

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

— Walt Whitman

NEWSLETTER

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SOCIETY NOTES

The year started off well with the annual potluck dinner held in the Jean Harvie Center in Walnut Grove. Close to one hundred people attended to eat the excellent food and hear the program about "Flooding in the Delta" presented by Tom Herzog and Tim Wilson (see article on page 4). Leonard Souza ended two years of very fine leadership and achievement by turning things over to Cathy Hemly who quickly thanked the Dinner Organizers (Joann Wiseman, Mary Fulster, Leonard and Lillian Souza, and Gene Wiseman) and introduced Tom Herzog. Tom presented a brief history of flooding and reclamation in the delta. Tim Wilson started the slides with historical flood pictures and then more modern (1982-86) pictures that he took, from the air, around Walnut Grove and, from the ground, around Dead Horse Island. Tom finished the program with pictures from the 1955 (Christmas Eve) flood threat near the Herzog ranch on Snodgrass Slough.

The Board of Directors for 1995 is made up of Cathy Hemly, President; Terry Alchorn, Recording Secretary; Carol Watson, Corresponding Secretary; Joann Carr, Treasurer; Leonard Souza, Past President; and the following Directors: Robert James, Becky Wheeler, Jerry Waterworth, Tom Herzog, Jim Dahlberg, Marshall Pylman, Jim Tracey, and Robert Arcero. Their agenda includes paying electric bills, defining historical sites, reissuing the historic homes book, the Resource Center, and planning interesting general meetings. The Board is most appreciative of the membership support, both financial and moral.

General meeting dates for the rest of the year are Monday, September 18, and Monday, November 20, and the Annual Potluck Dinner is scheduled for January 15, 1996.

The MARCH MEETING was held at Bates Elementary School in Courtland. (People often ask why is the Bates school called Bates instead of Courtland Elementary School. When the Onisbo and Courtland School Districts were put together the new school district was named after the man who donated the land--Benjamin Bates.) The meeting featured Terry and Jayne Alchorn telling of the renovation of Runyon Landing--the Sol Runyon home and Jeff Trantum speaking about the William Neely Runyon home reconstruction (see article on page 3). Jerry and Doris Waterworth were the hosts for the evening, which was enjoyed by a large crowd.

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We are hoping to have reprints of our former publication "HISTORIC HOUSES OF THE SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA" available before the end of the year. It has been out of print for several years and there have been requests from both individuals and libraries to get copies.

The RESOURCE CENTER is slowly getting organized. We are open every first Tuesday of the month from 10:00 a.m. to noon and can use help sorting and filing--you all come! This is the third time the materials have been organized because they had to be boxed up and put in storage twice. Everyone is a bit tired of doing the same thing over and over; however, this time we are about to get things in shape to be used. It's really fun to look at some of this material; of course, we don't get much work done. It's kind of like Christmas with surprise packages popping up to be identified.

(See SOCIETY NOTES, page 8)



PEAR FAIR

JULY 30, 1995 • COURTLAND, CA

WORLD WAR II ON THE HOMEFRONT

Marshall Pylman introduced the November meeting held in the Clarksburg Library. The 1941-1945 Home Front topic was explored by several speakers and from several viewpoints. One common thread: everyone over 55 years of age remembered where they were when they heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Norman Slater led off with a review of the effect of the war on agriculture, especially in the Clarksburg area. The major effect was a loss of labor, particularly when the Japanese were removed to internment camps and youth people went to the service and defense jobs. In the United States 174,000 went into the Army the first year. By 1945 there were 6 million in the Army and 3½ million in the Navy. However, food was still needed. All rubber products including tires and machine belts were hard to come by. One machine was cannibalized for parts to make another one work. Machine shops were all into war work, not farm work. Asparagus was taken out and acreage in the area dropped from 7000 to 400 or 500 acres. Onions also disappeared due to the loss of "stoop" labor. So everyone on the home front worked harder with less help.

Flossie Campbell took up the story reporting on U.S.O. activities. The Ladies Fellowship of Clarksburg supported the U.S.O., led by Eileen Wright. Many women gave time and cookies to the center at 10th and L Streets. The men talked and ate a lot! Flossie raised children from 1945 to 1953, then returned to U.S.O. work. Flossie reported 14 years of service and enjoyed all of it.

Scud Marshall dropped back in time to the 1920s, when radio communication was introduced and continued with the W.P.A. projects to combat unemployment during the Depression: clearing the river banks by felling trees and burning. Selective Service registration began in 1939 for men over 21, and later those over 18. The men registered at the church in Clarksburg. Also in 1939 the High School burned to the ground while being renovated, so all classes were held in the "old" gym. 1940 saw teachers drafted and a shortage of men and materials. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor everyone feared an invasion from Japan. Clarksburg was within six miles of the Sacramento Airport and airplane watch stations were created to report on moonlight nights. The centers had a telephone, no heat, and little light. One center was located in Reamer's yard and there were two others. Women watched during the day and men at night. A spotter phoned Sacramento if they heard a plane. Sacramento Metro Airport was the only airport. Revetments were built to protect the planes. From time to time there were blackouts when all shades were drawn. Parking lights were used for driving during blackouts. Food was rationed: sugar, red meat, and butter; but poultry was not rationed. Ration Boards had a dirty job: no one was ever satisfied. All were really dedicated and the war was supported. Baling wire was hard to get and canned goods were traded for it. Scud also brought to mind several mottos of the time. "Loose lips sink ships" and "Is this trip really necessary?"

Lois Hunn graduated from Clarksburg High School in June of 1941 and attended Sacramento Junior College for two years. One-third of her class were sent to

internment camps; they were registered for camp in the high school. Some of them were close friends, and after they took them to the train in Freeport they wrote of the unpleasant crowded living in the barracks. Lois was an airplane spotter. They had to note if the planes were small or large and in what direction they were flying. The Junior College organized harvest crews. In 1943 Lois went to U.C. Berkeley where the dorms were blacked out--no lights to shine, no flashlights, no going out at night. Ration books had to be turned in to the dormitories. Savings stamps were saved to become war bonds. Students volunteered. They worked in day care centers so women could work in shipyards and other war industries. The centers operated from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and fed two meals. The students also rolled bandages. Lois also recalled that one of the Palmadessi sisters had been born in Italy and therefore her movement was restricted.

Les Heringer enlisted in April 1941 in order to get into the Army Air Corps. He was at Kelly Field (Texas) on December 7th. He was almost sent to the Philippines but after six years he was released from McClellan Field (AFB) and returned to Clarksburg to become involved in the German Prisoner of War Program. The camp was located on 15 acres about where his home is now located. Holly Sugar Corporation headquarters facilities were also used. As previously mentioned, labor was scarce and a number of Germany General Rommell's desert troops wound up working in sugar beets and hospitals. There were 550 workers. The camp consisted of Quonset huts and big tents. They were fed by the Army. One day they refused to work and someone from the Stockton Army Base came over and yelled at them and confined to barracks with only bread and water. After one day they returned to work. The prisoners "goose stepped" to trucks which took them to various farms. They were great workers. They were perfectionists.

Daisey Merwin recalled doing war work while raising children. Greg Merwin remembers his birthday party and a relative killed at Hickam Field on December 7th. Daisey told of how, later in the war, some labor came from Mexico. She also remembered the difficulty getting shoes--especially for growing children, black market activities (not hers), synthetic rubber, and saving grease. (At this point someone mentioned coloring margarine during the war: ugly task!) Daisey told of a summer trip to Lake Tahoe--three children and dogs. The car stayed at the lake until they returned to Clarksburg. Daisey canned tomatoes while at the lake. The trip home with a loaded car was memorable due to a flat tire that Daisey changed. The bumpy spare got them to Loomis where the wheel was finally fixed. She also remembered a beacon located near their house on Z Line Road. One dark night Daisey was sent to turn off the beacon. She lost the key in the mud, finally found the key, turned off the light, and as soon as she returned home she had to go and turn on the beacon again. One time there was a plane down in the bypass. It was rescued after a week and before the floods.

The Clarksburg Garden Club adopted Camp Kohler and furnished their recreation room. Marshall Pylman closed the meeting with the reminder that: "World War II was a time when all gave some and some gave all." P2

THESE OLD HOUSES II

The March meeting played to a capacity crowd at the Bates School in Courtland. Robert James introduced Terry and Jayne Alcorn who spoke about the Solomon Runyon house--the house located in the Pierson District fronts onto the Sacramento River. The exhibit of the centerfold of "Thompson and West History of Sacramento County 1880" showed the house and grounds before the levee was built to its present height, which ruined the garden vista to the river.

Solomon Runyon was born in 1827 in Will County, Illinois, not far from Chicago, then only a western outpost. He was the son of Armstead Runyon, born in Madison County, Kentucky, and Anna Harnbarker, a Tennessean. Solomon had just enough education to read, write and account, in his own way. He migrated to California in 1849, with his father and two brothers, Orin Randolph and Armstead Jr. The boys were 3 among 21 children. Solomon mined for two years and then farmed vegetables near Schoolcraft, Solano County (Ryer & Sutter Island area), until 1858. In 1859 he bought the home ranch 24 miles downriver from Sacramento. He married, in 1863, Adeline Bloom, also an Illinois native. He bought additional land in 1863 on which he built his house. More land was bought in 1871 (6155 acres) and 1881 (286 acres) on Andrus Island near Walnut Grove. He also owned land in San Francisco and Sacramento. He was an incorporator, stockholder, and director of the California Transportation Company (riverboats). He had one child, Ora.



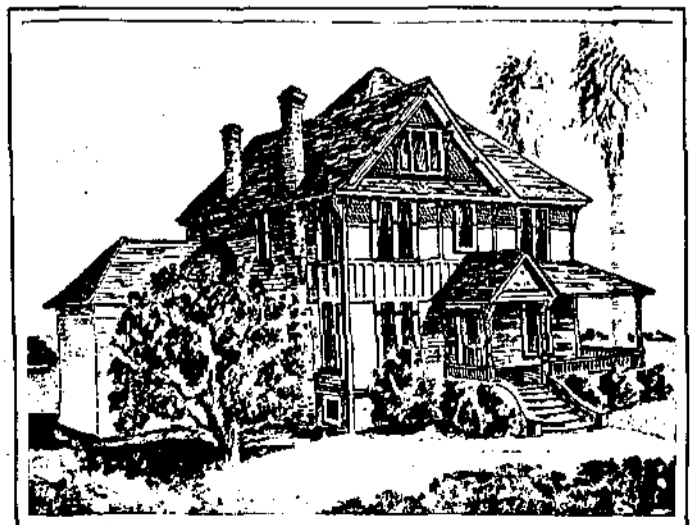
The present house was started in 1865 to replace a brick house. One wall of the brick house remains incorporated in the present structure. There is no evidence of flooding in 1907. The greatest changes in the house occurred in 1915 when the Runyon family modernized the house. Inside plumbing and electricity were added. Some rooms were made smaller to accommodate bathrooms and there remain some pipes on the outside of the house. The veranda and roof slope were also altered at that time. The house is basically made of 12 by 1-inch redwood and lath and plaster. This means walls a foot thick and well insulated. The first floor contains the living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, half bath, music room and library. Upstairs there are five bedrooms and three baths. French doors to the attic complete the elegant farmhouse. The well done slide

presentation showed the 7000 foot interior of the house. The downstairs ceilings are 11½ feet and the upstairs ceilings are 9½ feet high. There is a complete standup brick basement. Beautiful original art glass panels surround the front door. A flying circular staircase turns and curves to the bedroom floor. There are "casket niches" in the stairwell for turning corners with large crates. The original embossed wall covering is maintained on the stairway. The original marble and brass fireplace is in the living room. Throughout the house, in some rooms, there are original moldings, ceiling medallions, and wallpapers. An original portrait of Mrs. Sol. Runyon has always hung in the dining room. Haunting has been reported when she is not in residence.

The Alcorn family bought the house in 1976 and had nine weeks to get it ready for a wedding reception. The side veranda flooring had to be replaced and something had leaked through the kitchen ceiling and onto the floor. Otherwise the house was in good shape. As mentioned in the first "Old House" meeting, old houses are long ongoing projects.

The yard has many old plantings, principally camellias, and one Japanese split-leaf maple that started as a bonsai and has become a miniature tree. It is said to be 200 years old and to have come around the horn. Cleaning out the camellia grove involved three 30-yard dumpsters. Of the house's dependencies, only the foundations of the tank house remain.

Jeff Trantum took over, with Terry still at the slide projector, to tell of the rejuvenation of the William Neely Runyon house located a short way upstream of the Solomon Runyon house and ranch. The Trantum family bought the house from the Runyon family in 1974. Recently, Jeff and three men spent 2½ months repainting the 120-year-old house. The house had been white with green trim for over sixty years. They stripped the paint to the raw wood and tried to locate original colors. The entire house was painted meticulously by hand. Each balustrade and eave was restored. A real labor of love! Fortunately, antique oil base paints and information on "Victorians" are available today.



(See THESE OLD HOUSES II, page 7)

DELTA FLOODING

At the Annual Dinner Tom Herzog and Tim Wilson spoke about Delta Floods.

Tom Herzog gave an excellent summary of flood implications. He began when he was very young and floods were exciting and "fun" and how he quickly outgrew his youthful attitude. He continued with the methods used to defer, delay, or otherwise combat flooding: planting trees on levees, constructing dams, weirs, bypasses, dredging to build stronger, higher levees and deeper channels. Nonetheless, the threat of excess water continues. Too much water in one place at one time equals: flood!

John Sutter established his fort on a rise between the American River and the Sacramento River. He planned to establish his city "Sutcliffe" on the high ground located in what is now South Land Park. Alas, the rush of the gold miners established the city in the swamp along the Sacramento River between H and T Streets. Levees soon proved necessary but the levees built to protect the fledgling city from the Sacramento River did not protect from the American River flooding the town from the north. The area has been trying to manage flooding ever since.

The Arkansas Act (1855) granted all unsold swamp and overflow land to the states. In 1861 Sacramento County had five land commissioners to oversee the planning of reclamation districts. Twenty-eight potential districts applied. Three were formed: American Basin, Sacramento Basin, and Grand Island. In 1862, the reclamation responsibility was given to the Board of Supervisors instead of the Commissioners. In 1868, the Reclamation District Trustees took over the task. 1874 saw tremendous land grabbing, and in 1878 a State Department of Engineering was created.

More landmark dates in flood control include the 1878 Carmetti Act which was to stop the hydraulic mining that had silted the river and heavily filled Steamboat Slough by 1870. It didn't exactly prohibit hydraulic mining; it just made it clear that the mining operations would have to clean up after themselves. In 1905 the Sacramento Drainage District was formed. This was the beginning of the State Reclamation Board.

The history of government levees begins in the 1860s-70s when the Chinese built peat levees in the Delta. Ditches were created for drainage, and from 1870 the Fresno Scraper and the Clamshell dredger were the main tools of the levee builders. The study and control of flooding continues with projects like the Auburn Dam, the establishment of 100-, 300-, and 500-year flood plains and the addition of 16 feet to the levee crown.

In summarizing the history of flooding in the Delta, Tom mentions 39 years between 1805 and 1994 during which there was high water. The "granddaddy" of all occurred during the winter of 1861-62. Sacramento received 15 inches of rain in January, Sonora received 37 inches, and Tuolumne a whopping 102 inches. All this put 5000-6000 square miles in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley under water. The area was 20 to 60 miles wide and 250 to

300 miles long. With the many counter flood actions taken in recent years the area should be less prone to flooding, But, not so! Mother Nature finds new ways to send extra water into the Sacramento Basin. A combination of high tides and runoff is a common flood activator, also high wind and/or torrential rainfall, as in January 1995.

Tom pointed out some fine sources of information about flooding can be found in the State Water Resources Department, the Sacramento City-County Archives, and the State Library which has newspaper accounts of all the disasters.

Tim Wilson began his slide presentation with pictures of early floods: the new Cosumnes Bridge which was blocked by a flood, the Bank of Rio Vista with wet feet, the Pierson District in 1907, Isleton in 1972, Prospect Island 1955, the Egbert District, Liberty Island with a broken levee and totally flooded, Bill Hutchinson Sr. walking a levee three sandbags deep, and 1969 Sherman Island from 3 Mile Slough. Tim's presentation continued with his slides, many from the air, of Tyler Island in 1986. A 200-foot levee break created a huge hole when the water rushed in. Also, when the wind made waves great damage was done. The island settled 15 to 20 feet and the flood made it very difficult to get to the break and fill it. Pears on Tyler Island were picked from float in 1986. One slide showed the Delta Cross Channel with 18 inches of water going over the (door). It was not ever supposed to be topped! There were more pictures of Sherman Island in 1969, Dead Horse Island, the Walnut Grove area, and Campus Commons in Sacramento in 1982.

Tom Herzog finished the program with some slides of the '82 flood from the Clarksburg Collection, some land reclamation equipment, and his own pictures of the flood activity on the Herzog levee in 1955. Tom pointed out that when levees are built the islands do not flood but they do sink and erode. Therefore, when a levee breaks water really rushes in and around. For people who live in flood areas there will always be that unconscious sigh of relief when during "high water" somebody else's levee breaks first, thereby taking the pressure off neighboring levees.

<p style="text-align: center;">Asparagus Discs MANUFACTURED BY R. R. HUNTLEY ISLETON, CALIFORNIA</p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><small>The Patent Patent Asparagus Disc</small></p> <p><small>These Discs, also Harrows and Trucks are now in use all through the Sacramento Delta. The Disc solves the question of the proper care and cultivation of the aspara- gus field. Correspondence Solicited</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ASPARAGUS</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>"Bayside" "Bohemian" "Snow Peak" BRANDS</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">FRUITS VEGETABLES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bayside Canning Co. ALVISO · ISLETON · MAYFIELD CALIFORNIA</p>
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MORE GRAND ISLAND

We searched long and hard to find out about Walker Landing and Howard Landing for our article on lower Grand Island and came up empty-handed. Recently, while filing papers in the Resource Center we found an article in the 75th anniversary edition of the River News Herald. Written by Gloria Pieretti it says: "It's hard to believe that the little grocery store that leans at the foot of the levee on Steamboat Slough, right across from Howards Landing actually was built on Ryer Island. It was Edward and Zebe Howard who started the store in 1915 or 1916."

"Sometime prior to 1923 Mr. Howard moved the store by barge across Steamboat Slough to its present location. At that time Howards Landing was a hubbub of activity with barges docking to load and unload produce and supplies. In 1923 Guistine Carli rented the quaint little store and operated it as G. Carli Groceries. When sons, Edward and Tito, joined their dad in the store's operation it was only natural that the name be changed to G. Carli & Sons.

"The elder Carli passed away in 1942 and the store became known as Carli Bros. until 1958. Meanwhile, the Howard property exchanged hands in 1949 when the Carlis purchased it. In 1958 Tito Carli moved his family to Sacramento leaving Edward Carli the sole proprietor. Again the name was changed, this time to Carli's...a name that's been familiar in the Delta more than forty years.

"A regular 'fixture' in the friendly store for years and years was one Francis J. Corcoran, a veteran of the Spanish-American War. Big Jim spent most of his time sitting in the store, joshing with customers and buying candies and sodas for the kiddies.

"Jim died this year (1965) at the ripe old age of 94! The Carlis received a letter from President Johnson honoring Jim's service to his country and the U.S. flag used for the military burial was also presented to the Carlis.

"Now Howards Landing no longer exists. High waters and raging tides have reaped their destruction. But Carli's Store continues to serve a multitude of people from farmers and laborers to travelers and fishermen."

A recent phone call to Carli's confirms that the store continues and still is being operated by Ed Carli—the second generation in over 70 years.

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We are indebted to Mr. Robert Gromm, editor of the East Contra Costa County Newsletter, for the following excerpt from a transcript he made of a talk by Leo Fallman about Delta History.

"I was born in San Francisco around New Year's Eve, 1902, and my mother passed away in 1904. I was then moved to Grand Island on the Sacramento River. I was raised there by my aunt until I started smoking at the age of ten.

"My earliest recollection at the age of four years was of a huge red glow in the western sky which local adults thought was Rio Vista going up. We learned 24 hours later when the San Francisco-Sacramento River steamers came along that it was San Francisco that had burned."

"The following year was momentous for the great flood of 1907 came along producing the highest water ever recorded before or after in the Delta. During this high water, I remember playing with little toy boats in

the river water while sitting almost on top of the Grand Island levee road. Today, Grand Island levee is only a few feet higher than then, so when you drive the levee road to Sacramento, look way down at the water and you can by comparison imagine what a huge flood that was. Most of the Delta flooded, two wonderful exceptions being Grand Island, which incidently is the largest island under one levee system in California, containing 17,000 acres, and Orwood Tract, where I have resided for the past 34 years.

"I think my dad, Frank Fallman, deserved a lot of credit for these two islands' flood resistance for he was the captain of the first Grand Island dredge until 1901, when Grand Island's primary levee was completed. He then moved over to the San Joaquin Delta and became dredger superintendent for the famous Rindge family and Lee A. Phillips.

"In those days, lands were higher and floods were slower because of less fall from the river into the land. To revert back to the early Grand Island days, my maternal grandfather, a Swedish ship's carpenter who married an Irish lass from Boston in San Francisco, bought in 1869, the 60-acre Grand Island farm I now own. This farm has been in the family for 101 years, and I have a long, handwritten deed to this property written before the days of typewriters, and signed by Governor Hayes of California.

"When I was five or six years old, the country was pretty wild along the Sacramento River, and we dared not venture out far from the house at night for fear of wild hogs, not to be confused with pigs of today. Those wild hogs of half a century ago raided the barnyards killing chickens, ducks, and raising hell in general, and oftentimes attacking men. My grandfather had a wooden barricade near the chicken yard where he and my uncle held weekly confrontations with the hogs. When he occasionally killed a wild hog we sometimes tried to eat the meat, but it was strong and I didn't like it.

"A short time after my father became dredger superintendent for Rindge and Phillips, I wrote my Uncle Jack McCarty, who was then superintendent of Grand Island, and told him Lee Phillips was offering him the job of superintendent of both Jones Tracts and other islands as they were reclaimed. Mr. Phillips' offer was \$100.00 per month and hay for his horse. Mr. McCarty came over to see about the job by the shortest way, taking the river steamer from Grand Island to San Francisco, and the Santa Fe Railroad to Middle River. On this important day, the four men who were to become important to the reclamation of nearly 100,000 acres of the Delta, namely, Mr. Rindge, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Fallman and Mr. McCarty, left Middle River for a trip to look at the Rindge Tract and the various points of interest and the new launch my father was operating, which had been built in Stockton."

We are grateful to Mr. Gromm for this addition to our Grand Island story. Does anyone know who the Swedish grandfather was or where the farm was? We can guess this talk was delivered in the early 1970s. Further tidbits about Grand Island will be appreciated.

We have a correction to our December 1994 article concerning Ryde. We inadvertently identified Walter Mansfield Brown as Mansfield Brown for which we are very sorry. There will be more to follow on Mr. Brown in our next issue.

RYER ISLAND

Ryer Island is located across Steamboat Slough and to the west of Grand Island. Located in Solano County it is bounded by Steamboat Slough, Sutter Slough, Miner Slough, and Cache Slough. A levee road completely encircles the island and the cross road splits the middle of the island. There is one bridge located at the north end of the island which spans Minor Slough connecting Ryer Island to the lower Netherlands (Hollands) Tract near Valdez Station. One time a new school district employee circled the island three times before she found the bridge. There are also two ferries: one on the back of Grand Island across Steamboat Slough at Howard Landing and another on the opposite side of the island across Cache Slough at the southern tip of Ryer Island. There is a slough, called Elkhorn, down the middle of the island which drains into Cache Slough.

Ryer Island is reported to have been little more than a sandbar at its beginning. First named Schoolcraft Island (as was Sutter Island), many early families, Morse, Runyon, and others, started on Ryer and quickly moved their operations to Sutter or Grand Islands.

According to Ed Dutra's "Tule Breakers," a San Francisco medical doctor named W.M. Ryer and an engineer named Nixon were the successful reclaimers. Dr. Ryer had carefully studied the excavation of the Suez Canal and the construction of the polders in the Netherlands. He wrote in 1874: "Had the money and genius which has been expended in the creation of ditching machines been employed in building old-fashioned dredging machines, and had such machines been used in raising the bottoms of rivers to make levees upon the land, then the reclamation of such land would have become a success." Ryer urged the excavation of a puddle ditch along the axis of a prospective levee which was to be filled with tamped sediment of earth. He also proposed that the borrow ditches from which the peat levees were built be filled by dredge and new levees superimposed. It is not known if replacement of peat was done on Ryer Island. The Dredge Ryer Island, built in 1888, was dismantled in 1914. Its principle owner was Reclamation District 501. Its design features were considered to be a reflection of Dr. W.M. Ryer's research on dredges and reclamation. Built by the Golden State Iron Works of San Francisco, it was bought with funds underwritten by assessments approved by landowners. The assessments were made on an average basis by the reclamation district trustees. Ryer Island Reclamation District also owned a ditcher to excavate and maintain the system of drainage canals and sumps. The Ryer ditcher was built in 1908 at a cost of \$674.

Ike Craven spoke to the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society in September 1978. He spoke on Ryer Island floods, crops, and history. Both Ike and the new Reclamation District 510 man supplied the information that the Ryer Island Reclamation District was formed on June 7, 1887. An attempt had been made in 1865, but it did not succeed.

The island flooded in 1896, 1902, 1904, and 1907. The area to the west, Egbert district, Prospect Island, and Liberty Island flooded more often and created a great deal of pressure on the west side of Ryer, which has now been rocked. There was a narrow gauge railroad built on Ryer Island to get dirt to the Cache Slough levee. There were two steam engines and the tracks ran down Steamboat Slough levee around the end of the island and back up to the construction site. The side dumping gondolas, engines, and tracks remained on the island until sold for scrap during World War II. A story is told of a man working on a hole in the levee that was swept from the slough through the levee hole and onto the inside of the island without injury.

Ike mentioned that early land owners were Thomas and Leftinger, John Hollenbeck, H.K. Stewart, and Dr. Ryer. Of the approximately 10,000 acres in 1992 (the time of Ike's arrival), Ryer-Nixon owned over half, Rio Farms owned 2500, and the Thomas Estate, Harry Stewart, and the Hollenbeck family also owned land. At that time there were 8000-9000 acres of asparagus, most of it leased to Cal Pack, Libby McNeil Libby, Eppie Bruce, Joe Grover, Alex Brown, and Darsie & Hutchinson. Each operation (19) had a camp which housed the tenants, teamsters, cutters, washers, horses, and field equipment. "Grass" was cut, washed, and hauled to the levee for shipment, by water, to canneries in Rio Vista, Brannon Island, Grand Island, Locke, Oakland, or San Francisco. Green asparagus went mainly to the east coast fresh market by way of Antioch (Cal.). At the peak of the season there could be 1500 people working on Ryer Island. A migrant school was started for the children and there was a store. It was not true, as reported in one magazine, that no one was allowed off the island until the season was over. Cutting gangs were made up of Portuguese, Hindus, Afghans, Koreans, Spanish, Chinese, and later Filipinos. The transcript of Ike Craven's presentation has more details about asparagus harvesting, canneries, landings, etc. Some of Ryer Island asparagus was processed at what is now the "Cannery" Shopping Center in San Francisco.

Edna Thomas Bishop tells of her family moving from Rio Vista to Ryer Island in 1919 to avoid influenza. At that time there was a hemp mill operating on Ryer.

Fong and Mary were asparagus harvest supervisors and later growers and managers of Rio Farms. They established an asparagus packingshed in one of the hemp mills. In 1938 they founded an alfalfa dryer and mill in the leftover hemp buildings. In 1940 a grain elevator and dryer were established on Ryer Island. Later Lloyd Smith, Ernie Blackwelder and Fong-Yung developed a beet picker.

In 1932 the Ryer Island crops were 45 acres of alfalfa, 7800 acres of asparagus, 382 acres of beans, 1411 acres of sugar beets, 20 acres of celery, 426 acres of corn, 387 acres of wheat and 314 acres of vegetables. An early maturing milo was planted experimentally. Today the new crops: grapes, kiwis, and pineapple guava can be seen growing on Ryer.

(See RYER ISLAND, page 7)

THESE OLD HOUSES (continued)

William Neely Runyon was a half brother of both Solomon and Orin Runyon. Their father, Armstead Runyon, Sr., though he lived in the Delta a while, later moved with a number of his family to Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, where he died. However, the above sons remained in the Delta.

The house was built around 1870-72 of 1-inch x 12-inch redwood and lathe and plaster. It has wooden cornices and the medallions and rosettes are plaster. There is one aluminum window on the weather worn south wall. Lattice work around the foundation has been replaced over the years with more solid wood. There is a standup brick basement that did flood in 1907 but the first floor was high enough to escape. Two original chimneys were located, one in the kitchen area and another in the living room and a later chimney was added on the north side in the dining room. The living room and dining room chimneys have been refitted with stainless steel cores surrounded by mortar in the original brick structures. The third chimney is exterior only. A pipe tube for servant communication with the second floor remains in place but is not used today. The redwood gutters remain intact and are carefully kept clear. The plumbing has been retrofitted and, inside, there remain outside pipes exposed. The downstairs rooms include a double parlor, now one large living room, dining room, kitchen, and servant quarters off the kitchen. There are a back stairs and a front stairs with four bedrooms upstairs. The downstairs rooms have 12-foot ceilings and the upstairs ceilings are 10 feet. There is a large complete attic with finished floors. The top of the roof is probably 62 feet above ground—about 6 stories. The roof has the original cedar shingles and seven layers of composition roofs. Nails will not penetrate the layers. The next reroofing will necessitate complete removal of seven shingle layers.

We enjoyed the tale of two houses, Solomon Runyon's "farm" house and William Runyon's Victorian American Stick style. The narrations and slide presentations were most informative and entertaining and we are indebted to Terry and Jayne Alcorn and Jeff Trantum. Charlotte Trantum generously invited everyone to attend her annual garden party.

We want to thank the evening sponsors, Robert James and Cathy Hemly, for the program and Doris and Jerry Waterworth for refreshments.

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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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RYER ISLAND (continued)

There have been two school districts formed on Ryer Island. Slough School District was established in 1875 near the north end of the island. In 1878 the district became a Joint District drawing pupils from both Solano and Sacramento Counties. It drew pupils from Ryer and surrounding islands, i.e., Sutter and Grand. The first year there were 16 pupils and J.F. Parker of Walker's Landing was the clerk. The attendance ranged from 24 in 1879 to 11 in 1883. Clerks included Wm. McClain, B.F. Kelly, A. White, and J.T. Rundell, all of Courtland addresses. The Rio Vista Museum has on display a Slough School Diploma of Alvin Ostman. The District lapsed in 1897. The Ryer School District was established in 1878 near the middle of the island. John Hollenbeck was the clerk and there were 10 pupils. It became a Joint District in 1905. In 1909 there were only 4 students. In 1934 there were 81 students. In 1931 Ryer Island School became part of the Rio Vista Joint Union District and continued until 1967 when it joined the River Delta Unified School District. In 1966 there were 35 pupils, 3 teachers, and one school on Ryer Island.

The schools provided a focal point in the absence of an established community. And as aforementioned, there was a general store. Today the island has its own Volunteer Fire Department as well as its devoted landowners.

THINGS TO DO

Our neighboring historical societies are not as active in the summer as throughout the rest of the year. FOLSOM will be particularly busy this summer celebrating the 100th anniversary of electricity transmitted from the Folsom Powerhouse to Sacramento for the first time, and they are hosting the annual Sacramento City Birthday Party. Both the Folsom Museum (823 Sutter St., 11-4 Wed-Sun) and the Powerhouse Museum (Leidesdorff & Scott, 12-4 Wed-Sun) will be open all summer.

There are lots of interesting places to visit:

- Sutter's Fort, 2701 L Street, 10-5 daily, 445-4422
- Crocker Art Museum, 216 O Street, Wed-Sun 10-5
- Towe Ford Museum, 2200 Front Street, 10-6 daily
- California State Capitol, 10th & L,
Guided Tours, 9-4 daily, 324-0333
- Sacramento Old City Cemetery, 1000 Broadway,
8-4:30 daily, 448-5665, call for tours.

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SOCIETY NOTES (continued)

The MAY MEETING was fascinating! Playing to a capacity crowd, Dr. Margret Purser of Sonoma State University and Dick Swete outlined their projects for this summer. We found that there are terrestrial archaeologists and marine archaeologists. They are combining equipment and staff from the California Maritime Academy, Sonoma State University, Long Beach State, and California State Parks and Recreation to seek historic sites along Steamboat Slough and near Rio Vista. They are seeking landing sites, the location of Brazos del Rio, and the wreck of the Charleston near "Hogback."

The landing sites are all along the slough as each ranch needed a place to load produce. They are somewhat located by pilings. The researchers will tow a "fish" along the slough. This "fish" is a sophisticated instrument that will take pictures of the bottom of the slough and can be converted by computer into a contour map which will disclose possible artifact locations. Steamboat Slough was filled up with debris from the hydraulic mining up river and it is probable that the old landings are well preserved by the mud.

The researchers have located the probable site of the old town of Rio Vista (Brazos del Rio, Suisun?) by using ancient plats of the town and satellite positioning as well as computer projections. John Sutter helped John (Juan) Bidwell get a land grant from Mexico. Bidwell was granted 17000 acres upon which he had to build a house and improve the land. No land could be sold. In 1846, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo seemed to do away with these restrictions and John Bidwell started selling land from his Los Ulpinos grant. After the legal battles over ownership were settled, Col. Nathan Davis platted a section of land next to a plat done by a man named Turrod. It is near these sections that the present group hope to find the pilings for the original "Rio Vista" landing.

In 1847, the Sitka was the first steamship to run from San Francisco to Sacramento. It took six days. That record was beaten by an ox team. The Yosemite blew up in Rio Vista but was raised and towed to San Francisco and rebuilt. It later worked in Seattle and now lies on the bottom of Puget Sound. Steamboat Slough was first mapped in 1837 but they are currently using maps from the 1850s.

The Charleston is believed to be a sailing vessel that sank near the "Hogback." Whether this was the current State Park locale or a high sandbar located nearer to Ryer Island remains to be seen.

The plan is to locate these historic sites but not to disturb them unless they are threatened by some kind of development. They will keep better under water than exposed to air. All of this will culminate in a computer CD video about California to be distributed throughout the schools of the state in recognition of the sesquicentennial in the year 2000.

The meeting was chaired by Terry Alchorn. Jim and Barbara Dahlberg provided a pleasant atmosphere and delicious refreshments. Our MANY THANKS to the speakers and organizers.

ERRATUM: In writing about Sutter Island in December of 1993 we were not clear about the land settled by Asbury Hustler. Part of the original ranch has been sold. The portion inherited by Asbury's daughter, Frances, who married John Paulsen and then Louis Fiedler, is still being operated by great granddaughter Jeanette Baker's family.

The Dai Loy Museum, in Locke, is open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1-4:30 p.m. The museum draws a large number of tourists and people seeking information about their family.

The Pear Fair historical exhibit will be held on the old Courtland High School grounds on Sunday, July 30. The exhibit may be in the "auditorium" or it may be in a tent, but don't miss it.

**The above reference to the California Sesquicentennial is our first but it will not be the last. Historical Societies throughout the state are preparing for the event to be celebrated in the year 2000.

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