

# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 13, No. 2

DECEMBER 1993

## SOCIETY NOTES

### PEAR FAIR

Preparations to ready the Historical Exhibit for the Pear Fair began with a work day July 9th, in Courtland. A hard-working group cleaned out, in the "old Auditorium," a twenty-year accumulation of junk. We have to thank Jim and Barbara Dahlberg, Gerry Waterworth, Leonard Souza, Terry and Jane Alchorn, Cathy Hemly, Randy Baranack, Tom Herzog and Don Quesenberry. On the 24th the Exhibit was set up with the help of the same committee. On Pear Fair Day, the 25th, the exhibit was viewed by hundreds of people.

The Pear Fair pins were popular but this year there was competition from the very popular "dinosaurs"--a pamphlet on dino dining with scrumptious pear recipes. The Friends of the Clarksburg Library also received a vote of thanks for their picture boards. Jim Dahlberg's Pear Label collection always fascinates and the old pear farming tools, ie., baskets, hadders, pruning shears, rings, etc., always attract interest. Lillian and Leonard Souza, Jerry and Doris Waterworth, Dave Ito, Terry and Jane Alchorn and Barbara and Jim Dahlberg served as docents for the day, making every one of the visitors feel welcome.

### SEPTEMBER MEETING

The September meeting was well attended and most informative. Pete Budnik spoke about living 65 years in the Locke-Walnut Grove Area. Leonard Souza organized the meeting and refreshments were provided by Leonard and Lillian. Many thanks for a real success. (See article p.2.)

### NEW MEMBERS

John and Cheryl Cox, Becky Elliot, Robert Arcero, Gary and Joyce Pylman, Irwin Anderson, Joan Kirkgaard, Ann Sorrels and Renee Holmes Bennett. We hope you enjoy your membership as much as we enjoy your support.

### RESOURCE CENTER

The Resource Center, located in the Jean Harvie Center, is open on the first Tuesday of each month from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, or by appointment. The contents are listed throughout this Newsletter and we hope to see many of you browsing. We do not have room for artifacts, but if you have any books, papers,

or pictures, we will be glad to preserve and file them for reference.

### NOVEMBER MEETING

Marshall Pylman arranged a superb meeting in November. The Clarksburg "Sugar Factory" has closed after over sixty years of operation. The history of the Mill was presented as a tribute and a nostalgic reminiscence. Curzon Kay, who managed the factory for over 20 years, told of the 1933 beginning of construction and the 1935 opening. The factory was built by Amalgamated Sugar for the American Crystal Sugar Company. It was later taken over by Newhall Land and Farming Company. The building was new and made of bricks from the "pocket area." The machinery was used and shipped here from a plant in Utah. Lester Holmes was the first manager, then Curzon Kay took over and he was later followed by Charlie Eason. Almost everyone in Clarksburg was involved with the "mill" and it is sad to see it close. The whole community will miss the white steam rising above the site and the midnight, 8 a.m., and 4 p.m. blasts from the steam whistle. Bill Merwin presented videotapes of movies taken by Scud Marshall, Adolf Merwin and Hop Merwin showing the building of the sugar factory and the processes of planting, growing and harvesting sugar beets including topping and washing. Eventually these processes became mechanized. Bob Heringer had many pictures of the life of the sugar mill. Yvonne Pylman topped off a most pleasant and fun meeting with great refreshments. Our thanks for a historically satisfying evening!



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**ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER**

**MONDAY JANUARY 17th 6:30 PM**

**JEAN HARVIE CENTER**

## PETE BUDNIK'S LOCKE & WALNUT GROVE

Our September meeting was a delightful history of Walnut Grove as told by Pete Budnik. It was a very entertaining story.

Pete's father was born in 1873 in Russia. At that time, every male owed the Tsar three years of military service. After Mr. Budnik Sr. finished his service, he trekked over three thousand miles across Russia from Kiev to Vladivostok selling needles to earn his keep. He finally reached his goal, the United States. After a brief stay in San Francisco he went to Alaska as a hardrock miner. He returned to San Francisco and then went to Walnut Grove where, in 1906, he purchased business goods from L. Schmidt & Co. He also returned to San Francisco to clean up after the earthquake. He participated in a number of enterprises--commercial fishing (salmon, catfish, shad and bass), bees, trapping beaver (shipped to Canada and then resold as imports to the States) and market shooting ducks for the San Francisco restaurant trade. At some point he returned to Russia to bring back his bride. Whatever he did seemed to prosper. He bought a house in 1924 and a new Chrysler in 1927. (One of the artifacts of the evening was a "wheel block" which when chained to the car wheel prevented stealing.) He was the janitor at the Walnut Grove School and his wife was the janitor at the Walnut Grove Oriental School.

Pete was born and raised near Locke and has lived in the Walnut Grove area for 75 years but only spoke about 65 of those years because he doesn't remember much of the first five years and he was in the Army during World War II for another five years.

Pete graduated 61 years ago from Walnut Grove Grammar School. He recalled that he first met Jean Harvie when in the fifth grade. He also remembers a very "mean teacher"--"old lady Woodbury." Miss Woodbury was also school principal. One day she accused Pete of putting egg sandwiches behind the blackboard and then she shook him. He told his father and when his father asked if he did it, he replied, "No, I was hungry and ate mine." Next day his father went to school and shook Miss Woodbury "until her teeth came out" and all the children gleefully laughed. Pete attended Bates School in Courtland for 6th and 7th grades. He returned to Walnut Grove to graduate in the 8th grade. He mentioned an Arbor Day celebration in 1932 and the Indian Mound behind the school.

Pete took tickets in the Movie Theater in 6th and 7th grade to earn his first \$100. He worked on the Bear Ranch until World War Two. Among his memories of Locke is the Libby-McNeil Cannery. It furnished 100 cabins for its workers and operated a separate school. Among the local farmers, it processed Alex Brown's tomatoes and asparagus. Yuen Chong Market in Locke sold to the cannery workers.

Most of the orchards were worked by Chinese. They lived on the ranches during the week and came to Locke on the weekends. On the weekend, they barbecued hogs for two days and sold the meat on Sunday--all the meat was gone by noon.

Jack's Clothing Store was the oldest Levi dealer in the west, when he retired in 1950. The Hindus had a flour mill. They ate no meat (lots of butter) so their flour cakes were very important to them. He recalled the Star Theater, George's Bakery, and a dentist (a painful memory). A house of prostitution (girls and whiskey), the White House, was operated by Clive Hill. The large packing shed handled fruit, celery and asparagus. All cannery and packing shed debris went into the river. Icing railroad cars provided jobs. The old water tower stood until 1924 when the railroad tracks were extended to Isleton.

Between Locke and Walnut Grove, he recalled Jess Wise, who lived there and operated an early radio station. Joe Wise owned some small farms. Also between Locke and Walnut Grove, there was a dairy creamery until 1929 and a beet dump which shipped 100 cars a day. John Brown's old house was built with rock brought by barge. Guistie's house "was next" and then the Japanese town. A miniature golf course was located nearby. He recalled "Susie's Restaurant" (25 cents for a meat), Mary Watanabe's where the truck drivers dined and Tommy Cummings' blacksmith shop. Walnut Grove had gambling houses until 1947.



Pete remembers Adams Lumber Co. was located next to the river. Where the Courthouse stands now, Alex Brown owned a large asparagus packing shed for his crop. Many Japanese worked there. Nearby an ice house stored ice which was made in Isleton. From behind Harvey Lyman's plant tomatoes were hauled by L.W. McCall and passenger trains ran from the Depot each day, from Sacramento in the morning and back at night. N.C. Barry had a big wharf, which was used to ship beans. A Chinese landing was burnt down in 1938 when a man committed suicide by setting himself on fire and burnt down the Chinese town.

The Sharp family cemetery is between Walnut Grove and the meadows. Maryanne Sharp Tyler outlasted all her children. There are Sharps and their descendants Salisburys, Lords and Dyes buried there.

Among other local businesses mentioned were Jack Ross Ford Motor Co. which sold "Model T" Fords and which had the best mechanics for Fords. (Jack Ross died in October 1993, almost 100 years old.) Jack Burchell ran the service station. Additionally, Jack Burchell Sr. was a seed company buyer and young Jack delivered seed.

All garbage was dumped in the river. Kids shot rats on the river bank. Jim Donnally began a service and dumped refuse on the back of the Dye property.

Pete continued with reminiscences about the Portuguese who were very hard workers. They cleared out all the ditches. The Italians he characterized as the greatest bootleggers. There were lots of stills on lower Sherman Island.

Alex Brown owned two fire boats and they were often called to put out fires when the small warehouses by the landings burned. Alex Brown also owned a slaughter house which sold meat. Pete remembers purchasing 2 T-bone steaks for 20 cents.

## SUTTER ISLAND Reclamation District No. 349

Sutter Island is one of the smaller islands in the north Delta. It is bounded by Sutter Slough on the north and west, the Sacramento River and Steamboat Slough on the east and south and Steamboat Slough on the south. Sutter Slough is deeper than the Sacramento River. Steamboat Slough historically is the shallower. Surrounding land masses are Merritt Island to the north, Ryer Island to the west, Grand Island to the east. The largest low spot, a marshy lowland, known as Pecks' Lake, was on what is now Elliot property. The lake paralleled the District Canal. It was graded when the Graham Brothers owned the property.

The island, originally designated as Schoolcraft Island and named for H.A. Schoolcraft, an early settler, was a part of eastern Solano County. Renamed Sutter Island, likely after John Sutter, it became a western addition to Sacramento County. In 1849, a "paper town" was platted and named Onisbo, roughly opposite Paintersville.

In the mid-1800s Ezekial Merritt, the trapper after whom Merritt Island is named, lived at the head of Sutter Island with his Maidu wife and children. In 1846 Merritt was called to Napa County by John Charles Fremont to be his lieutenant in the Bear Flag Revolt. One early Delta pioneer reported finding Merritt covered in mud to ward off mosquitos.

In the 1850s, during the steamboat racing era, several powerful explosions ripped through competing boats, with great loss of life, abreast the island as the boats made the sharp turn entering or exiting Steamboat Slough. Two of the most notable were those of the "Washoe" and that of the "Nevada."

A land and title abstract of 1877 lists the landowners:

Benjamin Bates (owned 600 acres at the point of Sutter where Sutter Slough meets Steamboat Slough.)

Charles Hustler  
Archibald Peck  
Samuel Sullivan  
Henry Cook  
David Osborn  
Charles Neilsen  
Daniel Desmond  
Charles Bates  
Paul Paulsen

Later, Benjamin Bates sold to King, Hustler to Salmon and Ostman, Peck to Meyer (Sprague and Deback), Cook to McQuaid, Osborn to Elliot, Neilsen to Billy Foster, Desmond to Wiedmann and Paulsen also to Wiedmann. Stephen Turner Morse farmed the Point Ranch along Sutter Slough from 1858 to 1889. Among others, Andrew Bogle bought land early on Sutter, as did Henry Meyer who sold to Alvin Ostman. In the 1930s, Meyer's daughters, Mrs. Sprague and Mrs. Deback, sold to the Graham brothers. (Local land owners in the later years include Wheeler, Reed, Romanini, and Bolen McCormack who owned "Sunnyside" at the head of the island, and others.)

Sutter remained unreclaimed as late as the end of the 19th century. Only surrounded by a tidewater levee, it never flooded. However, there was heavy seepage; seepage deep enough on which to float a flat-bottom duck boat. In 1902, Dredger #5 was hired to build levees which were completed by 1905. The levees were heavy strong sand levees, and in March 1907 during one of the great floods, Sutter remained one of the four islands unflooded. The others were

Grand, Merritt and Randall. In 1908/9 the dredger "Sierra" built up the levees. On the west side of the island the pump was installed in 1902/3 and each year larger and larger pumps were installed until 1912 when the first electric pump was purchased. Soren Paulsen was the first pump superintendent. (Sutter Island being a Sacramento River west bank island receives all its electricity from PG&E, the successor to Great Western Power in the Delta region.)

When the water was low in the summer (before the era of upstream dams), it was common to walk across Steamboat Slough, sandbar to sandbar. There was a small island at the foot of Sutter which was used by cattle and residents to cross to Ryer Island. The roads were terrible to nonexistent. Otherwise, crossing across the water was accomplished by rowboat or motorboat or the Paintersville Ferry (except in high water). In 1924 the Paintersville Bridge and the Steamboat Slough Bridge were built and the State Highway traveled the island's northeast levee. During this era, the Sutter Slough Bridge was installed at the head of Sutter Slough, connecting Sutter and Merritt Islands.

The island remains rural except for the commercial business at Steamboat Landing. Located at the entrance to Steamboat Slough, in the 1940s it consisted of a store overhanging the river and a gas station. The store burned and was replaced by an old house which sat below the 1908 levee and which has been greatly remodeled. The area once full of riparian vegetation was a favorite of San Francisco yachtsmen in the summer. In the 1920s, during the summer, it was common to spot California Governor Hiram Johnson's large cruiser moored to the Sutter levee bank near Steamboat Slough. The beach at the head of the slough has also been very popular over the years. Nearby the only other nonfarming business was the local crop-duster airstrip, established by Bud Peck. At Paintersville, on the east bank of the Sacramento River across from Sutter Island, there was a salmon cannery on the wharf. Downstream, adjacent to the Paintersville Bridge, a colony of Azorean fisherman lived in houseboats and commercially fished salmon until 1950, when the State of California prohibited commercial fishing in the Delta.

There have never been schools on the island. Agnita Poulsen Lample recalled walking by way of sandbar or rowing from Sutter to Grand Island and Ryer Island to go to school. After school buses were introduced, when it crossed on the ferry, all the children were required to exit the bus and cross standing on the ferry deck. Rowboats, walking and horses were often combined to get the youngsters to school on Grand Island, Ryer Island, Onisbo School or Courtland.

Sutter Island remains today a farming area on which pear orchards and vineyards predominate. Other crops under cultivation are cherries, kiwis, feed corn, tomatoes, wheat, safflower, alfalfa, sugar beets and barley have also been grown, as have some other vegetable and fruit crops. Most of the island has been under cultivation for 140 years. Some pear orchards include trees from 100 years old.

There have been very few complaints, although one pear farmer did get a little upset when he drove home one night to see a beaver dragging one of his trees over the levee.

## RESOURCE CENTER SOURCES

The Society Resource Center is open the first Tuesday of each month or by appointment. It is located in the Jean Harvie Center in Walnut Grove.

The following is a list of oral history transcripts and general meeting lectures which are available to check out and read at your leisure before returning them.

### GENERAL MEETING LECTURES

March 1978, Gus Olsen, George Wilson and Lester Holmes: Clarksburg Area Development.

January 1977, Robert James: "The Account Books of the Ryde General Store and Saloon 1894-1902."

March 1977, Douglas Hemly: "Greene Family History."

June 1978, Ping Lee: "The History of Locke and the Chinese."

September 1978, Ike Craven: "Ryer Island 1922-1978."

March 17, 1976, Bob Power (President California State Historical Society): "What is History? and What do Historical Societies do?"

William Stritzel: "The History of the California Transportation Company."

Mr. Bob Moore: "Early Agricultural Practices and Products in the Delta."

### ORAL HISTORIES

Mas Ito: Japanese History in the Delta

Dr. Raymond Primasing: Medical Practice in Courtland 1922-1978

Vernon Mathew Hutton: Isleton Memories 1901-1978

William Nelson Lindsay Hutchinson Sr.: farming and Marketing in the Delta from 1915

Dennis Leary: Life in the Delta from 1867

Agnes Paulson Lample: Courtland Area History 1890s - 1976

Adolf Merwin: Farming along the Sacramento River

Herbert and Daisey Merwin: Farming in the Delta, the Land, Water and Ferries

Marion Aldrich Brown: Childhood Memories of the Courtland Area 1888

Warren Bogle: "Bogle Family and Farming History on Grand, Sutter and Merritt Islands"

Clifford Smith: Smith Family Chronicle--Life in the Delta 1851-1981, Sutter and Merritt Islands

Yasu Kawamura: To Walnut Grove as a "Picture Bride" in 1913.

June Watamura: Japanese Life in Isleton

Wilma (Mrs. Henry) Brown: Farming near Walnut Grove

George E. Hudson: Merritt Island Memories

Lenore Greene Hemly Allen: Greene Family History on Both Sides of the River

Gertrude Dennison: Isleton, the Delta, Houses, Asparagus and lots more!

## RIVERBOATS

The first steamboat to navigate the Sacramento River was the "Sitka" which arrived at Sacramento in November 1847, six days and seven hours after leaving San Francisco. Regular service was established by the Steamboat "Sacramento" in 1849. By 1850, 16 steamboats plied the river route and by 1853 there were 25 in regular service.

The California Steam Navigation Company, founded in 1854, dominated the freight business until the advent of the RAILROAD. Later the railroads (Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe) themselves owned river freighters. The most famous early steamboat, the "New World," escaping creditors from New York, arrived in Sacramento July 11, 1850. She cut the running time between Sacramento and San Francisco to 5 hours, 35 minutes.

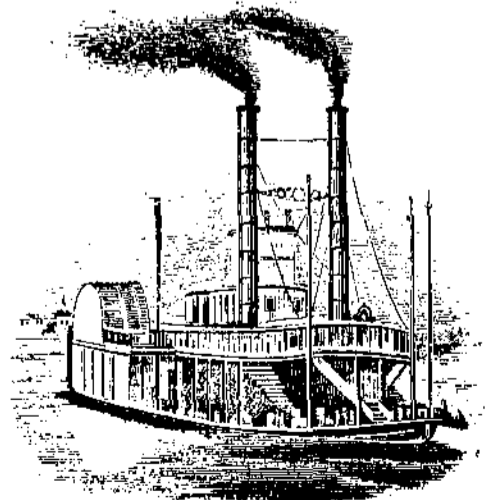
During these early years, steamboat races were not uncommon and the "New World" engaged herself in the dangerous competitions. There are recorded attempts by her rivals to both ram and ground her. An engagement with the "Defender" resulted in the passengers and crew of both boats exchanging pistol fire. On September 5, 1884, in another race, the steamer "Washoe" sank after a boiler explosion while rounding a sharp curve. One hundred sixty-three out of the two hundred five passengers were killed.

When San Francisco dock workers were alerted that a Sacramento River steamer was about to slip her lines and ease out into the bay, they would vamoose with the speed of a wild horse.

The steamer channel was continually dredged to the bay bottom. When the big Chrysopolis or any other riverboat headed into the bay, its huge paddle wheels would send a rolling cloud of highly perfumed mud in her wake, covering the area between the Pacific and Broadway wharves. Locals swore that the mud filled the area with the smell of spoiled Swiss cheese. The bottom of the bay is a foul place.

The age of riverboats abruptly ended after the fabled "Delta King" and "Delta Queen" were inducted into military service in 1941 at the outbreak of World War II. Today, commercial boats cannot be built with wooded superstructures. The one remaining commissioned Sacramento River steamboat, the "Delta Queen," plies the Mississippi River, by the special act of Congress.

(Parts of this article were taken from the San Francisco Independent and the Panner.)



**NEIGHBORS**

One interesting set of information available in the Resource Center is the Newsletters from our neighboring Historical Societies. They often offer one day or weekend tours and interesting meetings, as well as historical gems. Most of them welcome visitors. Here are some examples of their activities:

East Contra Costa

"Old Times in Contra Costa" book  
Museum open 1st Sat. and 3rd Sun. 2-4  
Pioneer Family histories.

Folsom

13th annual Miners Ball  
Museum 823 Sutter St. open Wed.-Sun. 11-4  
Mickey Mouse Memorabilia special exhibit  
until Jan. 16  
Special display at City Hall - first 100 years  
1848-1948 Mon.-Fri. 8-5  
Powerhouse Museum on weekends.

Galt

Rae House Oak Street open 2nd and 4th  
Saturday 1-4 pm.  
Sacramento-American River Cruise (Sept.)  
Beef in a Barrell Dinner Feb. 27

Rio Vista Museum

Open 1:30-4:30 Saturday and Sunday

Sacramento County

A November tour of Locke and San Francisco  
Chinatown may be repeated in the spring  
Old City Cemetery Activities  
General Meeting in Folsom on the History  
of Folsom Prison

Sacramento History Museum, 101 I Street

Wednesday through Sunday 10:00am-4:30pm

San Joaquin County

Mick Grove Museum  
Fall Colors trip--old-fashioned picnic on  
Fremont Peak and San Juan Bautista.  
Antiquing in Downtown Victorian Petaluma

Yolo County

A weekend in the Santa Cruz area--Filoli  
and Roaring Camp  
The reopening of the Winters Opera House  
A stroll through History--the Historical  
Neighborhoods of Woodland

**PETE BUDNIK (continued)**

There was a ball park behind the Buddhist Church--town teams played hard ball.

Each farm had a landing with a sign and a small warehouse and the boats picked up farm produce and delivered groceries on their way to and from San Francisco. There were sounding boards throughout the Delta. The boats sounded their horn and navigated by the echo when the weather was foggy. Landing warehouses and miscellaneous signs served as sound boards and some boards were purposely built.

Heating services in the area included kerosene, the main fuel, Sheldon Oil and Flamo tanks.

The Delta King and Queen could not stop in Walnut Grove because it was too sharp a turn. (The riverboats always docked heading upstream.) The young blades of the town had a Sunday routine. They would get a bag of sugar beets and stash it by the bridge, retire to the movie theater until they heard the boat whistle, then race out, grab some beets, ride the bridge up as it opened and then try to lob beets down the stack. Misses lit on the top of the Captain's cabin! Pete rode on the last trip of the Delta King.

The meeting ended on a questioning note of "What is Brown's Alley? Where was the racetrack? and Where did Alex Brown keep his horses?"

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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.

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P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690

**BOOKS OF INTEREST**

Japanese Legacy: Farming and community life in California's Santa Clara Valley. Timothy Lukes and Gary Okihiro.

Upriver Boats: When Red Bluff was the head of navigation. Edward Galland Tetinsky and Nancy Leigh Olmstead.

Scow Schooners of San Francisco Bay. Roger Olmstead.

Thrown Among Strangers: The Waking of Mexican Culture in Frontier California. Douglas Monroy.

The Campaign of the Century: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the birth of Media Politics. Gregg Mitchell.

The Hearsts: Father and Son. William R. Hearst, Jr., with Jack Cassenly.

Facing Footsteps of the Issei: An annotated checklist of the Manuscripts holdings of the Japanese-American Research Collection. Yasvo Sakata.

The View from Within: Japanese-American art from the internment camps. Karin Higa, James and Lane Hirabayasu, Wakako Yamaochi.

Bonanza Rich: Lifestyles of the western mining entrepreneurs. Richard H. Peterson.

The Adventures of a Young Swiss in California: The Gold Rush Account. Theophile De Rotte.

This Reckless Breed of Men: The trappers and fur traders of the southwest. Robert G. Cleland.

History of the San Francisco Stock Exchange Board. Joseph L. King.

Agony and Death of a Gold Rush Steamer: The disastrous sinking of the sidewheeler Yanke Blade. Donald G. Wright.

The Italians of Sacramento. Bruce Pierini.

Pony Express: Fact and fiction. Contra Costa County Historical Society.

Watkins to Weston: 101 years of California photography, 1849-1950. Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Wayne Bonnett.

**HISTORICAL AWARD**

On June 16, the Yolo County Historical Society, Historical Museum and Friends of the Archives awarded a plaque to Frances Bogle of Clarksburg "for her outstanding contributions to preserving local history."

Mrs. Bogle was commended for restoring and preserving the pictorial history of the Clarksburg, Courtland and Freeport areas. During nearly ten years Fran collected, copied and catalogued 1500 historically significant prints and negatives that chronicle the 19th and early 20th century of the southeastern part of Yolo County, the Delta and Sacramento County. By painstakingly researching the contents of the photographs, she accurately identified them and described them carefully on individual catalog cards. They are now a valuable source of historical information. The collection, portions of which have been widely displayed, will be accessible in the Clarksburg Library when space is available.

The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society seconds this award and gives thanks to the Friends of the Clarksburg Library for their generosity extended to our Society. These "picture boards" are exhibited each year at the Pear Fair, in Courtland and often at meetings to "back up" a speaker.

And to the foregoing a sad note is added: Fran died in early October. She will be remembered by us all as the long-time librarian at the High School in Clarksburg, as well as an avid historian and a good friend.

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