

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 20, No. 1

JUNE 2000

SOCIETY NOTES

The millennium started with a highly successful January meeting. The potluck dinner in the Jean Harvie Community and Senior Center had everything going for it! Our President, Fran Bates, and June Werhan co-chaired the dinner which brought out the best cooking talents of the membership—the food was wonderful. Many people worked behind the scenes to make the evening complete. The "setup" crew who worked during the day included Terry and Jayne Alchorn, Lillian and Leonard Souza, Fran and Jim Bates, Tom Herzog and daughters, Clarise Jonson, Mary Fulster, Jim Dahlberg and crew, Jerry James and Gloria Santos. It seems that they also worked the kitchen during dinner. The master stroke of the evening was provided by Tom Herzog. He arranged the showing of the 1928 movie "Steamboat Bill, Jr." starring Buster Keaton. It was filmed on the Sacramento River near the confluence of the American River. Amazing to see how the facial expressions and action keep the plot line going in a silent film. The enjoyment was enhanced by 11 Towne grandchildren who led the laughter. Our thanks to all for a propitious beginning to the new year.

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Officers elected at the January meeting for the year 2000 are: President Fran Bates, Vice President Tom Herzog, Corresponding Secretary Carol Watson, Record Secretary Maryn Whitney, Treasurer Joanne Carr. Directors include: First year: Leonard Souza, Gene Wiseman, Robert James, C.J. Jensen. Second year: Marshall Pylman, June Werhan, Jim Tracy and Cathy HeMly.

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The March meeting was fabulous! Leonard Souza spoke to a packed house about the Portuguese who settled along the Sacramento River. We are indebted to Joann Wisemann and Barbara Dahlberg for refreshments that disappeared very rapidly. Our thanks to all for a wonder evening. (see article on page 6)

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PEAR FAIR—Contact Tom Herzog (775-1479) to help with the Historical Display at the Pear Fair to be held Sunday, July 30. Help is needed to set up & take down the exhibit as well as working during the day of Pear Fair.

(Society Notes continued page 6)

SESQUICENTENNIAL IV

(These two stories conclude our California sesquicentennial series.)

Chester Smith Lyman was born in Manchester, Connecticut in 1814. He showed scientific ability throughout his boyhood. He studied astronomy at Yale University graduating in 1833 and then studied theology and held a pastorate in New Britain, Connecticut, until a throat problem obliged him to travel for his health. This produced a book, Around the Horn to The Sandwich Islands and California 1845-1850, a Personal Record, from which we quote his notes from times when he wandered into our area (p. 292-307).

"Fri April 20, 1849 San Francisco to Suisun (to lay out town). \$25 feed selves and sleep on deck. Left SF at 3PM arrived Benicia at dusk.

"Saturday Apr 21, left Benicia 7AM tide out slow progress. 10 AM Suisun Bay aground til midnight. High tide brig into narrow channel.

"Sun Apr 22, went aground in 10 min, got off afternoon. Passed New York [Antioch] at mouth of the San Joaquin river. Passed Montezuma on left. Commands fine prospect of the bay. 15 miles more reached Suisun [Rio Vista]. Beautiful sight as seen from river. Brig anchored—went ashore and pitched tent encamped. (1st night had slept on cabin floor second night on deck. 30% list aground.)

"May 3 finished laying out town.

"May 4 - Salmon for breakfast—very windy. Bad news from above. Collisions whites (chiefly Oregonians) and Indians. 30-40 Indians killed 5 or 6 whites. Danger in the Mountains except in large parties well armed, the whites doubtless the aggressors. Will probably result in a general Indian war, and great interruption of gold digging.

"Sat May 5 - Running [survey?] lines up river and Ulpino Creek. Wet and swampy. Immense rush marshes extending out of sight towards the northwest.

"Monday May 7 - surveyed the north end of ranch.

"May 8 Fine day plotting.

"May 11 - Surveyed to south 7 or 8 miles returned at sunset. Someone saw a bear and three cubs.

(Sesquicentennial continued page 2)



PEAR FAIR

JULY 30, 2000 • COURTLAND, CA

SESQUICENTENNIAL (continued)

"Monday, May 14 - Finished field work of ranch. Back to San Francisco (went aground again in Suisun Bay).

"Thurs 24 bought 4 lots in Benicia \$4000. Mapping, mapping, mapping.

"July 4 Sailed for Benicia in Sloop arrived at 7. Laying out lots in Benicia.

"July 17 Started in beautiful little pleasure boat for Feather River to survey reached mouth of Sacramento River in 2¼ hours. Dropped anchor a few miles above Merritt's slough—not many mosquitos.

"Wed July 18 Hot Sacramento by now large and growing town—buildings extend over a large area.

"July 19 Sailed up river to Vernon [Verona] at mouth of Feather River surveyed town (3 mi. down river east bank) for L.E. Treusdale [Treusdale Weir]. Mosquitos abundant at night. Suffered from heat but more from mosquitos.

"July 27-28 To Sacramento 'bot' some fragments of lots. Started for Benicia.

"July 29 Stopped at Webster and cooked breakfast. No wind got through Merritts Slough and stopped at Estero de Ulpino 3 mi. above Suisun [Rio Vista].

"July 30 Started early—blowing a gale. Reached Montezuma PM. Blowing too hard to cross Suisun Bay. Put up at Mr. Hastings house now deserted. [In 1846 Landsford Hastings built his "Montezuma house", an adobe near Birdslanding/Collinsville. He is well known for his "Immigrant's Guide" which publicized the ill-fated "Hastings cutoff" which tragically delayed the Donner Party.]

"July 31 Blowing gale—grounded 2 hours. Tide off Crossed bay heavy nasty sea all wet. Benicia 4 pm no breakfast or dinner."

[By 1850 Mr. Lyman mentions moving around more and more by steamship.]

Mr. Lyman also mentions a fire in San Francisco December 22, 1849. On December 10, 1849, he writes, "Mr. Sherman Day [first California State Engineer and for whom Sherman Island is named] and I conclude to open an office together." He also mentions that he made a map of Sacramento to pay expenses on January 12, 1850, and that he sold his Benicia lots for \$17,000 on February 2, 1850. He left San Francisco for the East Coast March 1, 1850.

[In his History of the College of California, Rev. Samuel H. Wiley cites a record from San Jose which reads: "It is the understanding that Chester S. Lyman, Sherman Day, Forrest Shepard, Fredrick Billings and S.H. Wiley became a corporate body according to the laws of this State, as soon as the Legislature shall have passed the necessary acts, to hold property for the foundation of California University or College, and to be part of a board of Trustees of such university or college."]



For our last look at what was going on in the Delta between January 24, 1848, and September 9, 1850, we turn to a book co-authored by Rockwell D. Hunt and W.S. Ament. Dr. Hunt, a professor of history at U.S.C. and U.O.P, was born and grew up in Freeport. His niece, Mrs. George (Grace) Scribner still lives within a few miles of Freeport. Oxcart to Airplane is a book about transportation and its part in the development of California. The book, one of a series of four, is most readable but we are going to steal a couple of pages from the section on a trip from San Francisco to Sacramento River during the Gold Rush.

"The passage of San Pablo and Suisun bays...presented no difficulties, but near the junction of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers the trouble began", as **Captain George Coffin's** journal, for instance, gives ample evidence:

"I steered away to the northeast, following some boats that I knew were bound to Sacramento, and after about ten miles of circuitous sailing among marshy islands, I came to elevated grounds, covered with large trees, and here commences the Sacramento River; all below this to Suisun Bay is a basin of 'tule' marshes. Looking away to the southeast I can see the sail of a number of small craft up the other river to Stockton.

"The Sacramento at its mouth is about a quarter of a mile wide, but, having advanced about two miles, it narrows to five or six rods, and here begin the trials and troubles of river navigation. Both banks are so overgrown with huge oak and sycamore trees, with an impervious screen of underbrush, that it is impossible for the wind to find its way though, and there we lay entirely becalmed, while the tops of the trees are dancing in a stiff breeze, and we have now invaded the region of mosquitoes, and they are very large, savage and blood thirsty. The current is running down at the rate of three or four miles an hour, not a breath of wind, and the thermometer above 100 degrees.

"The only way to advance is to warp and tie. I run the sloop alongside of the bank, tie her to a bush, then send the boy ahead with a long line, which he makes fast to a tree and brings the other end back on board, and then he hauls away forward while I stand off to assist and coil down the line, steering the boat with the tiller between my knees. Having dragged the craft up the length of the line, we tie her to a bush again, while John runs the line ahead again; and so on, warp and tie, warp and tie, and in this way it is a good day's work to gain three miles, for nearly half the time the warp line gets foul of some snag or root on bottom and it has to be slipped and run out again. Gracious Heavens! I exclaim, and is this the way I have got to work up to Marysville? One hundred and fifty miles of this sort of navigation! I have undertaken a pretty sort of a job, to be sure. 'No matter; gold's the talisman,' as Simon Spriggins says, 'will lighten all my labors.'

"April 2—Warp and tie, warp and tie, warp and tie sun shining down in a blaze of fury, with not a cloud to screen his scorching rays; thermometer 110 degrees, not a breath to cool our frizzling livers—and mosquitoes! Oh, my conscience!

"We started at daylight this morning, and in order to lose no time in cooking, I took the Portland patent miner's cook-stove aft, so that I could attend to getting breakfast while the boy was busy running out the line and working ahead.

(*Sesquicentennial* continued page 5)

CLARKSBURG CHURCH

Our November meeting yielded so much interesting material on the churches of the Delta that we have several articles of merit. Greg Merwin graciously sent his notes, in which he says he borrowed from Bob Heringer's History of the Clarksburg Church and we are going to plagiarize both of them.

The town of Clarksburg dates from 1849. At that time there were circuit ministers who provided services on Sunday evening after their morning services in Courtland. The real beginning of the Clarksburg Community Church was around 1920 when a group of ladies, including Agnes Frazier, Mable Heringer and Fanny Darden, began a Sunday School in the schoolhouse. A vacation church school held in the summer of 1923 doubled the Sunday School population, causing serious discussion about funding a church. A committee of three, George Wilson, J.C. Marshall & Mabel Heringer were appointed to look into it.

It was decided that all interested people would be accepted and the project would operate on a cash basis. During the 1920s there was a movement to form nondenominational community churches. It was felt that by embracing Christians of various beliefs they would work and worship together and a single greater church would emerge. Negotiations were going well with the Presbyterians when the denominational leaders declared that Presbyterians would be members of the new church and other denominations would be associate members. Clarksburgers replied, "We haven't separated the sheep from the goats yet and we aren't going to now!" The Presbyterian named youth group "Christian Endeavor" remained well into the 1950s.

The Methodists were approached and with their help Mark Dauber, of England, was brought to Clarksburg as an adviser. Clarksburg wore their own creed, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself."

The early ministers were Methodist. In 1926, an energetic young bachelor, John Wilkins, was the first. The church provided him with a parsonage on Clarksburg Road. In 1927 he organized the scout troop and was scoutmaster for 8 years. In 1931, the Scout and Campfire cabins were built by the community and church members. There were many tales of camping trips led by John Wilkins. He baby-sat, helped on farms and eventually married one of the local school teachers. Church services were held in the Grammar School Auditorium. During that time Reverend Wilkins had forgotten to take the collection when Howard Reamer Sr. expertly rolled a silver dollar down the aisle to the stage—the sermon was interrupted and the collection taken. After leaving Clarksburg about 1934, Reverend Wilkins distinguished himself in the Asian missionary field.

In 1934, the church called Jesse Rudkin whose job included building a church. One of the chief fund raisers was Hop Merwin, advised by Irving Smith, one of the Holland land engineers who remained in Clarksburg. Their premise was that instead of small gifts, larger gifts would keep the donor interested in the project. The money for the church building was raised from all segments of the community and even from businesses in Sacramento that served the local farmers. Because the community hall was to serve all sections of the community even the Catholics contributed. Well known Berkeley architect, W.R. (Raymond) Yelland, who had designed several local homes, was retained. In the depression year of 1936, \$20,000 was raised and the church was built on

land donated by the Holland Land Company. It was dedicated on Easter Sunday 1937. In the late thirties the first young married couples group, called "The Thursday Nighters" was started. In 1941, they purchased new hymnals for the church. Reverend Rudkin resigned in 1941. When asked why, after successfully building the church, he replied, "Building a church always creates friction and enemies for a minister and it is a good idea to effect a change." His next church was the Federated Church in Placerville. The entire Clarksburg congregation attended one of his services followed by a picnic in Coloma. Reverend Rudkin became Vice-President of U.O.P. and its chief fund raiser.

Clarksburg next called Elliot Fischer who had boys the ages of Greg Merwin and his brother, with whom they spent many happy hours. The Reverend Fischer was a tireless visitor of the area families and instituted monthly potluck dinners which made the church a social magnet in those pre-television days. After just three years the Reverend Fischer was tapped by the Methodists to become District Superintendent. His son, Wesley, later married Pat Wilson and they resided in Courtland in the sixties. Wes later became Mayor of Hereford, Texas.

In 1944 Eugene Brackney was called and then in 1947 Howard Daulton, who would be the fifth and final Methodist minister. Another young married couples group was formed, later called "The Mixmasters". They put on several memorable variety shows and installed badly needed street signs in Clarksburg. This organization disappeared in the early sixties and curiously no similar group has been started since.

The Sunday School burgeoned under the Reverend Daulton, partly because it was well organized and partly due to the baby boom. This resulted in preliminary designs by Raymond Yelland for a substantial addition for Sunday School purposes. The council and trustees decided not to construct the addition, but instead purchased John Nevis' house on School Street for a new parsonage and sold the old one to Bob Rose.

After WWII many new suburban churches were started, but the idea of nondenominational was out of style. Instead, the mainline Protestant churches were trying to cooperate on dividing up the new areas and trying to stay out of each other's bailiwicks. During the late 1940s the Clarksburg Catholic Parish gave up on the idea of a local parochial school and asked permission to use the Scout Cabin for released time catechism studies for their school age children. The Clarksburg Church gave permission and decided to launch its own released time program for Protestant children. This continued through much of the 1960s.

Centennial Methodist was an example of such a church. The District Superintendent, Dillon Throckmorton, thought it was about time Clarksburg considered joining the Methodist Fellowship. A meeting was held between Bishop Tippet and church leaders. The Clarksburg Church was not willing to affiliate with the Methodists, part of the requirement being that the church building be turned over to the Methodists.

In 1951, the council went to the Congregational denomination and called Dr. Amos Boone from Lodi who, though in his sixties, was dynamic and, among other things, an avid fisherman. In 1955 the Sunday School addition plans were dusted off and updated by building chairmen Bill Merwin and Raymond Yelland. Bill Schauer contracted to build the building and threw in a hardwood floor at no additional cost.

CLARKSBURG CHURCH (continued)

The High School age group came to be called "The Pilgrim Fellowship" under the Congregationalists, but languished in the late 1960s. In 1958, Reverend Boone retired to Sebastopol, with his wife, where he rebuilt old sewing machines and lived well into his second century.

The church next called Bob Pomeroy whose conversational style sermons was an innovation. Martin Recio was called in 1961 and it was during his tenure that consideration of affiliation began again. Ray Burd, then Council Chairman, set up a committee chaired by Patty Merwin to consider denominations and possible affiliation. In 1967 George Westefeldt was called from the Independent Church of Christ. George was a very active leader and, among other things, became a substitute mail carrier and a 4H woodworking leader. When he discovered that the church went on vacation one month each summer, he decided the vacation had to end. Substitute ministers were located for the August Sundays and since then the church has met Sundays year round.

The affiliation committee investigated, held informational meetings, and even had a debate in which Greg Merwin represented pro affiliation and Guy Wright represented the status quo view. When it became apparent affiliation would probably be with the U.C.C., the new name for the Congregational church, George Westefeldt registered his opposition. On a spring Sunday in 1968 a vote of the congregation was taken and a short time later on Sunday evening, May 19th, the church officially affiliated with the U.C.C. and became part of the Sacramento Valley U.C.C. The church sponsored a debate on the farm labor unionization question in which the Conference Associate Minister squared off with the farm bureau's Howard Harris over Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. George Westefeldt accepted his Church's new membership by mobilizing the ministers in the Association for regular lunch meetings for their mutual benefit. He later submitted his credentials and became a U.C.C. minister himself. In 1971 Lorna Wright, in her twenties, started a high school age group which grew and continues with parental help. The Reverend Westefeldt resigned in June 1976 after over 9 years—the longest tenure so far. He went on to serve the U.C.C. church in Lind, Washington. He may have been the least appreciated minister and after he left many came to realize what a tight ship he had run.

On July 3rd of 1975 Choir Director Charlyn Connor enlisted the musical talent of the community to put on a bicentennial concert of voices and orchestra in the School Cafeteria. This effort resulted in a strong resurgence of the church choir and musical program. This was followed by genuine fireworks on the football field. The next morning newly called Jim Meadows took his place in the pulpit for the first time. Jim Meadows' wife, Kathie, was Catholic, and during his ministry relations with Saint Joseph's up the river became much closer. Jim was followed by Dennis Erickson, who was followed by the husband and wife team of pastors Steve and Pam Roberts, both of whom were ordained and worked as a team.

The present minister, Dennis Montzingo began his ministry in 1989 and is in his 11th year, longer than any of his predecessors. He has started several Bible studies and a men's group that meets monthly. One of the things of which the church is most proud is that one of the members, Michelle Bagby, is well on her way to graduating from Harvard Divinity School and will become the first minister from this church congregation.

The Sunday School which began it all has persisted through the years and is healthy today. Bob Yelland was its Superintendent for many years and was famous for his singing and his story of "the potential of the tiny seed." His successor, Gary Wright, is also well remembered, as well as Marge Heringer and Darlene Webber in more recent years. Most of the congregation learned what we know of the Old Testament from Bernice Krull's 3rd, 4th and 5th grade class.

Music has always been a major part of the Clarksburg Church. The choir began with the beginning of the church under Rev. Wilkins. The Merwin brothers, Dennis and Greg, were instrumental in guiding the voice and accompanying. In 1950 it was decided to replace the donated piano with an organ. After a Sherman Clay demonstration a Hammond Spinnet was purchased. Greg began collecting organ music. Hammonds were being sold to the rural churches while Baldwin 5s were purchased by the suburban churches. Greg commented that the Hammond was virtually indestructible. After he got out of the Army Greg was served as organist to 8 ministers to date (Nov. 1999). When he started in 1959 relying on piano music, he found that organ music did not fit on the Spinnet rack and so the Merwin brothers located, bargained for, and sold a 10-year-old Baldwin 5 to the congregation. At the first service, the organ was a little loud until Greg could judge and adjust the sound. By the late 70s the aging Baldwin 5 was disintegrating, and also by this time, organist Greg Merwin had enough confidence to approach the Council for a pipe organ. Greg located a Moller Artiste 3 rank organ in Cashmere, Washington. Dennis and Greg Merwin and Graham Conner drove a Dodge van pulling a horse trailer to Cashmere. They hooked out the pipes, unsoldered the wiring, and, with the minister's help, maneuvered the console down narrow stairs and into the van. The pipes, blower and chests were stacked in the trailer. On Sunday, March 16, 1980, the church celebrated its first pipe organ-supported service. The used organ cost \$5,500, and with new parts the total rose to \$17,000. The organ was installed by January 1981. Attention was then diverted to bells. By 1982 Charlyn Conner had organized a bell choir. Keeping it staffed has been a trial but it has a history of 18 years of beautiful sounds.

The choir also has gone on uninterrupted all these years, except during the summer. The directors who served for long periods include J.B. Long, Ken O'Daugherty, Dennis Merwin, Doris Reeves, Charlyn Conner and Tom Wallace. Isabelle Wilson served many years as pianist and then organist. Youth choirs have existed since the 1950 with Doris Reeves, Charlyn Conner, and for more than 20 years up to the present, Kathy Hunn. Kathy has put on three or four musicals over the years and just recently took the choir to Dallas. The Scout troop, approaching 75 years of age, is the second longest continuously chartered troop in the Golden Empire Council and is as strong as ever. The church has also sponsored Campfire groups and the "Community Hall" hosts two garden clubs, the Ladies Fellowship which began very early on, and Farm Bureau Women.

The Clarksburg Church, approaching 75 years of integral community involvement, serves people of all ages and fulfills the spiritual commitment to the area.

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SESQUICENTENNIAL (continued)

"The branches of the trees extend out over the river in some places forty or fifty feet and it requires much caution to keep the sloop mast clear of them. As we had just passed one of the largest of these scraggy branches and I had given the sloop a sheer in again, the warp line gave way and down stream came the sloop broadside to the current; the masthead caught in the branch and laid her down on her side. I seized the tiller and overboard went P.P.M. cook stove, breakfast and all. Oh, delightful! The masthead held fast till the inclination gave it a change to swing clear, when up she came again, right side up, so suddenly that John, who stood looking up at the ominous branch in great trepidation, lost his balance and made a backward somersault into the river, to look for his P.P.M. cook stove.

"Downstream went the sloop, and before we could stop her she had drifted some rods below where we started from this morning. Labor and breakfast lost and cook-stove gone to the bottom of the Sacramento, there to remain a memento of the voyage of the Sophronia. We had a fry-pan and coffee-pot left and went on shore, made a fire, fried some ham and eggs, and never did I relish ham and eggs so well before."

"There is a cut-off slough [Steamboat Slough today], in this river, which saves ten or twelve miles, but, being a stranger, I missed it, and took the main river, and after toiling a week, I reached the upper junction. Here the slough enters the river at an acute angle, the river half a mile wide and the slough about thirty yards; directly at the junction there is a little knoll or islet, with half a dozen great sycamores on it.

"Against this knoll were two large schooners, crowded in among the branches by a six-knot current, and just as I was passing there a third schooner was emerging from the slough. She had no sooner run her stem out into the river's current than she flew round like a fan of a windmill and drove down foul of the other two, and jib-booms and main-booms snapped off like joss sticks, and gaff-topsail and staysails became pennants.

"The river being wider here, I had the advantage of a light breeze, and at night had gained the enormous amount of twelve miles. On the 12th of April I reached the city of Sacramento, after fifteen days' labor and boiling and roasting."

..."With conditions making life on sailing vessels intolerable, the insistent demand for steam navigation of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers can be understood.

The 'Pioneer', brought out on the deck of the 'Edward Everett,' was probably the second steam launch on the river. William V. Wells, of the Boston and California Joint Stock Mining and Trading Company, made one trip to Sacramento as captain before the company broke up and the boat was sold to Simmons and Hutchinson for \$6,000. The 'McKim', 327 tons, was one of the earlier packets on this run, as well as in the service to Panama. By midsummer 1849 the San Joaquin River trade amounted to from \$50,000 to 100,000 a day at Stockton alone, according to Samuel C. Damon, who reported his impressions in his paper, 'The Friend,' of Honolulu. Early in '49 William H. Davis and his associates had anticipated the demand and ordered a steamboat from New York. Their representative, when he found that a stern-wheel boat was being built for the same service, refused to place the order. The 'Sutter', as the new river boat was appropriately named, came safely around the Horn and made big profits for 'Jim' Blair, her owner. But the 'Senator' proved the bonanza of the river fleet. This Long Island Sound steamer of 750 tons burden was purchased by Lafayette Maynare and a syndicate of New Yorkers. After the trip through the Straits of Magellan she reached San Francisco early in September 1849, where she was greeted by a delegation of four covetous capitalists. Sam Brannam, the spokesman, offered \$250,000 in gold dust at \$16 an ounce for the steamer. But the vessel was not for sale."

"It was often remarked," wrote William H. Davis, with pardonable exaggeration, "that the Senator had carried enough gold from Sacramento to San Francisco to sink her two or three times over with the weight of the precious metal. Add to this the passage and freight money, the former two ounces for the trip and the latter from forty dollars to eighty dollars per ton, and the amount received was enormous. It would probably take two or three similar steamers to convey the freighted gold, and the gold and silver coin she had earned for her owners during the height of the gold production."

We would be remiss if we did not mention a few of the 1850 residents of the Delta, i.e., Rueben Kercheval, Josiah Green, Ezekial Merritt and John Sharp. Mostly the Sacramento River Delta was, as described by H.H. Bancroft, one big swamp. More active settlement of the region began in 1851-52, after gold fever played out and California emigrant settlers had to think seriously about earning a living.

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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.

- Regular \$15.00
- Family/Business \$25.00
- Patron \$50.00
- Life \$150.00

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

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MARCH MEETING

Leonard Souza gave us a wonderful report on the Portuguese people who settled among the Sacramento River, particularly around Ryde. Leonard himself was born on the back of Grand Island near Hogback Island. He was raised in Stockton, went into the service in WWII and in 1946 returned to marry Lillian Brun and live on Grand Island. They raised two children: Leonard - now retired, farmed for 25 years and then worked for other farmers, and Lillian Brun Souza has always lived on Grand Island.

For a long time Portugal and the Azore Islands had political problems—40 different governments in as many years. Some Flemish moved onto the islands when the King married a Flemish Princess. The name Dutra comes from this migration. (Ed. note: Leonard left out the time when the Pope divided up the world with the Portuguese getting control of the Eastern Hemisphere and Spain the Western Hemisphere. He also neglected to mention Amerigo Vespucci, Vasco da Gama and Henry the Navigator, to mention only a few early Portuguese heroes.) Finally the people got rid of the monarchy and elected Antonio Salazar who provided a decent government, wages and traded with the rest of the world. All younger men (16-18) had to serve in the army, with little or no pay. Most went to Brazil, Africa or the Hawaiian Islands. They left on whalers and after two or three years jumped ship. They had a language problem in business and had a rough life. Eventually they brought over their families and entered the dairy business. Many fishermen from the Azores settled in Monterey and San Diego. They operate tuna boats today.

The nine (larger) Azores Islands and Madeira Islands (discovered 1418) were home to many of the Portuguese people who settled along the Sacramento River. The Azores were volcanic islands and, in the 1950s, 50 to 60 thousand people came to the United States due to volcanic action. The Islands are 700 miles from Portugal and 2000 miles from Massachusetts and have remained somewhat isolated. San Miguel, the largest island, is modern, tropical, and where pineapples and bananas are raised. On the smaller islands they grind grain powered by windmills, run dairies and make cheese. On the island of Pico they scratched some small farms out of the rocks; however, when a whale sighting was announced, the men were all off to sea in their boats hoping to be the lucky one to stick a harpoon in the whale. Sugar is raised on Madeira so emigrants felt at home in the Hawaiian Islands. The largest settlements (two Lisbon districts the "Lisbon" and the "Pocket") were on each side of the Sacramento River above Freeport.

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In Ryde, California, many are third and fourth generation Portuguese families. Lillian nee Brun, Leonard's wife, is fifth generation and they have a whale's tooth to remind them of days in the Azores! The newcomers fished and lived on boats, then on the levees and then moved over the levees to farm. They farmed asparagus and worked as blacksmiths. Mostly they worked on ranches during the season and fished in the winter. They also cleaned ditches, worked hay presses and took care of the stock. Some of the local names are Patrick, Rogers, Miller, Bettencourt, Silva, Souza, Brown, Rose, Machado, Castanho, Mello, Fereirra, Vegas, Gomes, Valine, Neves, Charamuga and Frietas.

In telling about the Portuguese customs, Leonard often began with "My father said." The immigrants were 90% Catholic. The largest annual social event was the three-day Holy Ghost Picnic. Hogs were killed. Queens were chosen and the dancing never stopped. Young people from the "old country" keep this tradition going. Last year (1999) Rio Vista celebrated its 100th Holy Ghost festival. (Holy Ghost Celebrations were also once held in Freeport and Isleton. There were also Portuguese benevolent societies in several river towns.)

Our thanks to Leonard and Lillian for the most enlightening talk and to Joann Wisemann and Barbara Dahlberg for refreshments.

SOCIETY NOTES (continued)

SAVE Monday, August 21, 6:30 - 9:00 PM to work in the Resource Center. We are going to make some headway on preserving articles and making the resources more available. We hope to build shelves, hang pictures and access materials. NO TALENT needed, just an interest in local history. You choose a packet of materials and decide what it is and put numbers on it—now what could be simpler than that!

* * * * *

We are sorry to report the death of Lloyd Korth. He was a long-time member and served on the Board of Directors of the Historical Society. We will miss his support. We recommend his grandmother's book, Wind Chimes in the Apple Tree for the Korth family history and wonderful background on the Portuguese people in the Delta. (see *MARCH MEETING*, page 5).

NEWSLETTER STAFF

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