

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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PRESIDENTS NOTES

Well time has flown again and here I am back for my second writing. So far this year's been a fairly exciting year for our historical society. In our programs we had (1) a very excellent lecture by historian Bill Stritzel on the California Transportation Company and early boat transportation (2) a nice tour of the Rio Vista Museum with docents Mary Bell O'Connor and Jim Tracy (3) the movie "Bittersweet Roots" by KVIE (4) and lastly a rewarding talk by author Cortlandt Parker on his book "Up-Delta." Our resource center is full of activity with Fran Bates, Bobbie Collier, Esther-Koopman, Cathy O'Connor, Carol Watson, Clarice Jonson, Linda van Loben Sels, Jerry Waterworth, Pete Budnick, Lorraine Croup, Lucille Christensen, Connie King and Ping Lee for all volunteering their time to bring our resource center's future along. We now have computers and equipment to enter data, store oral histories, scan photos, scan maps, and keep a log on resources in the center. We are also now protecting our large maps and charts in Mylar, a protective plastic. Anyone who has time to volunteer please contact Fran or Bobbie as there is still much to do. Our oral history is kind of on hold as we are desperately in need of volunteers to record these oral histories. These oral histories are a priceless resource for us living in the delta. The Sac Area Consortium on Nov. 7 in Placerville was attended by Terry and Jane Alcorn. Our thanks to them for making the time and representing our society. My thanks go out to our board, our newsletter editors, volunteers and all those involved in our society for caring about our local history. A special thanks to Judy Culbertson who has been instrumental in obtaining the video equipment from the Sacramento County Farm Bureau to show the movies.

SOCIETY NOTES

The Pear Fair held in Courtland on Sunday July 29th was well attended. There was an historical exhibit with wonderful picture boards from the Clarksburg Library Collection. Carnival rides were available and there were many pear based contests. The annual Fair provides a money raising opportunity for the many community groups in the Delta. We look forward to the last Sunday in July of 2004.

Jan Groggins has created a marvelous chapter of Sacramento River Delta History. She interviewed Pete Budnik, Jim Shanks, Louie and Rae Giovannoni and Pan van Loben Sels. These interviews are in a booklet "The Land of Give and Take" that will be available at future meetings. Jan also interviewed Nelson Eddy--extensively. A transcript of his interviews is available in the Resource Center, however, it is not ready for circulation. Thanks Jan for creating a beautiful window on the Delta!

The Resource Center is booming! Collections are being organized and catalogued so that everyone can use the materials. It should be open regular hours early next year. Don't miss the annual dinner in January--The Resource center will be open for browsing--no taking.

K. W. "Bill" Westerberg moved to Courtland in 1946. They bought the remodeled pharmacy (Which had been founded by Phillips in the early thirties) after the 1941 fire. Bill ran the pharmacy for many years and helped the next owner after he retired. Bill and his wife Annie collected books on California as they traveled around the state. This collection is now available at the Courtland Library. We will be printing a list of the books from time to time. There is a great variety so pick one out next time you visit the Courtland Library.

The September meeting received good reviews from attendees. "Bittersweet Roots" included a discussion after a movie on the history of the Chinese in the Delta. Connie King had marvelous things to say about Locke.

Cortlandt Parker presented "Up-Delta" In the early years. A cruise into the past of the California Delta. We will have a write-up of the May, September and November meetings in the next issue.

It's time to pay dues again. Please pay at the January Potluck and you will continue to receive our Newsletter.

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WALNUT GROVE 1850-1970

Written by Kathleen Graham Hutchinson

This is the continuation of our Towns along the River series. We have completed Ryde, Vorden and Courtland. This is a multi part history of Walnut Grove. Because some of the material is conflicting and some is vague or ambiguous there are sure to be inaccuracies in this article and recollections can be fallible. As with all previous articles, additions or corrections are welcomed. Many thanks in advance to Art Brown, Fran Brown, Barbara Brooks, Marilyn Dye Fisher, "Terry" Salisbury, John Salisbury, Katherine Oda, Russ Graham, Jr. and to some who are no longer with us, Bill Berry and Bill Hutchinson among others.--Ed.

PART ONE

Walnut Grove is located in Georgiana Township, Sacramento County. To the east is Dead Horse Island, to the west Grand and Andrus Islands, to the north historically Meadows Slough and to the south Tyler Island.

The town established in 1850/51, is one of the earliest in the Sacramento River Delta and the only town to straddle the 382 mile long river. The river has split the town since the 1880's. Georgiana Slough the head of which is at Walnut Grove is the historic river route to Stockton, via the Mokolumne and San Joaquin Rivers.

The area was first known as a rendezvous for bandits and cattle thieves who used the dense undergrowth and twisting waterways as convenient cover. By 1850 only a few Indians still lived in the surrounding area.

The first settlers were John Wesley Sharp and his family. Sharp, born in New York State in 1823, traveled west in 1849 from his Ohio farm, with his wife Sophia Bartlett Sharp and their two babies. They departed St. Joseph, Missouri (the great Overland Trail staging point) in several horse drawn covered wagons laden with household goods, supplies and agricultural tools. The Sharps arrived in California later in the year and wintered in Dry Creek/Sutter's Fort where a third daughter was born.

In the spring of 1850, the family wagons followed the Sacramento River south to where Georgiana Slough branches from the main river. Their granddaughter, Clarabelle Salisbury remembered the stories told her. The river was very clear with huge overhanging trees gently sighing in the breeze. Deer were commonly seen, grapes festooned the trees and shrubbery. The Walnut Grove area was especially beautiful with large groves of valley oak and native

walnut trees. The family settled and set up housekeeping under three spreading walnut trees. A fourth daughter was born and Sharp began farming and dairying on 160 acres homesteaded under the Swamp and Overflow Act.

On his farm, which grew substantially over the years, he built his house. He sold the produce and milk which was transported to Sacramento by riverboat. On November 1, 1869 he received his patent paper for the land he homesteaded. He continued to acquire acreage, which he occasionally sold. Other settlers subsequently arrived and a community was born.

John Sharp had a keen business sense to accompany his industrious nature and as a need presented itself he fulfilled it. He established the first general store, brickyard, blacksmith shop, lumber mill and was the town's first postmaster. The post office was opened in 1855/57 and was also used as the town polling place. The steam sawmill utilized the huge grove of native walnut and oak. An 1876 indenture between Sharp and A. S. Bryant of Oakland established that Bryant could timber the walnut trees on "Sharp's Point", at the confluence of Snodgrass and Tyler Sloughs, provided he kept a wagon road open at all times to the junction of Snodgrass and Tyler Sloughs. The sawmill was closed when finished lumber was cheaper to ship than to produce locally. As early as 1865, Walnut Grove was a major shipping point for fish and produce.

Sharps wife Sophia became proprietress of the town's first hostelry when she began taking in people traveling through; hunters, trappers, wanderers and wayfarers. Among early visitors who stayed to settle was Sperry Dye. The Dye brothers; Troy, Sperry and John came to California from Illinois via Boonville, Iowa crossing to California by ox team. Dye descendants are seen in Walnut Grove ever since. The family eventually owned considerable Walnut Grove real estate. When Sperry Dye married Elisabeth Sharp the two families became related.

As the population increased a school was opened in the Sharp house. The house was located on land now occupied by the Bank of Rio Vista. In 1855 the first school district was formed. In 1856, Georgiana District was formed followed by in 1861 Walnut Grove School District which incorporated the Georgiana District and which lasted until 1965. Children came long distances by horse or boat. The first teacher was a woman who had retired to Tyler Island with her daughter. Sophia Sharp persuaded the teacher to come out of retirement to teach in her living room. In 1878 the Sharps donated land and

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WALNUT GROVE 1850-1970 Continued

helped finance the construction of the first schoolhouse. The location was in back of the garage and theater buildings of today. An outgrowth of the school was the Walnut Grove College (a combination finishing/high school) which flourished for a time near the close of the 19th century.

In 1861, at the outbreak of the Civil War an armory hall was built to quarter the Walnut Grove Union Guard. Dr. Josiah Pool, later of Isleton, was the First Lieutenant of the unit.

As he prospered, Sharp kept a promise made years earlier to his mother Elisabeth Schankland. Sharp, bringing her to California via clipper ship around Cape Horn to join the family. Sharp died in 1880 and his wife in 1898. Both are buried alongside Sharp's mother in the family cemetery in Walnut Grove. (Part One continued next issue)

MEYERS TRAVELOGUE

This travelogue was written by Henriette Meyers Newell and found its way to the California State Archives. We found it in one of our collections and have tried to keep the format so we can all take a journey back to the Delta in the 1920's and 30's. (Ed. note Henriette Meyers is of the Meyers Mansion family).

In the arm chair traveling we're doing this year, I'd like to take you on a trip thru the past; and to travel in a style that has been lost to progress, and then again, by the same token, made popular by progress.

The Sacramento River is the most important river in the growth and development of Northern California and the Port of San Francisco. For most of its 250 navigable miles it winds lazily through California's fertile Central Valley. Its waters are slow moving and its banks and sloughs are lined with willows, wild grapes and mistletoe festooned cottonwoods. No body of water west of the Rockies is as rich in history, drama and adventure as the Sacramento. No other body of water played such a vital role in the California Gold Rush, or played such an important role in the development of Central and Northern California. The magic of this River like major rivers all over the world, it provided the chief form of transportation and formed the Delta.

In the 1850's the Delta was just a swamp to be bypassed by gold-rush prospectors. Then the gold fever died, farmers-turned-forty-niners turned farmers again, diked swampland by shovel and

wheelbarrow. My grandfather was one of those men (worked with the shovel for one year and then bought his first ranch). Later, steam-powered clamshell dredgers built the levees higher, and still later, suction dredgers raised the levees to their present height. The roads are on top of the levees; first, they were just sand, then concrete, and now the hardtop, which seems to be on all the roads. The roads are narrow, just 2 lanes, with the River on one side and orchards on the other. City people are scared to death to drive the "River Roads." This building of the levees reclaimed more than 700,000 acres of rich peat and loam, and the Delta soil ranks among the world's best.

The Delta is known as the largest producer of Bartlett Pears. During the season, many of the ranchers shipped 1000 boxes of packed pears to the Eastern Markets every day. Peaches, plums, cherries, in fact any fruit, as well as acres of "grass" are raised in the Delta.

STEAMBOAT'S COMIN! One long deep-throated steam whistle for landing and 2 short ones to leave, 3 whistles to open the Grand Island Bridge and 4 to open the Walnut Grove Bridge. That was the Sacramento River in the days of the only means of transportation between Sacramento and San Francisco - before automobiles and good roads.

The freight boats, fruit boats and mail boat plied the River during the day. There would be a dozen or so deckhands to load the lug boxes of fruit or other produce for market at the Commission Houses in San Francisco. (We have one of the old hand trucks that they used). Hay was loaded on schooners that were originally propelled by sail - later the hay was loaded on barges and towed by San Joaquin No. 2 which was famous for its long tows - the San Joaquin No. 2 pulled the barges - on the Mississippi they push the barges.

I was the third generation on our ranch on Steamboat Slough, which is a tributary of the Sacramento. We relied on the steamers to deliver our crops to market and as our means of transportation to San Francisco. I suppose we all took the boats for granted - everyone knew the name of each boat and her Captain. Each boat was distinguishable by its own whistle which could be heard for miles - and everyone knew whether it was the Capital City, Modoc, Pride of the River, or the tow boat, San Joaquin No. 2, just to mention a few. There were two night boats - one steamer would leave Sacramento at 6 o'clock in the evening and arrive in San Francisco approximately twelve hours later - the other steamer would leave San Francisco at 6 o'clock and arrive in Sacramento approximately twelve hours later. They would stop at the landings

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MEYERS TRAVELOGUE Continued

along the way to take on or leave passengers. The steamers docked parallel to the landings - deckhands (all white!) would run out the gangplank and we'd walk on board. (The Mississippi boats all load from the prow, as they head into the docks). We would board the steamer at Courtland, at 9 PM - sleep in our reserved stateroom - awaken in San Francisco, and at our leisure (8 or 9 am) take a cab to the Palace Hotel for breakfast. We would spend the day in San Francisco - shopping - music and dancing lessons - beauty parlor - then leave San Francisco at 6 PM. We enjoyed a perfectly-served, delicious dinner while watching the sun sink through the Golden Gate - to bed at 9 or so and be awakened by a Filipino bellhop at about 2 am, at the Grand Island landing which was about 6 miles from home. An automobile would have been left for us and we would drive home and go to bed again.

My generation traveled on the Capital City or Fort Sutter. These steamers were the forerunners of the Delta King and Delta Queen which were in use on the Sacramento River from 1924 to 1941. The King and Queen were constructed with much ballyhoo and were the "last word" in luxurious inland liners. Their hulls were constructed in Scotland, in sections, and shipped via the Panama Canal to Stockton, California where the ships were built at the Stevens shipyard under the order of the California Transportation Company. Each ship weighed 1837 tons, was 285 ft. long (almost as long as a football field) with 2000 horsepower compound engines. There were 5 decks above the water line, and were as opulent as any of the early steamers. Each boat was powered by a paddle wheel 28 ft. in diameter. The cost of construction of each boat was one million dollars.

During World War II both the King and Queen were tied up at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay and used as dormitories for the Service Men. The King now is just a derelict and should be towed out the Golden Gate and sunk in the Pacific Ocean. The Queen, of course, is the legendary Delta Queen of the Mississippi.

The Sacramento River was the locale of all the old movies depicting life on the Mississippi. Will Rogers, Irvin S. Cobb and Jean Harlow are the only stars I can remember. "Steamboat Round the Bend", "Huckleberry Finn" and "Showboat", were a few of the movies filmed there. The steamers were "dressed" with two smokestacks to resemble those on the Mississippi. All the colored people used for extras in the movies were imported, as there were no Negro's on the Delta. The ranch help on the River were Japanese and Chinese, and they couldn't possibly be made "black".

The days of Steamboating on the Sacramento River are now a thing of the past. Railways, highways and skyways doomed the nearly 100 year reign of this mode of transportation. Today, the placid waters are the domain of pleasure craft - houseboats and all types of recreation. Looking back through the years at the way of life that went with them, it seems such a shame to have lost the romance and adventure of the River to more modern and progressive methods. But, then again, we couldn't survive without accepting progress - and has the romance and adventure of the River really been lost? The Delta Queen is still steaming in full glory, only now, on the Mississippi, as a reminder of another time and another way of life.

THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE

Mas Hatano presented "The Japanese-American Experience". Mr. Hatano charmingly presented the up and down experiences of Japanese immigrants. He explained that soldiers visit places with no plan to stay i.e. students, '49ers etc. Immigrants move to a foreign land not to return home. In 1882 the Chinese exclusion Act was passed and no more Chinese were allowed in the United States. As a labor replacement the Japanese began to come to the United States in 1886. They could work here 4 or 5 years and save what would be a lifetime of work money in Japan. They originally planned to return home. By 1890 there were 2000 Japanese in the United States, by 1900, 20,000. The animosity toward the Chinese shifted to the Japanese. The Japanese could not become citizens or own land. The ratio of men to women was 20 to 1--a boon for the women. They were sought after just for conversation. They loved baseball and had extensive Japanese community leagues. They were similar to the African-American Leagues though none were professional. They also enjoyed basketball and they had martial arts clubs.

In 1922 Mr. Hatano's parents came to Isleton and then moved to Sacramento. Thanks to the media's yellow peril, Native Sons, American Legion, Farm Bureau etc., another Exclusion Act was passed in 1922. No more Japanese could come to the United States. In 1921 there were segregated elementary schools in four districts in California--Isleton, Walnut Grove, Courtland and Florin. The Japanese stayed in California for their children, who were citizens and they thought America a better place for them to live.

Then came World War II. The FBI told the government they had the dangerous Japanese under control and naval intelligence declared that there was no need to evacuate. The executive order for internment was left up to the area Commander.

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JAPANESE EXPERIENCE Continued

None-the-less thanks to racial prejudice, war hysteria and poor political leadership which did not enforce the constitution, the Japanese residents in California, 1/2 Oregon, 1/2 of Washington and 1/2 of Arizona were given 7 days to report to an evacuation center. They were given a list of things they could take. They had one week to get rid of everything else. There were two permanent relocation centers in California, Manzanar and Tule Lake. Manzanar is being reconstructed for history, i.e. preservation. There were other relocation centers in Idaho, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and two in Arkansas. Children from orphanages were sent to camp and lived in children's villages. One W.W.I Veteran was interned. (Japan was on the side of America in W.W.I) Large corporations and the State fired the Japanese employees, ministers, teachers of the Japanese language and other "dangerous aliens." These people were rounded up but there never was a charge of treason filed against any of the Japanese residents.

Life in the internment camps was not pleasant. They wore ID tags. They were crowded. They had army cots for beds, one hanging light bulb and one coal stove. Men's and women's bathrooms were outside. Mr. Hatano's family had 20 ft x 24 ft for 2 parents and 4 children. The whole building was 20 x 100. They were interned at Tule Lake Relocation Center. The rent and food were free and there was a small store with tooth brushes, Kleenex and the like. There was a laundry, recreation hall and mess hall.

People could work in the camp as cooks, bakers, farmers, housekeepers, carpenters, etc. They were paid \$12 a month. Professionals, i.e. Doctors, Teachers were paid \$19 a month. They could not be paid more than the soldiers who received \$21 a month. Young people not with a family created problems. There were very rudimentary schools for example, no science equipment schools and Mr. Hatano participated in the Boy Scout program, however, they did not go camping. GIs were fed on .50 cents a day, the Japanese on .39 cents a day--lots of starch. They were given an ambiguous oath and labeled disloyal if they did not subscribe.

In January 1943 the Japanese were allowed to volunteer for the Army. A special unit was created--the 442. This unit (which drove the Germans out of Italy and France) was specially recognized by President Truman. It was the most decorated unit in the US Army. They lost 800 lives and were buried in the cemeteries as Christians, no matter what their religion. Over 9000 purple heart medals for 6000 men. 300 Japanese women served in the Women's Auxiliary Corps. When the troops needed new uniforms they had to use Women's supplies to get a good fit. 6000 others served in the little known Military Intelligence service in the Pacific. Two or three were attached to other groups. They worked as interpreters and interrogated prisoners.

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SRDHS 2003 SCHEDULE

Meetings are typically held on third Monday of each month. Tentative schedule -- Subject to change.

- January 19.....General Meeting/Annual Potluck
- February 16.....Board Meeting
- March 15.....General Meeting
- April 19.....Board Meeting
- May 17.....General Meeting
- June 21.....Board Meeting

June Newsletter

- July/August.....Summer Break
- September 20.....General Meeting
- October 18.....Board Meeting
- November 15.....General Meeting
- December.....Board Meeting

December Newsletter

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

JAPANESE EXPERIENCE Continued

Eight months before the end of the war the Japanese were told to get out of the Camps--as abruptly as they were ordered into them. In California they were abused after the war. By 1962 most of the worst laws were gone and their names were cleared. Their property had been sold and they lost most of what they had gained. In 1982 a law was proposed to study internment. The causes were listed and in HR 442 (ironic) those still living who had been interned were granted \$20,000 each.

Mr. Hatano told of the Japanese experience including the immigration, World War II and finally his American dream. The Tule Lake plaque was shown at the end. Audience questions indicated great interest in this topic.

NEWSLETTER STAFF

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"The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society Newsletter twice a year.



Sacramento River Delta Historical Society

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING & ANNUAL POTLUCK

Monday, January 19th at 6:30 pm

Jean Harvie Community Center 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove

Slide Show of the Delta

By Robert James

Please bring food for 10: A - N: Hot Dish O - S: Salad T - Z: Dessert

Please call Tom Herzog at 916-775-1479 if you have any questions

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