

COMMUNITY MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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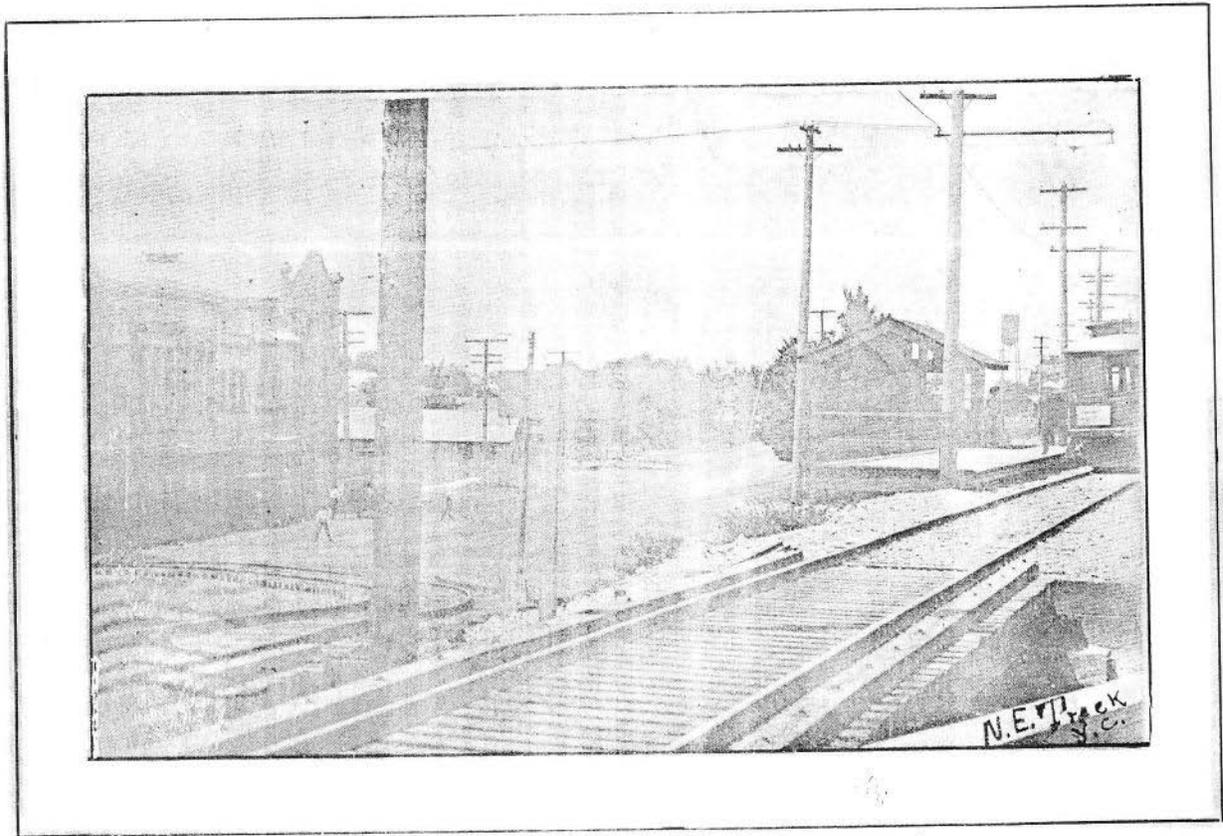
SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS BULLETIN

Vol. 2 No. 2

Yuba City, California

April 21, 1959



NORTHERN ELECTRIC TRACKS
SHOWING BRIDGE STREET UNPAVED

SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SPRING MEETING

April 21, 1959 - 8 P.M.
Board of Supervisors Chambers

SPEAKER: Glenn Hoffman
Superintendent of Schools, Glenn County
President of Colusa Historical Society

TOPIC: Profitable Activities for Historical Societies
Slides on Wearing Apparel of Historical
Significance

SOME MISCELLANEOUS NOTES FROM HAWAII
(Research done on Recent Trip to Hawaii by Earl Ramey)

As everyone knows, many of our earliest pioneers of California - those who were here before the discovery of gold - came by sea; and most ships which came to the California coast came by way of Hawaii. Original documentary information about these pioneers is very limited in California; so any additional references to them which we can find outside the state is of especial interest to us.

While spending a few weeks in Honolulu this winter, I took advantage of the opportunity to do some reading in the Territorial Archives. I went armed with a letter of introduction from the Sutter County Historical Society signed by Mrs. Gibson, our secretary. Only those who have some specific objective are admitted and allowed to use the rare documents. I stated as my objective the search for information in early Hawaiian newspapers regarding certain pioneers of Sutter and Yuba counties. I asked to be allowed to read files for the years 1838 to 1848.

The letter served as sesame. The clerks are very obliging. They brought the volumes I wanted and gave me a pleasant place to work; and in a very few minutes I was reading original papers 120 years old. I am not sure that I found any references which others have not seen and written about, but it is a great satisfaction to read the original account even though the information may be known and already recorded.

The first one of our pioneers about whom I found references was John A. Sutter. In the issue of December 15, 1838 of the Sandwich Island Gazette and Journal of Commerce is given the passenger list of the Hudson Bay Company Barque Columbia which arrived in Honolulu December 9 from the Columbia River. Among the few passengers was listed "Capt. Shuiter." No mention was made of Nicolas Altgier or Sebastian Keyser who we know were with Sutter. It is likely that they were riding steerage, because it was the practice not to name steerage passenger; only numbers were sometimes given.

Biographies of Sutter give us the impression that the captain was lionized and that he assumed a prominent role in social and political affairs while in Honolulu on his way to California. They usually quote his own writings as authority for this impression. But his name does not appear in the paper from December 15, 1838 as noted above, until April 6, 1839. On this latter date he wrote a letter

to the editor. This is the famous letter which served for many years as evidence that Sutter had been a member of the French army. Biographers have quoted excerpts from the letter, but as far as I know, no one has noted the circumstances which provoked the letter. These circumstances became clear only after I had read a good many of the issues before and after the letter was printed. They are rather complicated and must necessarily be condensed here.

New England Protestants were the pioneer missionaries in Hawaii. During the twenty years after their arrival in 1820, they had not only Christianized the islands, but had gained control of the royal government. They were determined to keep their monopoly of organized religion. Their potential competitors were certain Roman Catholic orders which were already active in some of the other Polynesian islands. So the royal government, at the instigation of the Protestants, simply forbade all religious activity by the Catholic clergy. But the Catholic missionaries were persistent; and some of them openly violated the law thereby provoking "persecution" which led to strained international relations.

The Protestant missionaries were publishing a monthly magazine, *The Spectator*, which they used partially to present arguments supporting their monopoly. At that time (1838-1839) the most active Catholic missionaries in Polynesia were French. The editor of the *Spectator* adopted a sort of implied premise which ran: All Catholics were bad for Hawaii, and all French were Catholics; so, logically, all French were bad for Hawaii. And as a means of impressing this premise the editor periodically printed accounts from all over the world of bad behavior on the part of French persons.

Now the merchants of Honolulu were not to any degree antagonistic to religion; but they became impatient with the missionaries and their campaign of slander against the French. The merchants considered this practice bad for business. Hundreds of ships each year put in at Honolulu to secure supplies or to store cargoes. These ships were of all nationalities. Russian and French war vessels had made calls to investigate mistreatment of their nationals. The merchants knew that any military action against the Hawaiian government would disturb their international trade and traffic.

The *Sandwich Island Gazette* occupied a novel position in Honolulu at this time. It was owned and edited by a private individual, but it was subsidized (in addition to subscription and advertising) by the merchants who, consequently, were in a position to influence its policy. And one part of its policy was to counteract the missionaries' campaign against the French and to denounce generally what it called bigotry. When the *Spectator* would come out with an article slandering the French, the *Gazette* would try to defend the French or deprecate the charges. It was in this setting that Sutter wrote his letter to the editor.

A tragic incident had occurred on the Oregon Trail in the Platte country. A small group of white travelers had been massacred by a band of Sioux Indians. One of the victims was the Reverend William Henry Gray, the leader of the missionaries in Oregon. The story appeared in the March, 1839 issue of the *Spectator* whose editor, the Reverend Mr. Bingham, declared that the Indians had been led by a Frenchman.

Sutter had come overland from Missouri to Oregon through the country where the massacre had taken place; so he was qualified to refute the Bingham version. His letter is in proper and natural English prose indicating that someone composed it for him. Very likely the editor of the *Gazette* composed the letter himself with Sutter dictating the subject matter.

Sutter wrote "As I was formerly an officer of the Swiss Guard in the French service, I consider it my duty to defend the honor of the French nation; hence, I am compelled to correct the accusation that a party of Sioux had been commanded by a Frenchman..." His main defense was that the leader of the Sioux was three quarters Indian which if true would have left the "French Nation" only one

quarter responsible. But the letter served as occasion for the editor of the Gazette to score the editor of the Spectator for printing false accounts.

The only other reference to Sutter was in the passenger list of April 27, 1839. It read "In Brig Clementine for Sitka and California Captain John A. Sutter, Mr. A. Thompson, two German cabinet makers and nine Kanakas." One of the German cabinet makers was a Sutter county pioneer, Nicolas Altgier, and one of the Kanakas was Kanaka Harry an early resident of Hock Farm. But again it appears that Altgier, Keyser and the Kanakas were sailing in the steerage because they were not named.

I had hoped to get some additional information about Theodore Cordua, the pioneer of Yuba county, who came through Hawaii on his way to California in 1842. But I found that there is a provoking gap in the files of papers. The Sandwich Island Gazette, in which the references to Sutter were found, ceased publication in the early part of 1840. But a new editor, J. J. Jarves of Boston, came to the Islands in June of this year and established the Polynesian which ran for two years; but at the end of 1841 it also was discontinued. During the years 1842 and 1843 only the monthly church magazines were published in the Islands and they contained little general news. So I was unable to learn anything about Cordua.

Those members who read the account of the Boga Grant in this Bulletin for last July will recall that Charles W. Flugge was known to have spent some time in Hawaii trying to recover his health. But it was not known exactly when he made the trip. So, in tracing this Sutter county pioneer, I was able to use a very helpful feature of the Territorial Archives. This is a huge card index of ships' manifests. The coverage is not complete for the early years, but I was fortunate to find Flugge's name. Neither the name of Sutter nor that of Cordua was to be found indicating that the manifests of their ships had not been preserved. It was not necessary to see the manifest because the card in the file gave the information that Flugge had arrived in Honolulu December 16, 1845 in the barque Don Quixote, Captain John Paty, master.

Publication of the Polynesian had been resumed by editor Jarves in May, 1844 and I was able to verify Flugge's arrival by a passenger list given in the issue of December 27. He did not spend as much time in Honolulu as we had been led to believe by other accounts. Rather, he returned with Captain Paty on the Don Quixote which sailed for California February 19, 1846. There was only one reference to Flugge during his two months' visit. But indirectly it gives a very good idea of how he spent his time. In the issue of February 14 the following item appeared:

"Panoramic Exposition - We were not aware until recently that this exhibition was still in being. On Monday evening we dropped in and must confess that we were very agreeably disappointed in the treat which Messrs. Flugge and Thompson have provided for their friends. The pictures are really good and well got up and said by judges to be very true to nature. The best undoubtedly are the mountain scenery of Switzerland with a view of the Jung Frau and the Baltic Sound with a frigate going in. The views are some of the best in Europe and parents cannot do better than an hour's amusement and instruction by taking them to this exhibition. It is cheap traveling both as to money and trouble and well worth both."

This activity of Flugge's is consistent with the literary and artistic interests which we know he followed while in California and Missouri. It would be of further satisfaction to us now if we could know where and how he secured the paintings and other necessary equipment for this panoramic display. It is natural that he should have made use of the invention inasmuch as it had been developed by the Germans and French and was just reaching the peak of its popularity at the time (1846), being a forerunner of the later Stereoscopic devices to provide an illusion of third dimension.

Another pioneer of Sutter county about whom I found some references was Samuel Brannan. It will be recalled by those who have read some Mormon history that in 1845 a sizeable colonizing expedition was organized in the eastern states to settle in California. One section of this expedition came by land but came no farther west

than Salt Lake. Another section under the leadership of Brannan came by sea in the chartered ship Brooklyn.

The voyage made by this group of Mormons is one of the classics of American history. The Brooklyn put in at Honolulu June 20, 1846, and its arrival was a genuine sensation for the inhabitants of the Islands; and of course, the newspaper gave the occasion due coverage. Ships were quite common, but never had a ship brought a cargo like that of the Brooklyn. There were 50 families plus some unattached men and women - in all 70 men, 60 women and 48 children. They had been on the sea 136 days since sailing from New York. They spent ten days ashore in Honolulu resting, convalescing and revictualling during which time the editor of the Polynesian found all of the interesting copy which his limited sheet could contain.

A small item in the June 27 issue read: "Religious Notice - Elder S. Brannan will lecture at the Seamen's Chapel . . . His subject will be Salvation to Eternal Life."

The editor was favorably impressed by the quality and character of these Mormons. He opined that they would be good for any country and expressed a wish that they might be persuaded to settle in Hawaii where much unused land awaited such thrifty settlers. In addition to descriptions of the many hardships endured at sea, the editor printed verbatim a portion of the ship's log. He gave this quotation to illustrate the hardships. It is such an eloquent but simple statement that I made a copy of it. It is as revealing to us now as it was to the residents of Hawaii in 1846.

"The following is a list of deaths on board the ship Brooklyn:

February 14: the infant of Joseph Nichols died with the diarrhea after about two weeks illness, aged 2 years, 18 days and was buried the same day at 11 o'clock A.M. in lat. 37 N long. 50W.
February 20: Six o'clock in the evening Mr. Elias Ensign died after an illness of about three weeks aged 59 years, 5 months. His body was consigned to the deep the next day at 11 o'clock in lat. 19N long. 26W.
Saturday, February 28: the son of John R. Robbins died at 10 o'clock P.M. with the Scarlet Fever after an illness of 3 days, aged 5 years, 18 days and was buried in lat. 3 N long. 25W.
March 6: the son of Mr. John Fowler died with the diarrhea aged 1 year, 7 months, 28 days.
March 7: six o'clock A.M. Miss Eliza Ensign died of the Consumption aged 20 years, 8 months, 17 days. She had been confined to her bed about two weeks previous to her death. Lat. 3S long. 27W.
Saturday, March 14: ten o'clock A.M. the son of Mr. J.R. Robbins died of the Consumption aged 1 year, 5 months, 16 days. Lat. 15S long. 32W.
Tuesday, March 17: ten o'clock P.M. the son of Mr. Chas. C. Burr died of the diarrhea aged 1 year, 5 months.
Friday, March 26: Edward Miles one of the ships crew died with the cramp in the stomach after 8 days sickness.
March 27: two o'clock A.M. the daughter of Mr. George K. Winner died of the cankered sore throat, aged 6 months, 7 days.
Wednesday, April 1: two o'clock p.m. Mr. Silas Aldrich died of the Dropsy in the stomach aged 43 years, 8 months, 20 days, and was consigned to the deep at ten o'clock A.M. the next day in lat. 43S, Long. 47W.
Wednesday, May 6: Mrs. Laura Goodwin wife of Mr. Isaac Goodwin died aged 32 years, 11 months, 23 days. Her death was occasioned by a fall which she received soon after we set sail from New York. She left seven children. Her remains were buried on the island of Juan Fernandez."

A grim verification of this last death is to be found in the passenger list of the Brooklyn. It is given in terms of family units, and in alphabetical order appears "Isaac Goodwin and seven children."

I did not have in mind any other pioneers to look for particularly; so I continued to read through the volumes for 1846-47-48, noting items of interest. And when I reached the year 1848 I found an extremely fascinating topic unfolding week by week. It was the reaction of Hawaii to the discovery of gold in California. It was fascinating because it was familiar - about the same reaction which we associate with San Francisco, San Jose and other California towns. There was the usual skepticism at first giving way gradually to convincing personal testimony followed by the rush to the diggings.

To appreciate the timing of this reaction one must recall that while gold was discovered by Marshall near the end of January, 1848, the news of the discovery was suppressed by Sutter and delayed by slow communications. Not until April was the news spread through California and not until May and June was it appreciated that gold was to be found in paying amounts.

Ordinarily news spread quickly to the Islands because ships were able to sail from San Francisco or Monterey to Honolulu in 14 to 18 days. The Bear Flag incident was known in Hawaii less than three weeks after it occurred. But ships did not sail on regular schedule.

No doubt the rumor of gold reached Hawaii earlier, but the first public notice of the discovery was in the Polynesian for June 17. A long article from Brannan's "California Star" was reprinted. This article had been written April 1st; and why it appeared as late as June 17 we can only guess. The subject of the article was the general resources of California, and only a passing notice was given the discovery of gold on the American Fork. More attention was given to the quicksilver mines of San Jose.

But the news was coming through. In the issue of July 8 there appeared an item entitled "The Gold Fever". The editor stated that the fever was "beginning to rage in the town." And he called attention to a new law which the royal government had decreed evidently in anticipation of the pending exodus. The new law required Hawaiian citizens to secure a passport to be allowed to leave the Islands. And to secure a passport the citizen had to prove that he was free of debt. The procedure of proof was to give public notice of his intentions to leave, allowing a minimum time for any creditors to contest his application. If no creditors appeared, he was given the passport. This law may not have caused the payment of many bad debts, but it made good business for the newspaper and left the historian an exact record of those who joined the rush to California.

In the issue of July 8, four men gave notice of intentions to leave. The next week, July 15, twenty-three gave notice. And each weekly issue of the paper carried more and more. At first each person purchased an individual notice of three lines. But soon the notices were so numerous that there was not space for individual items, so one statement would have many names attached.

In this same issue of July 8, the editor, who was not yet convinced, printed the story of "El Dorado", the famous legend from Latin American history which for many years lured gullible persons in quest of mythical gold. But he facetiously denied any intentions of discouraging those who planned to go to California. But the next week, July 15, he conceded that gold had been found in paying quantities. He had received letters from reputable persons in California giving details of mining and also accounts of desertion of town. He estimated that there were 200 men in Honolulu ready to go if passage could be found. He lamented the loss of the many good citizens but noted that they would be rid of some bad ones at the same time. Also he took comfort in the prospects of Hawaiian produce being in larger demand.

On July 30 a ship arrived 14 days from San Francisco bringing more details of conditions and activity in California, which news further agitated the fever. By this time 69 passports had been issued, and it was estimated that as many non-citizens who did not need passports had sailed - an estimated total of about 150. The editor had excused his paper for discontinuing passenger lists by declaring that

the lists would be too long. The topic of discussion was no longer the desirability of going to the gold fields; rather, it was how to get there.

There were no more than four or five ships which plied regularly between Hawaii and the California and Oregon coast. And these ships could not carry more than 25 or 30 passengers with a full cargo. But as the demand for passage grew, others joined or deviated, and some smaller vessels used normally only for inter-island traffic were put in the California service. By October 20, vessels had cleared for California carrying 350 passengers including about 50 native Hawaiians who found means to make the voyage. Some of these 350 obviously did not arrive at the diggings before the weather had stopped mining for the winter.

The first ships to leave in July advertised rates of \$100. for cabin passage, \$80, for steerage and \$40, for "find yourself", which meant 'sleep any place you could find room." But soon these classes were abolished. The first to pay got the cabins, the next got the steerage bunks and the last found themselves; but all paid \$100. Freight was being carried for \$40. per ton. (Today the average rate is \$20. per ton and the average passage is \$200.)

Some of the thrifty merchants of Honolulu took advantage of a new method of transferring credit to New York or London, a method facilitated by the gold discovery. Most of the money in circulation throughout the Pacific was Mexican silver. The merchants sent silver to California with which their agents could purchase gold dust at \$16. per ounce. This gold then was shipped to Acapulco where it was further shipped across Mexico to Vera Cruz and then to New York or London. From Acapulco it could be insured against loss. The freight and insurance together cost from six to eight percent. But bills of exchange and sight drafts were subject to discount which often ran as high as twenty-five percent. So the gold dust filled a need of the time.

During the summer while cargoes were being purchased for shipment to California and passengers were buying equipment, business in Honolulu was brisk, and the editor expressed the general good feeling and cheerfulness. Even those whose affairs prevented their joining the exodus good naturedly formed a "Can't get Away" Club. But by October, when stores and warehouses had been stripped of goods, and after a large fraction of the non-native population had departed, business became slow. So the cheerfulness changed to gloom; but not for long. Because by November some of the first to go in July were coming back, if not to stay, to spend the winter. And most of them came back with money. A few were wealthy, and nearly all had more money than they had had before. Even some of the natives came back relatively well to do. The editor mentioned one native who came back with \$500 and found that he had many friends. So business picked up and cheerfulness returned.

The reader should note that these gold seekers whom we have been discussing up to this point belong to the draft of 1848. The 48'ers found their gold much easier and quicker than the 49'ers who followed them. I did not read far enough to learn how the Hawaiian 49'ers fared.

THE SUTTER COUNTY ROAD SYSTEM OF 1919
Edited by Noel C. Stevenson
(From California Highways,
1920, pages 270-275)

On February 3, 1919, the Sutter County Hoard of Supervisors, made up of George Trevethan, Frank Graves, Sam Gray, A. E. Schellenger and E. J. White, decided that the time was ripe for presenting to the people of the county a definite plan for road improvement, and thereupon applied to the United States Bureau of Public Roads to detail an engineer to look over the situation and make such recommendations as might seem best.

In taking this action the Board of Supervisors had the enthusiastic backing of the Sutter County Farm Bureau, which organization had measured county sentiment and found it overwhelmingly in favor of road improvement. The officers of the Farm Bureau at the time named were R. L. Morehead, President; C. E. Moore, Vice-President; L. A. Walton, E. S. Wadsworth, W. B. Clark, and J. R. Catlett, directors at large; the general directorate being composed of E. Thayer, C. L. Mosely, C. E. Reische, J. D. Rodolf, G. C. Galbraith, Dr. E. S. Moulton, Albert Graves, and Robert Shields. These men, all hard-headed business men, had watched the expenditures of county road funds for some time and, in conjunction with the Board of Supervisors, had come to the conclusion that Sutter County, in order to progress as it should, must adopt modern road-building ideas. So a government engineer was called in; and what he thought about the general situation is made plain by the following excerpts from his report:

"Sutter County," he wrote, "is an important agricultural and orchard section of California. The orchard sections are, more particularly, highly developed and are still susceptible of considerable expansion. The county is composed of three distinct areas, each having a different class of development. The Sutter Buttes, a range of rugged mountains covering an area of about 50,000 acres, is chiefly grazing land and, with the exception of the lower slopes which are cultivated, other development is absent.

"The second area of development follows generally the ridges of deep soil parallel to the river banks and elevated either naturally above the flood line or reclaimed by the construction of levees. A third large area of the county, known as the Sutter Basin, between the levee of the Sacramento River and the proposed Sutter By-pass, is as yet undeveloped for extensive cultivation. A similar basin, known as the American Basin, lies east of the Feather and Sacramento Rivers in the southerly part of the county. This section has been reclaimed and the development is progressing rapidly. With the exception of the Sutter Basin, practically the entire area of the county is already susceptible of cultivation. Of orchards there are 13,768 acres and of vineyards 8,610 acres, producing about 68,000 tons of fruit, a great part of which is marketed fresh and requires surfaced roads for economical and safe hauling to shipping points.

"Under field crops there are annually about 150,000 acres, chiefly in barley, wheat, oats, rice, and beans, producing from 200,000 to 300,000 tons annually, all of which has to be moved over the highways longer or shorter distances to either rail or water transportation. Alfalfa is grown on nearly 8,000 acres, producing an aggregate of about 60,000 tons.

"With the exception of Yuba City, the county seat, there are no other municipalities in the county, and the population and farm residences are fairly distributed along existing highways, except in the areas subject to overflow, the orchard section in general being in small holdings occupied by the owners.

"The road traffic, while light during many months, is exceedingly heavy during the harvest season. There are a number of smaller towns which are to some extent the trading centers of surrounding areas. The principal of these are Live Oak, Meridian, Nicolaus, and Sutter City. There is only one permanently constructed road in the county and that is the State Highway, built as a concrete road, which extends from Yuba City northerly and runs parallel to the Southern Pacific Railroad."

The above report may properly be regarded as a fair and conservative statement of existing facts, and was followed by a detailed recommendation for a bonding plan which, it may be said, the good-roads enthusiasts of Sutter county accepted gladly and used in a more comprehensive scheme of road improvement than the conservatism of the Government engineer permitted him to recommend, he confining himself to the bonding capacity of the county as he found it and limiting his recommendations thereto.

The Farm Bureau, however, in conjunction with the Board of Supervisors, proceeded first to raise the county assessment roll about twenty per cent, gaining a greater bonding capacity thereby; and then, in addition to planning for certain roads under a bond issue, decided that they would build additional needed roads by direct tax, resolved that when they undertook to improve their county highways they would do a good job or none at all. The type of road planned was concrete, there being 87.50 miles planned under the bond issue and by direct tax.

The State Highway Bond Issue for \$40,000,000 voted on July 1, 1919, provided for a cross county road between Yuba City and Meridian, taking care of one of the heaviest traveled roads in the county and throwing the burden thereof upon the state.

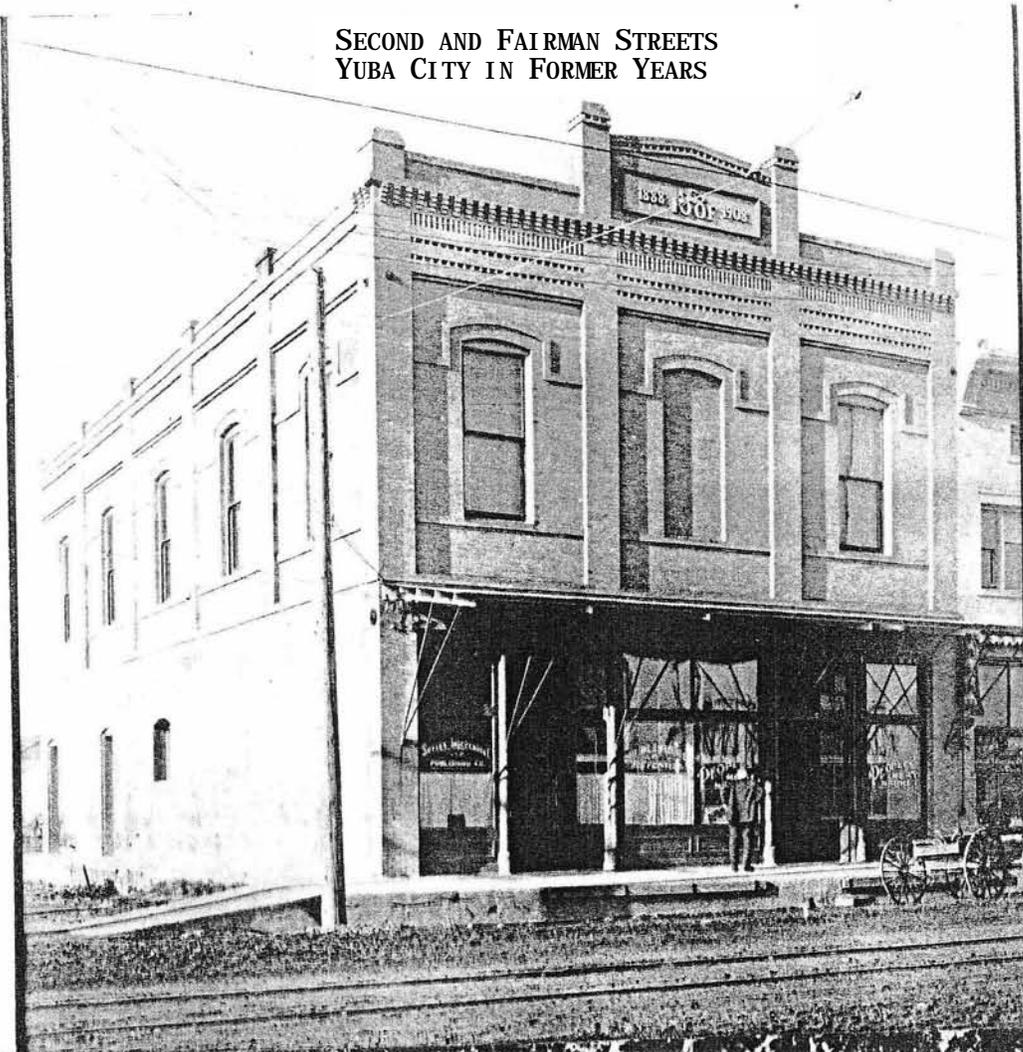
The main road distribution under the county bond issue was in the eastern part of the county, this section being highly developed and the major part of the county's road burden originating therein. Over this section, its production of fruit, and the development of its orchards one not a Government engineer might be induced to enthuse, for upon all sides are orchards producing peaches and prunes in such crop abundance as to make the net returns per acre almost sound like a fairy tale.

It may be said of Sutter County without hurting anybody's feelings, now that the people of the county had voted a good roads bond issue by more than twenty to one at a campaign expense of only about \$150.00 that prior to 1919 it was one of the most backward counties in the state in so far as road development was concerned. There wasn't a single county road that might by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as of modern type while on all sides were vacant acreages that save for the lack of road improvement would have been turned into prolific orchards of different kinds. As a matter of fact, this county was a sort of Cinderella, inconspicuous on account of ragged roads, while of sterling worth, with land prices so low in comparison with other sections as to be almost ridiculous.

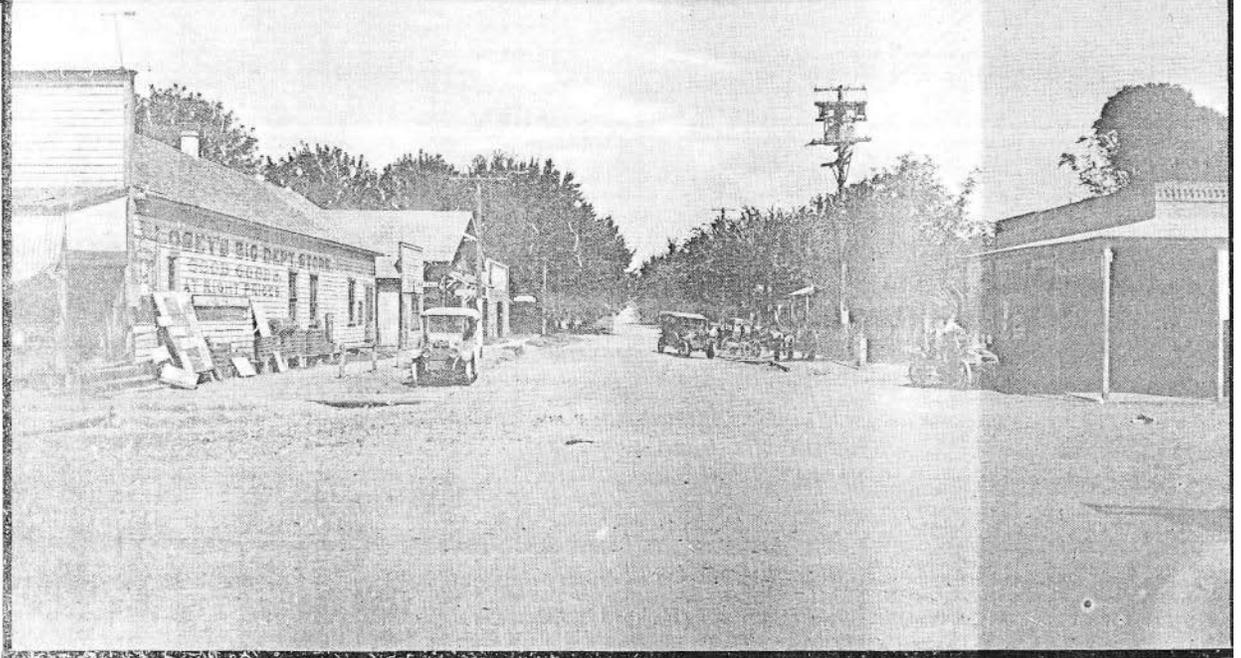
That a campaign was needed to carry the road plan through, any good-road enthusiast well knew; and this campaign, conducted by the Farm Bureau, County Farm Advisor C. E. Sullivan being actively in charge, was crowned with success on August 28, when \$810,000 of bonds were voted and Sutter county for once and all emerged from mud, only 53 votes in the entire county being recorded as opposed to the bonding plan.

In the work of building the road system planned, which in the main provided for asphaltic type of roads, County Surveyor Edward von Geldern was the man in charge, under the Board of Supervisors. To assist them the board named an advisory committee made up of R. L. Morehead, Loyd Wilbur, A. T. Spencer, J. M. Hampton, and Sam McKeehan, all of the men named resolved that their efforts would not end until Sutter county compared with the good roads of other counties of the State.

SECOND AND FAIRMAN STREETS
YUBA CITY IN FORMER YEARS



UNPAVED ROAD NEAR C. E. SULLIVAN RANCH, FORMERLY ABBOTT'S ORCHARD



DR. JACOBS' RESIDENCE
MERIDIAN-SUTTER Co.

STREETS OF MERIDIAN BEFORE PAVING