

# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

— *Walt Whitman*

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 17, No. 2

DECEMBER 1997

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, friends, we're about to begin a new year of activity in the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society. The key word in that sentence is "activity." The officers and board members will be working to provide interesting informative programs, to present an eye-catching display at the Pear Fair and to vitalize the Resource Center. I'd like to hope that more of the members will join in those activities:

\* Come to the meetings and applaud the presenters and hosts. OR, better yet, be a presenter and share your experiences, memories or research efforts with friends and neighbors.

\* Come to the Pear Fair. Enjoy the display and express your approval or your opinion on how to improve it.

\* Join the dedicated, hard-working members who are striving to make the Resource Center a facility useful to the community.

Mention of the Resource Center brings me to a major reason for this message. I would like to suggest a goal for SRDHS in 1998. With the Sesquicentennial celebrations taking place over the discovery of gold, the cityhood of Sacramento, and the Statehood of California taking place over the next three years, there will, no doubt, be a great increase in interest regarding things historic. The Delta communities and people are a vital part of the events of 1848-50 and succeeding decades. We find that researchers, both organizational and individual, contact SRDHS for information regarding our areas. To be able to respond we need to be organized. We have a room, the recourse center and much valuable information. We need to arranged the room with tables and chairs so that there is a hospitable work area for those wishing to explore our information. We need to catalog the data and store it so that it is readily accessible. And, most importantly, we need volunteers who can make a few hours a month available to have the room open and accessible to those wishing to use it.

The goal I would like to present for '98 — or perhaps it is really challenge to the membership is:

**BRING THE RESOURCE CENTER TO LIFE!**

If you feel that the goal is worthwhile and you want to accept the challenge, let any officer or board member know and join us in the resource center on the work day which is scheduled for January 10, 1998.

See you there,

*Terry Alchorn*

## SOCIETY NOTES

We began the second half of the year with the Historical Exhibit at the Pear Fair in Courtland. Tom Herzog continued as chairman and contributed his usual three days of hard labor aided and abetted by Jim and Barbara Dahlberg, Terry and Jayne Alchorn, and Jerry Waterworth. Dick Hawke of the School District was of great help in setting up the show. The newly refurbished auditorium was light and airy and a very pleasant place to be on a hot afternoon. The committee had to invent stands to hold the Clarksburg Historical Picture Boards as the pristine walls limited hanging. They came up with some very functional stands made from plastic pipe. We are most grateful to Bob Heringer and the Clarksburg Library who are so generous with their pictures. We hope to exhibit the Courtland High School Class pictures as usual next year when we can figure out more hanging space. For those of you who missed the Pear Fair, our exhibit includes tools, pictures, and labels all emphasizing the Pear Industry. Members who "sat" during the day were Cathy Hemly, C.J. Jensen, Dorothy Hays, Jayne and Terry Alchorn, Gene and Joann Wisemann, Roy Bergstrom, Bill and Margret Sheldon, June Werhan, Jim Dahlberg, Jerry Waterworth, and Tom Herzog. Jim, Tom, and Jerry also took the exhibit down — no minor task! We are also indebted to Sarah Simpson, Herzog Co., and Lyman Chemical. The display is not an easy venture but it is very rewarding. It's really fun to sit, people are interested, lots of old-timers show up, and everyone has a good time. Many thanks to those who made it fly. Next year we hope to have some local docents for the exhibit.

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**ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER**  
**MONDAY JANUARY 19th 6:30 PM**  
**JEAN HARVIE CENTER**

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**SOCIETY NOTES** (continued)

We have in our files a catalogue from "Nostalgic Warehouse." The warehouse is located in Texas and carries hardware that fits both historic and modern homes. It includes door plates, knobs and latches, hard to locate glass knobs and drawer pulls, etc. You are welcome to browse the catalogue in the Resource Center at the Jean Harvie Center.

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We were happy to hear from Melinda Sorenson... "I was glad to read of the Andrus Island history as my maternal grandparents (Henry and Margaret Moeckel) moved to the Delta in 1921 from the Bay Area and settled on upper Andrus Island. I noticed that you referred to the I.O.O.F. as the International Order of Forester's Hall. I believe the letters stand for International Order of Odd Fellows and that until recent years there was an active Rebekah Lodge (the female counterpart of the Odd Fellows). The Rebekah Lodge was actually named Hogate Rebekah Lodge after one of the area's founders, Philip Hogate Gardiner." (Ed. note: There must be more of you with bits of history or corrections to contribute. Please send them along.)

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Our September Meeting was another of the popular and well-attended meetings detailing the care and maintenance of some of the Delta homes. Cathy and Doug Hemly presented the story of "Ivy Banks," located on the river just above Courtland. Terry and Liz Mulligan gave us the tale of "Bonnie Brae" located on the river just below Hood. We are most grateful to the presenters and to those who provided scrumptious refreshments. (See article, p. 3)

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The November Meeting was held in the Clarksburg Library activity room. Graham Connor shared the details of his Genealogical Search and Yvonne Pylman told us how to stage a family reunion as well as the history of the Pylman family. The meeting was well attended and we are much indebted to Yvonne and Marshall for a wonderful evening, including super special refreshments. THANKS!

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The Resource Center is slowly taking form. Terry Alcorn shopped "till he dropped" and found two new cabinets to keep most of our books from the sometimes dusty environment. Clarice Johnson has made labels for all the Courtland High School Senior pictures and she and Dorothy Hays have many of the Bates Class pictures labeled. They could use some help on a few blank spots. January 10 has been declared a "work day." We can use all the help we can get so save that date—Saturday, January 10, 9 am, and come to work.

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The Sacramento Delta Chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) is looking for information about the immigration of farm workers who arrived in San Francisco from the Philippines between 1890 and 1935. They are particularly interested in when and how the workers arrived in Walnut Grove. If you have any knowledge or know anyone who does, please contact Jerry Paular (916-425-8657). Were these workers used on your ranch? Do you know the whereabouts of any of these people or, more likely, their descendants?

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It's membership time again. If you do not attend the January Potluck and join, please send in your dues soon, before our treasurer and membership chairman get lost in the pear season.

**FASHION SHOW**

The Walnut Grove Community Presbyterian Church sponsored an Historic Fashion Show and tea at the Grand Island Mansion. Mrs. Barbara Reynolds and Mrs. Nance Diggs, granddaughters of Louis Meyers (builder of the mansion) were in attendance. Historic clothing was provided by Doe Bayliss and locally by Nancy Moser, Becky Wheeler, Libby Gordon, Helen Towne, Cathy Hemly, Joanne Wisemann, Lucy Barnes, Bonnie Elliot, Bill Slawson, Janet Nielson, Josephine Lyman, and Wenona Studarus. Contemporary fashions were provided by Doncaster Dresses. The older fabrics were in a great state of preservation and still glowed. The models (Mary Ellen Hudson, Donna Hardwick, Lori Watson, Libby Gordon, Terry Alcorn, Justin Emory, Sharon Swete, Brade Martin, Dartha Jensen, Jim Gualco, Jayne Alcorn, Adrienne Young, Jennifer Thatcher, Sara Jensen, Caroline Wilson, Mary Lou Hudson, Barbara Den Hartog, Joanne Wisemann, Mary Fulster, Kim Sahi) were marvelous and a good time was had by all who attended.



22

**SEPTEMBER MEETING — ADDITIONAL HOUSES**

On September 15 at Bates School we were treated to another entertaining and informative meeting about the care and treatment of houses. This is our tenth house story and there has not been one maintenance or reconstruction project that did not take blood, sweat and tears! These historic and demanding houses also become wonderful homes.

Cathy Hemly (with Doug's help) told us the story of "Ivy Banks," the picturesquely located George Buckman Greene home. Built in 1875 on the northern tip of Randall Island, the house did have ivy arches at that time. "Ivy Banks" has remained in the same family since it was built. The George Greene family occupied the house until 1940 when his daughter Lenore Greene Hemly Allen moved in and her son, Doug Hemly, became master of the house in 1984. George's father, Josiah B. Greene, came from the gold fields to Merritt Island to raise vegetables that he sold in the mine areas. In 1850 he returned to Boston and brought his wife and 3-year-old George across the Isthmus of Panama to Merritt Island, where George grew up. When George married, he built his home across the river from his parents' Merritt Island home, on a family farm land located on Randall Island. George probably designed the house, made entirely of redwood, and certainly worked on it with his cabinetmaker uncle from Boston, Charles Crombie. George had a complete workshop including a lathe to turn the spindles. The Thompson and West (1880) version of the home was probably from a drawing made before it was built. Mrs. Green was said to have wanted something a bit fancier. The road originally went in front of the house by the river. One day after finding someone asleep in his front yard, George used his Fresno Scraper to relocate the road behind the house. George also built a steam launch kept on a dock in front of the house. In 1912 the house was raised 8 feet and placed on a new foundation as part of massive levee improvements. The reclamation district paid the \$1475 cost! One advantage of this project is a large basement which has many uses including entertainment. The river can be seen from every room. The house is slightly turned so that the north porch is protected from the prevailing wind. Charred timbers in the attic attest to the time when a river boat blew a loud blast and told George that his house was on fire. The steamboat pulled over and used their fire hoses to put out the flames. Only the roof was damaged by the chimney fire. Many pictures show the changes in the house and growth of the palm tree over the years. The tree was brought from San Francisco by George Greene and planted years before the house was built. Its roots are now buried in eight feet of sand from the 1912 levee building. The garage is almost unchanged. Other outbuildings have disappeared except for the Hensly Slough Pump house. Water used to be pumped into the slough for irrigation purposes but when the slough filled with silt, barges were scuttled at each end and the land reclaimed. This also prevented boards from going around the island whenever the river got choppy. Plumbing and electricity were

added to the house as they became available. George and Alice celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1925. In 1935 an arbor was stripped off the east side and a fireplace and chimney were added. In 1940, Al and Lenore moved a porch to the second floor and then down again later. At that time the house seemed to face the road more than the river. Doug and Cathy have returned to the 1912 outside look retaining the sunny kitchen and large rooms. The swimming pool was their first addition, then wiring, kitchen, insulation, and new windows. Then there was the 100-year paint job and always hardware to be rebrassed. Only some walking canes, a clothing rack and some of the original light fixtures remain of original furnishings. The piano is from a neighbor's house. George's mother's picture is in the living room along with his toolbox; and the desk in the sunroom replicates one that was there 125 years ago.

\* \* \* \*

Terry and Liz Mulligan related their experiences with their house located on the Sacramento River near Hood.

The Gammon family played a substantial part in the development of Richland and later Hood. In 1860, Walter Gammon, a native of Tennessee who owned land on the Sacramento River just below Richland, married a school teacher named Cook. According to the Thompson and West 1880 History of Sacramento County, Mrs. D.D. Gammon (nee Cook) owned 140 acres about ½ mile below Hood. She was born in Michigan in 1830 and lived there until coming to California in 1855. She taught school for a number of years and it is presumed she was widowed when in 1880 she was engaged in farming and fruit growing and had a "fine orchard on the Sacramento River." She had three sons and a daughter all living in 1880. Her land and improvements were worth about \$15,000. Earnest A. Gammon, her son, donated land for the Richland school which was relocated to just below the Gammon house. In 1921 the school house became a residence occupied for many years by the Massoni family and today is occupied by the Robertsons. A grandson, Earle T. Gammon, was born in 1894 in Hood and lived his entire 90 years in Sacramento County. He graduated from Sacramento High School and Oregon State College. Mr. Gammon was a nationally recognized expert in pest fumigation and worked for the California Department of Agriculture. He had a brother Cybil of Carlsbad, California, and a sister Mabel Graham of Myrtle Creek, Oregon. Great grandson, Robert P. Gammon, was born in Hood in 1918. He married Louise Johanna Kneppel of Franklin and they had a son, Robert L. Gammon, who lived as an adult in Indiana. Robert P. Gammon graduated from Sacramento High School and McGeorge School of Law. He served aboard the U.S.S. Helena during World War II and became an account executive at Foster and Kleister for 25 years. Cyril Gammon was his uncle.

### TYLER ISLAND

Tyler Island, Reclamation District #563, is located in Georgiana Township Sacramento County. The township was formed in 1855. Tyler Island lies east and north of Andrus Island, west of Staten Island and south of Dead Horse Island and Walnut Grove. It is surrounded by the North Fork of the Mokelumne River on the east, Georgiana Slough on the west and south, and on the north and northeast by Tyler and Snodgrass Sloughs.

In the early days, Tyler Slough was deep enough to accommodate barge and lighter traffic but after increased silting it was plugged at its confluence with Georgiana Slough. Plugging was accomplished by scuttling lighters. This procedure effectively annexed the town of Walnut Grove to Tyler Island. The remnant of the slough can be followed along the old levee road from Walnut Grove to Giusti's Restaurant. In 1977 the slough was mentioned in a contract drawn up between John Sharp, the founder of Walnut Grove, and A.S. Bryant of Alameda. Bryant was to fell walnut trees on Dead Horse Island and the contract stipulated that a wagon road be kept open at all times to the juncture of Snodgrass and Tyler Sloughs.

Near the foot of Tyler Island, the Mokelumne River and Georgiana Slough meet. This formed part of the historic water route between Stockton and Sacramento; the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers. The North Fork of the Mokelumne River today is an essential water conduit for the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Reclamation began on upper Tyler in 1852, at the same time as reclamation began on neighboring Andrus Island. The cost of reclamation was \$10.00 per acre. On both islands, for many years, only the drier upper ends were reclaimed or cultivated. This state of affairs was still in place in the 1890s. The original Reclamation District was Number 4. It was followed by #134, #136, #175, all now defunct. By 1880, the island measured 22.75 miles in circumference. Between 1885 and 1895 seventeen clamshell dredges worked in the lower Tyler area building levees along the Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Mokelumne Rivers enclosing the freshwater tidal swamps. Prior to 1910 the dredges were owned or rented by the landowners. The hummock on lower Tyler is a well-known Indian mound. Beneath the island run fingers of the Rio Vista gas field, one of the largest dry natural gas fields in the United States.

Tyler has, like all the "Delta" islands, flooded at various times over the years. In February 1862 it flooded and the island "looked like one with the Mokelumne River." In the big floods of March 1907 lower Tyler flooded but upper Tyler remained dry. It came within one foot of flooding Christmas Eve 1955 and was severely threatened in 1982. The biggest flood was February 19, 1986, when the east levee was topped by the Mokelumne River at the George Jensen Ranch. The island quickly filled and the floodwater crept to Walnut Grove which was protected by a hastily raised levee at the old juncture of Tyler and Georgiana Sloughs, along the Walnut Grove-Thornton Road. The Sacramento Bee reported February 21, 1986, "...a 36-member California Conservation Corps crew was laying sandbags atop a Staten Island levee that was threatened by the curious hydraulics of the three-day-old Tyler

Island Flood. The North Fork of the Mokelumne River, which breached the Tyler Island levee Wednesday, was pushing flood waters back over a downstream section of the same levee, creating a dangerous churning action against the river's opposite Staten Island bank. The fear is the water will break out of Tyler Island and, as the tides change, rupture the Staten Island levee." In another article: "The flood waters filling Tyler Island swamped several outlying Walnut Grove agricultural businesses and a few homes. It was crawling toward the main floor of Giusti's restaurant, a venerable Delta landmark, and proprietor Mo Morias, 62, was not optimistic. Looking out at the vast expanse of water that used to be farmland behind Giusti's, he said, 'The wind will push the water halfway up this building. The wind will ruin us; the water won't.' The winds were not strong Thursday afternoon and already waves were forming...Giusti's is housed in a building that Morias said was constructed in 1896. It served as a toll house for Miller's Ferry...Morias was commiserating with Bud Kruse, a long-time friend whose nearby adobe house was submerged in water up to its eaves." In March, the Bee reported, "The pumping of 140,000 acre feet of water off Tyler Island...is expected to begin Friday, more than a month after the rain-swollen North Fork of the Mokelumne River flooded 8,700 acres of rich farmland. Daniel Wilson, manager of Reclamation District #563...said Wednesday that the break in a levee on the east side of the island was finally closed Thursday afternoon." "Dutra Construction Company of Rio Vista, using one of its largest cranes and dump buckets, piled an estimated 10,000 tons of rock into the Tyler break to close it. Massive pumps, with a capacity of 415,000 gallons a minute (were) placed on the south end of the island...Wilson said it may take 75 days to drain the land..." There remains a lake and marsh at the site of the break, so much land was gouged out and distributed that it was impossible to reclaim.

The first landowner on the island was John Tyler, and thereafter it was known as Tyler Island. Tyler was the father of the riverboat captain, Capt. W.E. Tyler, who was married to Mary Ann Sharp, one of John Sharp's three daughters. The Tyler Ranch located near the head of Georgiana Slough had less than 2,000 acres under cultivation in 1880. Perhaps between 1880 Tyler sold his ranch to Joseph Friend and Louis Winters. By 1970 John Miller had arrived in Walnut Grove where he farmed the Tyler Ranch. Joseph Friend died and Miller married Friend's widow. Alex Brown arrived in Walnut Grove in 1879 and became a good friend of John Miller, thereby acquiring property on upper Tyler for the Brown family interests. Among other landowners through the years on upper Tyler were Durbin/Seymour and Lum Bun Fong. The major landholder on lower Tyler, once reclaimed, was Tyler Island Farm Co., owned by the McCormack family of Rio Vista. In the 1920s, Percy McCormack was the superintendent of Tyler Island Farm Co. At this time the company began to sell parcels to, among others, Russell Graham, George Jensen, George Wilson, L.W. McCall, Stuart Brown. Today there are roughly 15 farmers and a half dozen or so businesses.

*(To be continued in June 1998)*

**NOVEMBER MEETING**

Graham Connor outlined a genealogical paper trace of his grandmother, Edith Morse's family, Tibbons, Pinchback, Massie, Burson, and Morse. There were connections to Martha Washington, Runyons, and other interesting relatives from Virginia through Pennsylvania to Ohio and the Indian Wars to Illinois and then to Onisbo, Sutter Island, and finally to Merritt Island.

He started with Sacramento County History Books—Vanity Press books of the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s. Given a place and date of death, obituaries are very good leads. Graham found the census records of various states are good after 1850 but sketchy before that time. Property records and wills contain significant information. He also used National Archives, war records (all the way back to the Revolutionary War), pension records, state historical archives, and cousins! He mentioned the Social Security Index, Latter Day Saints records in Sacramento and the Sutro Library at San Francisco State University.

Graham's lecture was delightful—entertaining and informative; however, beware! Genealogy can be addictive. But research can make interesting vacations, too.

Yvonne Pylman explained how the Pylman family had organized a reunion 115 years after Albertie and Ralph Pylman and their seven children had migrated from Holland to Merritt Island. First she drafted some cousins, henceforth known as the "Pylman Ladies." They chose a June date when everyone is on vacation. The site, in this case, was Bates School grounds. Next a budget and a menu—potluck, beverages, barbecue, cake, and ice cream. Don't forget to rent portapotties if necessary. Choose a theme; in this case, tulips. Of the seven children, five families were available, one was a maybe, and another missing. Invitations went out in March and references were requested. The maybe and missing families heard and responded. Each branch was assigned a color for name tags, grouping, etc. Each individual was assigned a unique number based on the birth order of each generation, i.e., 23121 would be the 2nd child of the first generation, the 3rd child of the next generation of that branch, and so on.

Pictures were taken by family and generation. Someone had the good forethought to bring a video camera. Tulip awards were given and a newsletter, "Tulip Times," was sent out after the event. A good time was had by all and a year 2000 reunion is contemplated.

Yvonne read a family history that she had written and read at the reunion which we will publish in the June issue.

**IN MEMORIAM**

We must sadly report the loss of several members this year. Kathryn A. Wheeler was among the founders of the Society and continued to support us for many years. James Pylman, Edward Dutra, and Elberta Pylman were also staunch supporters of our projects and activities.

**BOOKS OF INTEREST**

\*HISTORICAL ATLAS OF THE AMERICAN WEST. Warren Beck and Ynez d. Haase.

THOMAS MORAN AND THE SURVEYING OF THE AMERICAN WEST. John L. Kinsey.

WEBER: The American adventure of Captain Charles M. Weber. San Joaquin County Historical Society.

\*THE GREAT CENTRAL VALLEY: California's Heartland. Stephen Johnson, Gerald Haslam, Robert Dawson.

THE GOLD RUSH JOURNAL OF EDWARD C. HARROW 1849. Micheal Vinson Publishers, Austin, Texas.

\*ASSEMBLING CALIFORNIA. The geology of the state: how "nature" cobbled her together. John McPhee

\* in the city/county library system

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**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.

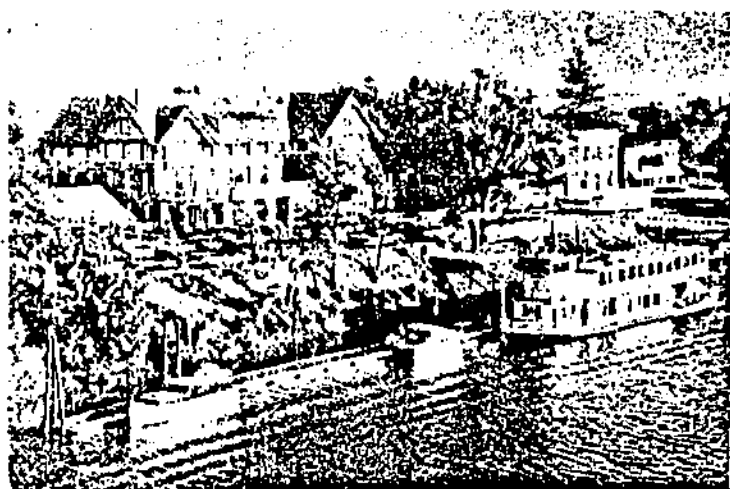
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The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (SRDHS) NEWSLETTER twice a year (December and June).

26



Boon Docks Motel | Walnut Grove



# WHY THE DELTA

The area where the Sacramento and the San Joaquin rivers meet, having been fed by the Mokelumne, Cosumnes, Calaveras and other streams, is a water wonderland comprising some 740,000 acres (or about 100 square miles) of some of the richest, peattiest farmland in the world, with 50,000 acres of meandering channels called sloughs.

In the early nineteenth century, the Delta became the territory of trappers, who sent their pelts north to the Hudson Bay Company. A few farmers settled around its edges to raise wheat and cattle, which they dispatched to San Francisco on Sailing ships. Then came the gold rush and the paddle-wheelers, carrying forty-niners to their disembarkment points at Sacramento and Stockton.

In the beginning (1772) this land was "discovered" by the Spanish under the leadership of Pedro Fages and Fray Juan Crespi, who approached from the south end of San Francisco Bay in an attempt to find a land route to Point Reyes.

At least partly as a result of deforestation by the Army Corps of Engineers, land in the Delta now lies six to twenty feet below the level of the waterways. It is protected by levees, thus providing ideal conditions for the fisherman, boaters and farmers.

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### SEPTEMBER MEETING (continued from p. 3)

In a pamphlet publicizing the new town of Hood (1912-16?), the house is described as "'Bonnie Brae' stately and sedate home of E.A. Gammon just below Hood."

The Gammon family built the house before 1900 and occupied it until 1925 when it was brought by the Jensen family. The Graf family purchased the property in the early 1950s and the Mulligans bought it in 1989. The house has a basement in the back; the first floor has a double parlor, dining room and kitchen; the second floor has two bedrooms and baths; and the third floor has a bath, a small room and a large balcony. There is a front stairwell to the third floor and back stairs to the second floor. The third floor was once rented as an apartment. There are spectacular views of the river from the upper floors. Terry reported many hazards to remodeling a house, including a broken leg. The first project replaced the garden with a pool and office. The house was out of line and had to be shored up to level—no minor task. Ceilings had been lowered and those were removed. The next project was to find and restore the beautifully grained Douglas fir woodwork. Linoleum had to be removed and floors restored. There were four chimneys for heating. The current fixtures for gas and electricity are similar to the originals. Picture rails and moldings were replaced. An elevator to the top floor has been made into closets. The style of the house is described as American Four Square. At the end we were offered a darling black kitten—free and jut in time for Halloween.

Our thanks to the speakers for an interesting and revealing evening.



96