramento. "They (were) one of the earliest firms to operate diesels on the Sacramento River and are credited with the local introduction of the modern system of cargo loading using pallets and small electric lift trucks."

The River Lines retired the "Isleton" and "Pride of the River". These two steamers had primarily serviced way landings (flag and lantern.) The "King" and "Queen" remained the only passenger packets on the run. Service on the San Joaquin River was discontinued in 1932 with the retirement of the "Capital City" and "Fort Sutter".

In 1934 and 1936 the major maritime strikes in San Francisco seriously damaged the company. In 1941 the "King" and "Queen" were taken out of service. There remained after that only lighter and tugboat traffic.



Delta Queen

Towboats such as the "Dover" and the "Fruto" had been plying the river for many years towing barges (with helmsman) and lighters (without helmsman) on long towlines. A barge could hold as much as the foredeck of a riverboat. The San Joaquin #4 "held the title of the Sacramento River's most sturdy towboat 1885-1932". Youngsters were told not to stay on the outside of a curve or levee bend when the towboat "San Joaquin" or any other towboat, for that matter, passed because the barge (without helmsman) or lighter would swing wide and strike the bank. In 1932 a large portion of the Sacramento fleet burned while docked on the Yolo side. Among those lost were Flora, Dover, Red Bluff, Colusa, San Joaquin 1 & 2, San Jose, Vallejo, Sacramento and Jacinto.

The towboats were succeeded by tractor tugboats which pulled via a short towline or pushed the barge or lighter which were commonly called "barges". After World War II they hauled sugar beets, beet pulp, sugar, molasses, grains, gravel and rock, petroleum products, caustic and acids, moth-ball airplanes, explosives and lastly rocket components.

All these boats plied the river in low water and high water, and all seasons. Snags above water and submerged were a constant concern — Hawaiians called "Kanakas" were employed to dive from snagboats to place a rope around the piece for removal. They were renowned for their swimming and diving prowess. Later snagboats with grappling hooks were used. During foggy days and nights the pilots sounded their whistles off the riverbanks/levees, buildings and special sounding boards in order to navigate. Shoals were usually designated by a light atop a dolphin situated next to the levee.

All forms of commercial transportation ceased on the Sacramento River when the Sacramento Deep Water Channel opened in 1963. River traffic continues on the straightened San Joaquin River.

#### Resources:

Steamboats in the Valley Golden Notes Historical Sites & Shipwrecks Along the Sacramento

River Between Sacramento City and Sherman Isl California Transportation Co. lecture by Wm. Stritsel

Canjornia Transportation Co. lecture by Wm. Stritsel Various lectures given to SRDHS

Various lectures given to SRDHS Memories of Delta Residents

Chrysopolis – The Sacramento River's Most Glamorous Paddlewheeler

Sacramento History – Journal of the Sacramento County Historical Society Vol. VI No.s 1,2,3,4 Sacramento to San Francisco Shipping

# REPORTING THE FRUIT AND GRAIN TRADE

"The Capital City left Sacramento this afternoon for down-river points with 8,000 cases of canned asparagus, a portion of this year's crop."

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, May 27, 1911

"A large amount of shook for fruit boxes is being carried down the river by steamers at the present time preparatory to the opening of the fruit season. The Southern Pacific steamer Cherokee carried its first load yesterday, and the Southern Pacific steamer Fruto has been carrying a load a day. The Isleton and the Pride of the River, belonging to the California Transportation Company, have been handling about three or four tons daily."

Sacramento Bee, Saturday, June 14, 1913

"The barley movement has commenced in earnest off the Sacramento River and yesterday two big barges of the Sacramento Transportation Company arrived at this city bound for the bay with loads of barley... Big shipments of pears for the canneries are reaching the City Wharf with the decline of the shipments of fresh fruits to the East. The steamer *Isleton* to-day brought between 500 and 600 boxes for the new Libby, McNeil & Libby Plant and the steamer *Valletta* brought several hundred boxes from up-river points for the Central California Cannery."

Sacramento Bee, Monday, July 28, 1913

"The Southern Pacific to-day put on a special 'fruit boat,' the *Cherokee* for the accommodation of fruit growers along the Sacramento River. The Southern Pacific wharf resembled a small-sized lumber yard to-day, with about fifteen car loads of shook being transferred into the hold of the *Cherokee*... The *Cherokee's* cargo was designated for Steamboat Slough for the California Fruit Exchange. The steamer will make regular trips for several weeks, carrying nothing but shook, nails, paper, etc., for the fruit growers... The first boat load of shook which the Southern Pacific has moved this season left Sacramento Saturday. It was consigned to James Elliott, large fruit grower near Courtland, from the Pioneer Fruit Company."

Sacramento Bee, Monday, May 22, 1916



River steamers along the Jackson Street wharf in San Francisco, c. 1880.

Courtesy Bill Strizel

#### RESOURCE CENTER NEWS

.. The Resource Center would like to recognize Clarice Jonson for all the time and effort she has spent contributing to the resources at the center. She has "retired" from keeping current the local obituary binders and the "Exploring Rio Vista's Past" binders containing articles written by Phil Pezzaglia. Thank you for all your work and dedication – we will miss you! The binders are available in the Resource Center for research.

.. Does anyone have old editions of the "Delta Current" or old Directories of the Delta they would like to donate to the Center? We would like to add to our collection.

.. New resource additions:

Donor Name
Mar, Lim
Hutchinson/Graham
Hurley, Joann

Thank you for your donations! 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.

#### SRDHS 2008 SCHEDULE

July/August	Summer Break			
September 16	General Meeting			
October 21	Board Meeting			
November 18	General Meeting			
December	•			
December Newsletter				
January 20, 2009	Annual Potluck			

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#### 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 srdhs@riverdeltawireless.com.

# MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

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

DO	YOU	WAN	OT T	CONT	INUE	TO	RECEI	VE
	TH	HIS G	REAT	PUBI	<b>ICAT</b>	ION	???	

Then make sure you pay your 2008 dues – Use this form or one of our handy dues envelopes

Name:
Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:
E-Mail:
☐ I'm paying Annual dues for the following year(s): ☐ 2008 ☐ Other \$25.00 a year for Annual Membership
☐ I've enclosed \$150 to become a Lifetime Member
☐ I'd like to register as an Honorary Member – Free to those 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

#### **NEWSLETTER STAFF**

Editor	Kathleen Hutchinson
Design/Layout	Esther Koopman

<sup>\*</sup>The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the Sacramento River Delta Society Newsletter twice a year.