

SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Thank you members
and friends, for continuing to
join us on our journey.*



And, welcome to a new year, as we embark on a journey to safeguard and celebrate the captivating heritage of our unique river region. Nestled at the confluence of history and nature, our society is dedicated to preserving the stories, traditions, and cultural tapestry that define the Sacramento delta. Our mission is to bridge the past with the present, ensuring that the vibrant history of this remarkable area remains a living legacy for generations to come. From the indigenous communities that first called this land home to the pioneers, farmers, and visionaries who shaped its destiny, we are the custodians of a narrative woven with threads of resilience, innovation, and the ebb and flow of the rivers influence.

The Sacramento River delta, with its rich history and natural wonders, reflects the continuous journey of our society. The new year offers a time for introspection, a chance to delve into the stories and narratives that have shaped our community. Just as the delta's ecosystem undergoes a period of rest and rejuvenation, our society too is poised for growth and transformation.

Last year we began working on new programs that we hope reflect the needs and desires of our diverse membership. Our twice-yearly *newsletter* will be augmented with a yearly *Journal*, filled with stories, essays, commentary, and images that highlight not only the past, but chronicles the present and starts a conversation about our region's future. *Our Voices of the Delta* program, which focused on regional oral history, will expand to include more personal, intimate stories, narratives, and anecdotes of what it is like to live, work and visit the Delta. We plan to *digitize* many of the resources that are in our *community resource center* and make them more accessible on our *newly revised website*.

The Center will continue to be open many Tuesdays or by appointment.

We'll also partner with other historical, social and community organizations, and libraries throughout the region, to offer programs and events outside our usual meeting space at the Harvie Community Center in Walnut Grove, and offer an occasional virtual program, as well.

We've long thought of ways to honor the landmark businesses, individuals, and organizations whose presence in the Delta make a difference. Our first inaugural award will be presented to Mark Morais as a representative of the Giusti family's almost century and a half of affording hospitality, food, and cheer to the

heart of the Delta. “Their iconic eatery **Giusti’s Place** was a second home to many of us, before being destroyed by fire in 2021.”

On *Tuesday, March 17*, we’ll resume our third Tuesday of the month spring and fall *community talks* with a program featuring the stories of three centuries of Delta women, followed by programs in April, May, September, October, and November.

We hope you’ll join us in our efforts. Like to ferret out stories, have an eye for design and layout? Want to contribute articles, essays, news, local happening, book reviews, oral histories or other materials to our upcoming Journal or newsletter? If that isn’t your thing, we have lots of other ways for you to engage. **Volunteers** are needed to conduct original research, archive, and digitize our materials, collect oral histories, transcribe video and audio tape and document images in our resource enter. We’re also looking for folks to help us video our programs and create little bits of history spots on You Tube, help on special events and contribute to our website.

The delta, haven for diverse flora and fauna, serves as a reminder that that delicate balance we must maintain to ensure the legacy of our community endures for generation to come.

In the spirit of the changing seasons, we invite you to join us in embracing the coming months with anticipation and hope. Together we can continue to preserve and celebrate the unique history of the Sacramento River delta.

Maryellen Burns, President



“The Delta” is an annual award celebration designed to honor the people, places, spaces, or traditions that make the Delta a distinct gem in the heart of California.

Join us Saturday evening, April 27, 2024, at the Ryde Hotel to honor Giusti’s Place, and the Giusti’s families almost 150 years of serving hospitality, food & cheer to the Delta.

Check our website – srdhs.org, Facebook page or srdhshs@gmail.com for more details.


Sacramento River Delta Historical Society
 PO Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690
Srdhshs@gmail.com



Preserving the stories, traditions, and cultural tapestry that define the Sacramento Delta.

THE PACIFIC FRUIT EXPRESS: IT'S RISE AND FALL

BY KATHLEEN HUTCHINSON



As soon as the gold spike was hammered to pin together the transcontinental railroad at Promontory, Utah the need arrived for refrigerated express to deliver the produce of the Golden State. In the East, dairy, meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit were transported by train on a limited basis --mainly short hauls. But, from the Pacific Coast it was another challenge altogether. As early as 1869 pears and grapes were successfully shipped from California. By 1885 peaches were added and in 1895 California grown oranges and lemons. (California oranges and lemons were preferred to Florida citrus even though they cost more. Theretofore citrus was imported from Italy and Sicily. California Fruit Transportation express (CFT) was an early player, but its high rates attracted competitors: Edwin T. Earl's, Earl Fruit Co. and California Fruit Express to name two.

The produce box cars, called reefers (refrigerators), were made originally of Oregon fir with tongue and groove siding, roofs, floor, lining and at the time a small side door. Four hatches were provided in the roof for icing the ice bunkers. The cars had steel rods and vertical posts to lighten the frame, steel under frames and iron couplers. Much later the cars were built with a steel superstructure and knuckle couplers. The reefers were painted orange or orange/ yellow. The reefers were ice-cooled. The ice was delivered to the cars from an Ice deck and shoved through the hatches into the bunkered end of the cars. It was no different than the Iceman (Union or National, etc.) delivering a cube of ice to the kitchen icebox at the time.

Much of the ice in the early days was harvested near Truckee, California. Truckee is well known for very cold winter temperatures. The ice harvests along the Truckee River were controlled by the Boca Ice Company at Boca and the Summit Ice Company at Prosser Creek. Newer companies included those at Rocky Run, Bronco and Floriston. All these companies later came under the control of the Union Ice Company but before they could organize all the smaller companies, the National Ice Company entered the picture, controlling those companies in the Bronco/ Floriston area. By 1910 the "Big Two" owned all the ice production in the Truckee basin - from Tahoe City, California to Verdi, Nevada. The premises consisted of ponds, warehouses, caves, and embankments. A few crumbling caves and embankments remain.



Other properties around Donner Summit were also harvested, notably Angela, Mary, Azalea and Webster Lakes and Ice lakes (Serene Lakes) where the icehouse later became part of an early resort. The Southern Pacific operated its own ice ponds at Elko, Nevada which were used for re-icing. These ponds provided all the ice for Northern California and Southern Oregon both for wholesale and retail use. It was stored in an icehouse which had three-foot deep walls of packed sawdust to provide insulation.

In 1905 S.P. joined UP and Armour Car lines forming a fruit express business. There were many ice stops along the way. Once the SP met the UP (Union Pacific) at Ogden, Utah icing resumed at Laramie, Wyoming and North Platte, Nebraska. UP used the Burlington Route into Chicago with icing stops until Chicago where middlemen bought the produce at auction and further distributed the produce. As trains improved in time intermediate ice stops were discontinued.

The fruit express only carried 40% of the traffic and it needed more income to build the cars which was expensive. In 1906 because of new ICC regulations, the Harriman company, which controlled the SP and its subsidiaries, was advised to incorporate its fruit express business as its own company. That created the greatest refrigeration car line in -- America Pacific Fruit Express. The SP gave UP/Armour 6 months' notice. Per business practice of the era, the initial subscriptions of stock included all the residents of Salt Lake City and at \$1.00 each Pres. W.H. Bancroft (11,996 shares), P.L. Williams, D.E. Borley, J.A. Reeves, and F.H. Knickebocker. It was in business immediately with 6,600 cars (reefers). In spring and summer fruit and vegetables were shipped from the southwest of the system, in the fall potatoes from its Northwest, and in winter citrus from its Southwest. Publicists in later years wrote "PFE followed the sun."

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To stimulate freight shipments along its lines, Southern Pacific aggressively promoted agriculture as one of the freight beneficiaries. For example, it aggressively promoted apricots and Delta celery and pears. Pears were handled in Roseville for icing and along the way at Sparks, Elko, and Ogden then onto the Union Pacific system. As for celery, blight and over farming shifted the crop to the Delta. By 1921 the shipping centers were at Walnut Grove, Stockton, Sacramento, and Antioch. Between 1927 and 1934 90% of the celery crop was raised in the Delta. (The Western Pacific Railroad, also a produce shipper, built a spur from Lodi to Terminous where it shipped culled celery for livestock feed. The culling chute is on the National Register of Historic Places).



Green celery was raised in California and Florida. It was introduced by the Chinese in the early 1900's. It was known for tenderness, crispness, sweet flavor, and absence of strings. By banking celery, it was blanched and produced a distinctive flavor and raised in Utah.

In 1909 SP built its first ice plant at Roseville. SP was contractually responsible for all icing and refrigeration of cars on the SP and UP. It eventually owned 19 ice manufacturing plants but still used a small portion of natural ice when needed at Elko, Nevada, Donner/ Boca, California and Laramie, Wyoming. In 1920 it was the largest ice plant in the world.

As early as 1909 carloads were pre-cooled. The loads were at field heat on arrival 70° to 80° or more. For two hours cold air was blown into the cars through the doors, circulated and drawn out through the bunker hatches via heavy canvas ducting. The temperature dropped 40°. Then the car was iced at the ice deck.

Water was frozen in 300-pound cakes in rectangular molds, removed and stacked 15 feet high in daily storage rooms for immediate (summer) and winter storage rooms for later use.

It was delivered from the storage rooms to the icing deck on a conveyor belt. On the busies days of summer and average 2700 tons were delivered. Ice was spotted on the deck under burlap to shield the sun's heat. A pickman hooked a block and slid it across a plan towards and open bunker. As the ice block was moving a barman would break it in half and guide into the bunker with a long medal bar. After which the ice would be crushed. Rock salt was added between the layers to further induce lower temperatures. After icing the reefers were classified for destinations and sorted into lines for distant markets.

Circa 1909: PFC bought the Armour Car Line Shops in Sacramento, Los Angeles, Riverside and Colton. In time Sacramento and Riverside were closed. The second Sacramento (Armour) shops were moved to Roseville which became the largest manufacturers of reefers in the world.

The new mechanical reefers it manufactured, as did the old reefers needed pre-cooling to ambient transit temperature. The reefers were equipped with wide range thermostats and air movement through the ceiling, down the walls and across the floor (the load space) over slats. But rival Fruit Growers Express led the way with diesel fuel tanks slung under the car carriage to operate the motors to mechanically cool.

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As early as 1909 carloads were pre-cooled. The loads were at field heat on arrival 70 degrees to 80 degrees or more. For two hours air was blown into the cars through the doors, circulated and drawn out through the bunder hatches via heavy canvas ducting. The temperature dropped 400 degrees. Then the car was iced at the ice deck.



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One of PFE's purpose in the post Harriman era was to supply cars manufactured for refrigeration, ventilation, or heating to the leasing railroads. It earned income through mileage charges, loaded or empty. The leading railroads collected freight charges for shippers, according to tariff lines then paid the per mile rental and service fees to PFE, keeping their share of charges for hauling the car over their lines.

In addition, PFE leased cars to the Western Pacific Railroad and made WP a part of its family of roads when WP announced it was going into the reefer business. WP received preferred rates and access to 40,000 cars. This was in addition to the 2775 cars WP had built before joining PFE.

However, in 1920 the ICC had encouraged consolidation, notwithstanding the 1890 Sherman Antitrust act which demanded dismantling of conglomerates. Out of all of this, it emerged that all traffic (including perishables) North of the Salinas Valley travel via Ogden, Utah and South of a line drawn from Santa Margarita on the SP Coast Line and North of Caliente (Tehachapi) on the Valley line travel via El Paso, TX regardless of destination. Nationwide railroad perishable tonnage gradually increased until the 1920's when it leveled and then gradually decreased thereafter. By the mid-1920s PFE was the dominant refrigerator car operator in the West. Besides refrigeration it offered ventilation service: no ice but open hatches for potatoes, onions, and garlic. Grape growers kept the PFE alive during prohibition, shipping East where European immigrants enjoyed their wine with dinner, taking advantage of the homemade 250 gallons allowed to individuals annually for personal use. By 1929 19% of perishables moved by truck.

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In the 1930's PFE carried half of the country's frozen food supply and small reefers with salted ice bunkers. The smaller cars were more flexible when destination changes were influenced by market price. Traffic was busy during World War II. Loaded reefers went East but often returned empty. Excess reefers were loaded as boxcars when boxcars were unavailable. This was due to pooling problems. PFE on the SP lines was operated as a hotshot freight and given rightaways over other freights and even passenger trains.

The 1950's were the golden age of the PFE.



A 2-6-0 in Florin picking up strawberries.

The 1950's was of the Golden Age of PFE. At its height it counted 500,000 car loadings. In 1953 PFE built its first mechanical reefers which replaced salted ice bunkers. It built its last mechanical reefer in 1957 The "ice age" ended at PFE September 1973. At this point the UP/SP joint ownership was abolished and their offices on Adams Street in Chicago and the Flood Building on Market Street in San Francisco were closed.

PFE management under SP labored under an arcane and calcified managerial philosophy and bureaucratic meddling at SP became more intense. PFE's marketing and sales suffered, and concepts were not modernized. As a result, slow service plagued PFE. The only fast service was the beneficiary of attaching a few headend cars to hotshot passenger train (like the "Overland Ltd" - San Francisco-Chicago), whereby the PFE car arrived in three days, consistently. Otherwise, shippers saw ice melting in the summer heat before the reefers reached their destinations. PFE eastbound shipments from California were reaching destinations in 8 - 13 days as opposed to Santa Fe Railway reefers which reached Eastern Canada in 4 days. High performance on key routes was mandatory. So as a profit center PFE couldn't reach sustainable velocity. Lateness was a regular complaint. The only consistency was a wide range of inconsistency. While PFE faltered, more and more railroads begin refrigerated shipping. Concurrently, tracking perishables gained traction beginning with the 1930's. Shipping costs via railroads became not much less than trucking. And tracking proved more convenient to the local producer. In 1961 SP introduced "piggyback service" whereby a trailer was transported on a flat car. But it was only a transitory success. Furthermore, overshadowing PFE's troubles were merger talks SP was holding with Santa Fe, which could have influenced SP's lack of real interest in PFE and its business. But, for 70 years, PFE set the standard for reefer operations.

(Photos from PFE and the collection of Keith Burns)

**If you have an essay, article or story idea, news, or events you want others to know about submit it the newsletter no later than June 1, 2024, to the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society
P.O. Box 283
Walnut Grove, CA 95690**

Resource Center News

We are around almost every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and by appointment and can assist you in finding material about an area of historical research or family history, you're interested in. We're also looking for **Volunteers** who want to learn more about research, archiving, digitizing, and conducting oral histories. At least once a month, we also host *Conversation Cafe*, an opportunity for residents and visitors to drop by and share stories about living or visiting the Sacramento Delta region. Have photos to share or other items about Delta life? Bring them, too. We'll have a pot of coffee on and something to nosh. 11 am to 1 pm. Spring dates include: *January 30, February 15, March 19, and April 18*. Check out our Facebook page or website to verify dates and Time just in case. We're located at the Jean Harvie Community Center Community Center, in Walnut Grove, 14273 River Road. For more information -- srdsh.org or srdhsresident@gmail.com

Our Publications Team



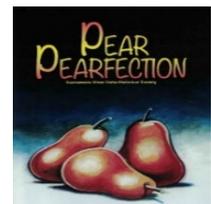
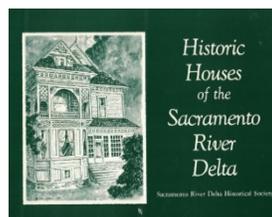
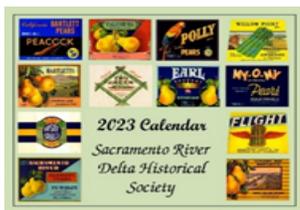
Maryellen Burns

Tom Herzog, Kathleen Hutchinson, Esther Koopman, David Stuart

Publications

We still have copies of our yearly calendars from 2023 to 2012. We no longer produce a calendar and will offer a yearly journal instead. Also new for 2024 – our website will include information about upcoming events around the region. Special events, talks, festivals, celebrations, and other news. Information on how to contribute to it will be listed on our website, which will be revised and operational in early February. Srdhs.org

Pear Pearfection and the Historic Homes of the Delta are also still available. For ordering information – check out our engaging and informative website or Facebook group page. Don't forget to follow us by searching for Sacramento River Delta Historical Society on Facebook.



Our Winter/Spring 2024 Schedule

Meetings March 19, April 17, and May 21 Board Meetings, February 17, April 17, and June 18 2024

“Explore the depths of our archives, engage in our community talks and programs, and join us in our ongoing effort to document and share the untold stories that make the Delta a treasure trove of cultural and historical significance.

Let's Connect! Become a Member of the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society and join us in our ongoing effort to document and share the untold stories that make the Delta a treasure trove of cultural and historical significance. Even if you're not a member, please send us your email so that we can provide the newsletter and other SRDHS information to you. Contact: srdhs@gmail.com

**Mail your membership dues to:
SRDHS
P.O. BOX 293
Walnut Grove, California**

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