# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

— Walt Whitman

**NEWSLETTER** 

Vol. 15, No. 2

DECEMBER 1995

### SOCIETY NOTES

The PEAR FAIR HISTORY EXHIBITION was a success! Set up by Barbara and Jim Dahlberg, Jerry Waterworth, and Tom Herzog. These people need HELP next year. The exhibit was open from 8 to 5 during Pear Fair. Leonard and Lillian Souza started the day with others sharing two-hour shifts during the day. This is fun! People are enjoying themselves and full of questions about PEARS and the history of the area. Plan to help next year.

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The SEPTEMBER MEETING was wonderful. The weather was perfect for dining alfresco and Mrs. Dutra was the perfect hostess. Our thanks to Mrs. Dutra and to Jim Tracy who made all the arrangements. If you missed out, you can arrange to visit the Dutra Museum of Dredging by calling (707) 364-5701. (See article on page 5.)

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The NOVEMBER MEETING held in the Clarksburg Library was another intriguing evening. Pete Hunn told of Ezekiel Merritt and his adventures during the Bear Flag Rebellion. Local touches made the presentation especially rewarding. Pete brought with him Gorden Frey, a fellow docent at Sutter's Fort, who made a marvelous mountain man. Projectionist Lois Hunn supplied the illustrations for the presentation. The crowd was large as Delta High School history teacher Jim Greene and many of his students attended. Marshall and Yvonne Pylman led the arrangements and refreshments committee with their usual success. Our thanks for a grand evening. (A detailed article will be in our June newsletter.)

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A WORD TO THE WISE. As we approach our 20th year and we have had no changes in the dues structure, it might be prudent to pay 1996 dues now. We are not aware of any memberships that have gone down and the dues are under discussion.

(See SOCIETY NOTES, page 6)

### MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT...

It is such a treat to open the mailbox and discover the newest copy of the Historical Society's newsletter! I always read the newsletter from top to bottom then put it into a drawer for unborn great grandchildren. Thank you to writer Carol Watson and editor Kathy Hutchinson — two of the many people who make the River Delta Historical Society run. We need more people like Carol and Kathy!

The Nominating Committee is assembling the 1996 board and Society officers and, as always, is looking for volunteers to serve. If you are asked, please say yes!

The current board is steering the Society in some exciting directions. The first is to launch a membership drive in January with the goal of increasing our membership rolls by at least 25%. Everyone who lives in, everyone who grew up in, and everyone who appreciates our community should be a member of the Historical Society. How about membership as a stocking stuffer!

Your board has authorized the reprinting of the Society's book <u>Historic Homes of the Sacramento River Delta</u>. This popular book will be published in the spring of 1996 and will be available for sale.

The board is also supporting a project to help the Society answer frequent requests for historical data used in Environmental Impact Reports. Community groups from up and down the river will soon begin the massive task of identifying and describing all of the historical sites in the river delta. The board agreed that no one can decide as well as local people what is important and what should be included in a study of this type.

Save the evening of Monday, January 15, 1996, for the Annual Meeting and Potluck Dinner. This year's theme is "Then and Now." Robert James will be presenting a slide show of old photos of local scenes and contrasting them with a slide taken from the same vantage point today. Robert is an excellent public speaker, and you will enjoy both the topic and the speaker. Further details about the dinner can be found below. Expect a flier in early January.

See you at the Annual Meeting!

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER
MONDAY JANUARY 15th
JEAN HARVIE CENTER

6:30 PM

### RUNYON FAMILY HISTORY

The March General Meeting about the two Runyon houses piqued an interest in the history of the Runyon family. We have copies of two genealogical records. One is a book owned by Clarence Pratt's Grandmother (a Runyon descendant) and the other is a journal found in the William Neely Runyon home. The Runyons are related to many families that have lived in the Sacramento River Delta area.

Phineas Runyon, born about 1742 in Hunterdon County, New Jersey, of French descent, married a woman surnamed "Coats," of Dutch descent. They had 14 children; two died young and the rest lived long lives. Phineas moved to North Carolina about the beginning of the American Revolution. In 1795 he moved to Madison County, Kentucky. In 1813 he joined the Shaker community and moved to Mercer County, where he died in 1832. One of the sons, Michael Runyon, born 1772 in New Jersey, married Nancy Blackwell and had 14 children between 1798 and 1827. He moved to Preble City, Ohio (1812) and eventually to Lockport, Will County, Illinois (1829) where he died in 1856. Many of the Runyon family members and others moved back and forth between the Sacramento River Delta and Lockport, Illinois during the mid 1800's. Michael's oldest child, a daughter Mary born in 1798, married Louis Kercheval, and among her ten children is Reuben who settled in the Sacramento River Delta on Grand Island.

The second child of Michael Runyon, Armstead, was born in Madison County, Kentucky in 1800. He married Anna Hornbecker and after her death he married Mary Crawford, in 1840. Armstead's first 14 children were born in Lockport, Illinois. Henry Armstead Runyon (born 1849), the 14th child, was the last of Armstead's children born in Lockport. The last 7 were born in Onisbo, California. Armstead and his 4th child, Solomon Blackwell Runyon, and his 6th child, Orrin Randolph Runyon, came to California in the 1850's and began to farm on the Sacramento River. Armstead's last child, Walter Scott Runyon, died at the age of 1 year in Sometime after 1867 Armstead moved to 1867. Santa Rosa, California. The children scattered Child number 7, around California and Oregon. Alexander Newton, moved back to Lockport.

Armstead's eldest, daughter Amelia Ann Runyon, born in 1821 in Ohio, married Joseph Eustace Pratt of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1837 and moved to California. After 20 years and four children the marriage ended and she married George Andrus. After he died in 1869 she married Robert Hall. One of the Pratt-Crew descendants married a Figg and another married George Adams.

Solomon Blackwell Runyon married Adeline Bloom. The Blooms migrated from Iowa to settle nearby present day Hood and Franklin. In 1868 they adopted a two-year-old niece of Adeline's, Sara Elizabeth Morrow (Sadie). Sadie married Charles Ripon and had a daughter Ora. Ora married Homer Backwell and then Paul Amick. She and Paul Amick had a son, Paul Amick Jr.

In 1859, Orrin Randolph Runyon married Martha Evelyn Place of New York. George Place Runyon (1863) and Laura Matilda (Martha?) (1868) were born in Lockport, Illinois. Howard Wright Runyon was born in 1876 in Onisbo. He lived four years. George Place married twice but lived in Illinois. Laura Matilda Place married Harry Crouch and later Robert Dorsey. She lived at Onisbo.

William Neely Runyon, Armstead's 15th child, was born in 1856 in Onisbo. He married Lizzie Collins, a daughter of James Collins of Grand Island. They had two children, Silas Mercer and Gertrude. After the death of William, Lizzie married "Capt" E.R. Stephenson who captained the "Delta Queen." Silas Mercer married Adele Raap, a distant cousin. Gertrude married William Crane.

To go back to Michael and his third child, son Jarred (Armstead's brother) who married Rebecca Massey—their second child, daughter Sarah, married Nelson Bump. Sarah Runyon and Nelson Bump had four children, the eldest of which, Lydia J. Bump, married Jessie Thomas and their youngest daughter, Angeline Sarah Bump, married Thomas Dean. One of Lydia's daughters, Elta Thomas, married Ernest Gammon, and her sister, Hallie Thomas, married Henry Derr. Other descendants of this line include Eleanor Bishop Bunnell and Mark Sullivan.

Today, 1995, there are still Runyon descendants living and farming in the Sacramento River Delta.

### WALTER MANSFIELD BROWN — EARLY RYDE RESIDENT

(Millie Brown Wenzell of Hillsborough, California, after reading the article "Grand Island II" in the Winter 1994 Newsletter, submitted this short biography of her father, Walter Mansfield Brown.)

Mr. Brown was born in Lake County, California in 1873, the fifth of nine children. Little is known about his childhood with the exception that he went to the country school along with children from a local Indian tribe and learned to speak their language.

In his twenties he was employed by a fur trading company as an accountant and sent to Alaska, first to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands and then to the Pribilof Islands. After three years or so he returned to California and joined members of his family who had settled in the Delta. During this time his family became acquainted with the Harvie family who had emigrated from Canada. As a result of the friendship, three Brown family members married three Harvie family members. W.M. Brown's first wife was Kate Harvie who died in childbirth. Mrs. Wenzell's half brother, Walter M. Brown Jr., was Jean Harvie's first cousin.

W.M. Brown bought property in the Holland Tract and the strip of land at Ryde on which he built the general store and his house, which was located on the site of the present Ryde Hotel.

### SHERMAN ISLAND

Sherman Island is the southwestern tip of Sacramento County. The Sacramento River passes Point Sacramento, the western end of the island, as it joins the San Joaquin River to form Suisun Bay. The Sacramento River channel runs along the west side of what came to be known as Sherman Island. The San Joaquin River runs along the eastern edge of the Island. Today, Three Mile Slough separates Sherman Island from Brannan and Twitchel Island on the northeast end of the island. Mayberry Slough, located in the western central part of the island, drains Sherman Island. After reclamation Sherman Lake remained on lower Sherman Island. Prohibition 1919-1933, bootleggers operated illegal stills hidden among the thick underbrush on lower Sherman Island.) Sherman Island was settled by Robert Beasley in 1855. Previous to this it was a large low tide island that the forty-niners had to get past on their way to the Gold Fields. To sail across San Francisco Bay and into the Carquinez Straits was no problem. Then, most boats spent a night on a sand bar in Suisun Bay waiting for the tide to float them off so they could seek the ever changing channel in the mud flats that was the beginning of the Sacramento River.

The Island is named for Sherman Day, U.S. Surveyor General in California from 1868 to 1871. He was the son of Jeremiah Sherman Day, President of Yale University. Sherman Day (1806-1873) was a noted civil and mining engineer. In 1855-56 he and George Goddard located (surveyed) a wagon road across the Sierra Nevada. Mr. Day was a California State senator, 1855-56. In 1855 he was a trustee of the college of California which became U.C. Berkeley. A collection of his letters to his father is in the Bancroft Library. From 1856 to 1864 he was superintendent of Quicksilver Mine at New Almaden, Sherman Day was briefly Santa Clara County. Superintendent of Las Mariposas Estate in Mariposa County.

A later business partner of Day's, Chester S. Lyman, in his book, Around the Horn to the Sandwich Islands and California, 1845-50, describes his adventures as he went to lay out the town of Suisun. They left San Francisco by brig about 3 PM The next day, and arrived at Benicia by dusk. April 21, 1849, the party left Benicia at 7 AM. It was slow going. The tide went out and they were aground in Suisun Bay at 10 AM. They were there until midnight when the tide floated them off. Sunday, April 22, they went aground again but got off in the afternoon and sailed past New York Landing (Antioch) at the mouth of the San Joaquin River, Montezuma on the left, and in 15 miles more reached Suisun (Rio Vista today). It was "a beautiful sight, the brig anchored and we went ashore and pitched a tent. We had spent the first night on the cabin floor, the second night on deck with a 30% list when aground." On May 3, Mr. Lyman finished laying out the town and proceeded, with other surveying commitments, up to the Feather River. December 10, 1949 Mr. Sherman Day and I concluded to open an office together." Chester Lyman studied Astronomy at Yale University before he set sail for California. We are reminded of Col. Mason telling John Sutter he could not have a claim at Coloma until the State was surveyed. There was a lot of work to be done!

Reclamation started on Sherman Island District #50 in July 1865. The district included 5972 acres on the lower end of Sherman Island. This district was reorganized in 1868 with trustees A.J. Bigelow, John Clark, and E.C. Boggs. In October 1865 District #54 was organized to include the northern half of Sherman Island. In 1868 the district was reorganized with trustees J.M. Upham, John McCall, and Albert Little. The levees were completed in 1870. The levees, 35-50 feet wide at the base and 4 feet above the high water mark, were reported finished in January 1873.

According to The Tule Breakers by John Thompson and Edward Dutra, "The reclamation and preservation of Sherman Island cost \$500,000 by early 1874. In 1875 the troublesome lower 4,500 acres were abandoned and much of the remainder of the island was given a levee 12 feet high and 120 feet wide at the toes. These dimensions were dictated by the peat land used. Peat was porous and the interior elevation of the island declined through natural and induced oxidation. Seepage occurred and was compounded as on Sherman when the levees were built with material taken from the river banks just outside the levee, which burrow pots filled with water." The entire island flooded in 1878 and was still being rebuilt in 1880. Reclamation district numbers were 252 in 1878 and 341 in 1880. In 1995, 341 is the reclamation district number.

Sherman Island Reclamation District was unusual as it did not own a dredge. They rented if they needed one. Four dredges worked in tandem around Sherman Island in 1900. John Franks (Franks Dredging Co. as in Frank's Tract), a contract dredge owner, is credited with the reclamation of the Dos Rios Tract—the abandoned lower portion of Sherman. It was reclaimed after 1900. "The "Sacramento" and the "San Joaquin" were 20-inch hydraulic dredges built in 1913 to widen and deepen the Sacramento River below Grand Island so that "prospective flood flows that passed through the river proper and the bypass system might be carried into Suisun Bay without unduly threatening reclaimed land."

In 1918 there was extensive dredging along the Sacramento River near Sherman Island. "A cut was completed in 1918 opposite the constricted Horse Shoe Bend which resulted in the creation of Decker Island. Major segments of the river's right bank were removed between Cache Slough and Collinsville, as were large slices of Grand, Brannan, and Sherman Islands. The 100-acre Wood Island and adjacent shoals opposite Rio Vista were removed. The resulting spoil, amounting to tens of millions of cubic yards was poured into Sherman and Decker Islands, lower Brannan and Grand Islands, and along the right bank below Rio Vista."

### SHERMAN ISLAND (continued)

The island flooded most recently in 1969. On January 10th, during heavy rains, a "boil" expanded rapidly into a levee break 270 feet long. Firemen evacuated families from 4 pm to midnight. Army engineers closed the gap in early February. 33 farmers lost homes, machinery, and crops. There was no insurance for people 8 feet below flood level. After the levee broke it took months to pump out the By March the pumps were lowering the water about an inch a day. The equivalent of using a thimble to empty a bath tub. Peat bogs were being created and rock hard mounds were forming from the churning of the ground when the water rushed in. The upper end near Three Mile Slough was dry enough for some planting and gas wells were being cleaned up. In August Highway 160 across the island was usable but there was still water on both sides of the road.

Early farming successes on reclaimed tule land on Sherman Island were well recorded by the press. The Oakland Transcript of January 25, 1872, reported that "native rice cultivated by D. Perkins, former Oakland seedman had reached 1 foot in height." The article also stated that cotton grown in the Sacramento Delta area was as fine as the cotton grown in the Southern United States. Francisco Call Bulletin of June 6, 1871, reported that a daily steamer was stopping at Sherman Island and that harvesting had commenced. Sacramento ships passed the island daily but none stopped. Others stopped in Antioch overnight, so San Francisco to Sherman took 24 hours. With a "commodious and substantial wharf" the Steam Navigation company stopped today and took the first passengers. According to D.L. Perkins, last Monday, the 5th, the first header was put into operation cutting barley grown plump with a large yield. The peat land lent itself to growing asparagus. When 90% of the asparagus in the United States was grown in the Sacramento River Delta, Sherman Island was one of the largest areas. Tomatoes and corn were also common crops. Today there is still farming on the The State of island but the future is insecure. California continues to buy sections of the island presumably to create wetlands and measure salt intrusion.

In 1871, a post office was opened in the small village of Emmaton located on the Sacramento side of Sherman Island near the middle. After flood closings the post office opened again in 1905 to close Joseph Upham was the first finally in 1918. Postmaster. The hamlet of Emmaton located on the west side of Sherman Island long ago disappeared. Emmaton was located 6 miles south of Rio Vista and It was situated 8 miles east of Collinsville. approximately opposite Toland's Landing, Solano County. Toland's Landing was formerly known as "The Twin Houses" after the James Gillis rancho, "Twin House Rancho." The rancho was sold to Col. Robert Beasley who, with his brother and in association with Joseph Toland, operated the "Twin House Ferry" between Emmaton and Toland's Landing. After Beasley's departure, Toland and son operated the ferry. The name Emmaton is still used by hydrologists to denote the average point of saltwater intrusion.

There have been four School Districts formed on Sherman Island. In 1870 Sherman School District started. The schoolhouse was located on Mayberry Slough on the west end of the island. The largest enrollment was in 1874 when there were 34 pupils. In 1879 there was no school due to flooding. In 1881 the whole island was submerged and Sherman School District is not mentioned again. In 1874 a new district, Emmaton, was organized near the town of Emmaton on the Sacramento River side of the island. The largest enrollment was in 1878 when there were 23 pupils. Some of the Clerks of the Board, who ran the school, were Dr. D.G. Perry, I.M. Upham, J.E. Baker, A.J. Bigelow, and J.M. In 1879 there was no school due to Upham. flooding, and in 1881 the island submerged and the Emmaton School District is not mentioned again. In 1903, J.M. Upham was Clerk of the newly organized Sherman Island School District. The schoolhouse was located near where the Emmaton School had been before the flood. The largest enrollment was in 1919. The school remained open through World War II but was joined to the Isleton District in 1947. The Riverside School District was new in 1906. The schoolhouse was located on the San Joaquin River side of Sherman Island midway along the shoreline. The District maintained a one-room school sometimes and sometimes a two-room school. Teachers came from Antioch. In 1926 Howard Pease, a well-known children's author, taught grades 4 through 7. In 1928 with two rooms and 36 pupils, Ruth Wightman was Principal. By 1937 she was teaching grades 1-8 with 20 pupils. The Riverside School District continued until 1946 when it was suspended and listed with Isleton Union.

About 1918 when the Walnut Grove Bridge opened, the old Grand Island pivot bridge which connected upper Grand Island with the Pierson District near the head of Steamboat Slough, was floated down river and reassembled to span 3-mile Slough at its mouth, thus connecting Brannan and Sherman Islands.

In 1967 the public gained access to Sherman Island. A facility for parking and boat launching was established by the State Department of Fish and Game and Sacramento County. Sportsmen (hunters and fishermen) had been "squatting," building blinds, and camping for years. This resolved the battle raging since before 1946 between the island being farmed or left in its natural state overgrown with tules. Now the farmers are free to farm and the hunters to shoot ducks and geese and the fishermen to fish for bass and catfish.

(Our next islands in the series will be Brannon and Twitchel to be followed by Andrus and then Tyler and Staten.)

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### SEPTEMBER MEETING

Jim Tracy arranged one our finest meetings. It was a beautiful evening at the Dutra Museum of Dredging. There was no wind and everyone enjoyed their brown bag dinner under the trees in the well-kept yard. After dinner we prowled through the museum/home. It was hard to know whether to pay attention to the exhibits or the home. The house was built by State Senator Thomas McCormack in the early 1900's and is still in top condition and was obviously a well-loved and well-kept home. It is completely furnished, and has eucalyptus woodwork, and gorgeous views.

We learned a lot about dredges and dredging— How the dredges stay put and how they walk along the edge of a levee. How life is on the dredges and in the lever rooms. How the tugs move dredges and barges. And how the Dutra Companies operate the world over.

Many thousands of acres of delta land was reclaimed by hand, but by 1875 floating steam shovels and then the sidedraft clamshell dredge took over. The Dutra family has been involved in dredging since Captain Joseph Miller, great uncle of Edward Dutra (the museum founder), began over 100 years ago. Ed Dutra spent World War II dredging channels into small islands in the South Pacific. No channel—no supplies. Mr. Dutra established the Dutra Dredging Company in 1955. The Dutra Companies, run by William Dutra, are involved in channel and levee maintenance all over the world.

The museum has many models of dredgers, barges, tugs, and cranes. There are also drawings and photographs. One of the exhibits is a beautiful set of carpenter hand tools. There are several paintings and a mural by Marty Stanley depicting the development of the Dutra Dredging Company. The latest craft is an underwater excavator that operates like a backhoe. We wonder what some of the earlier Dutras would think of that!

After our tour of the Museum/Home, Linda Dutra told us about the family and the business while explaining about the Mural. We are indebted to Mrs. Dutra, her granddaughter, and Debbie Commings who helped us through the exhibits. It was an entrancing evening!

You need an appointment to view this charming spot. (707-374-5701) Maybe your child's (or grandchild's) teacher would like the class to visit and you could tag along.

# WALTER BROWN (continued)

In 1916, he married Marion Stanley Aldrich, who is the mother of his second child, Mrs. Mildred Brown Wenzell. Her parents had known each other for many years.

A few years after they married, Brown sold the Holland Tract property, left the general store as the responsibility of his brother and in 1924 purchased a Spanish green olive import and packing company in San Francisco. The little house in Ryde eventually burned and he sold the property to Mrs. Gianetti who built the present hotel. He finally sold the general store and left the Delta except to return with his wife to spend time at their ranch, the Aldrich Ranch, down river from Ryde. The ranch had been purchased at auction by Marion Aldrich Brown's father in 1896.

One of our Oral Histories "Childhood Memories of the Courtland area 1888" told by Marion Aldrich Brown is available in the Resource Center and adds to this colorful local family history.

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The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER twice a year (December and June). The address of the Society is P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690.

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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	 \$6.00
_	 \$12.00
•	 \$20.00
_	 \$50.00
Life	 \$150.00

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### **SOCIETY NOTES (continued)**

Marilyn Guida, a researcher from the Vacaville Museum (213 Buck Avenue, Vacaville), spent an afternoon in our Resource Center and found some materials for their continuing exhibit on the "flow of History." She also contacted Kathie Graham Hutchinson, who lent some early Delta photos for use in their current exhibit "Tales of the Delta." The emphasis is on Solano County but there is a lot of meaningful material for us. The exhibit is open 1-4:30, Wednesday through Sunday until May 12, 1996. There is a garden along one side of the Museum with native California plants.

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The RESEARCH CENTER has the Courtland High School senior pictures that hung in the hallowed halls. HOWEVER, people have borrowed them over the years and seem to feel that see one cares about them. NOT TRUE. We would like to have the classes or individuals who have "borrowed" the pictures of the classes of 1928, 1931, 1955, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1964 return them, or copies if you are really attached to them. (Some good gremlin just returned the class of 1921. Thank you, good gremlin.) We are labeling all of them with the names of the graduates and we exhibit the ones that have 10-year anniversaries each Pear Fair. We are very fond of them and can't believe they look that good over the mantel. If you have one of the lost pictures and have forgotten to return it, PLEASE do so. Call Jerry Waterworth at 775-1583, or leave it somewhere anonymously with a note to return it to the Historical Society. No questions asked!

# THINGS TO DO

Discovery Museum, 101 I Street, Sacramento Continuing exhibit on the Folsom Power House and electricity.

Folsom Power House, Power House Grounds, Folsom

Folsom Museum, 823 Sutter Street, Folsom

Vacaville Museum, 213 Buck Avenue, Vacaville

Walnut Grove Community Church Home Tour, June 8th

# IN MEMORIAM

George William Gutenberg Smith

George William Gutenberg Smith died in Courtland October 9th at 92 years of age. George was a grandson of George Augustus Smith who migrated to the Sacramento River Delta from Germany by way of Illinois after the mid 1800's. George Augustus Smith settled on Grand Island on what became the Pacific Fruit Farm. He obtained the property near Courtland on which he lived and left to his son Edward. William J. Smith, George Augustus' son, and George, William's father, farmed the Hiawatha Ranch on Grand Island where the "Castle" was built. The George William Gutenberg (mother's maiden name) Smith family lived on the Diamond S Ranch near Courtland for many years. We will miss this pioneer descendant as a source of our heritage and a supporter of our society.

Nora Kuhagen Baudin

Nora lived many years in other parts of the world while serving in the Army Nurse Corps. Before and after the service she lived in the Delta and supported many community organizations. We will miss her support and optimistic outlook.

Harry Rasmussen

Harry, a Hollenbeck descendant who farmed on Ryer Island, was very active in the Historical Society, serving on the Board of Directors for many years. He worked on many projects and donated materials to the Resource Center. His knowledge of the local area and resources are irreplaceable.

Margaret Leary Gualco

Marg was a member of a pioneer Delta family and a staunch supporter of the Historical Society. We will miss her contributions and her additional support.

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Co-Editor	
Typist	Judy Johnson

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SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY P.O. BOX 293 WALNUT GROVE, CA 95690 non profit
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