# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

— Walt Whitman

**NEWSLETTER** 

Vol. 12, No. 2

DECEMBER 1992

# SOCIETY NOTES

### PEAR FAIR

The historical exhibit at the Pear Fair was a big attraction-many people visited and enjoyed the artifacts. The usual fascinating antique farm equipment, pear labels and pictures were joined this year by a couple of the Courtland High School pictures and 1992 Pear Fair pins-yellow on green for the 20th anniversary.

Lillian and Leonard Souza spent the day as docents. Jim Dahlberg, Tom Herzog, Jerry Waterworth and Cathy Hemly took care of the layout and clean-up duties. A noble effort with good results. Many thanks to the committee, headed by Tom Herzog and including Jim Dahlberg, Leonard and Lillian Souza, Cathy Hemly, and Jerry Waterworth.

### SEPTEMBER MEETING

We tried an adventure! On a beautiful fall evening we met at the San Joaquin County Historical Museum located at Micke Grove Park in Lodi. Docents who were both charming and knowledgeable led us through and among the rustic buildings. The museum has an extensive collection of antique farm equipment and hand tools as well as many artifacts from early settlers in the area. The setting of the Museum is almost as interesting as the collection. Highlights included the asparagus equipment, tules clearing (with "tule shoes" for the horses), the Delta building with scenes of early life and the Weber Cottage. The cottage is surrounded by tules and a delightful old fashioned garden. The tractor "boneyard" and the carefully restored machinery is fascinating to farm equipment buffs. The museum is worth many a visit for children of all ages. Our thanks to Cathy Hemly for arranging our visit and the refreshments from the tailgate of the President's pickup.

### RESOURCE CENTER

The Resource Center is developing slowly but surely. We are still sorting the contents of our files and boxes. As soon as they are all labeled and access provided we will be able to give everyone a chance to use the materials as we gather and incorporate more. This is the third time we have tried to get our act together—four moves later (The Bridge Tender, Jean Harvie Center, Himebauch's Storage and finally Jean Harvie Center) we hope to succeed.

We have not yet formalized our goals, however, we are headed in the direction of establishing an archives to preserve Sacramento River Delta historical information. We hope to make this data available to interested people through exhibits and open hours at the resource center. Our activities will include purchasing preservation materials, framing pictures and rebinding books. We will need help in arranging, indexing, accessing and preserving our collection. We also hope to extend our Oral History Collection and develop a family history program.

### NOVEMBER MEETING

The November meeting was held at the Clarksburg Library Activities Room. Graham Connor spoke about Merritt Island and the families that settled the area. The meeting was arranged by Marshall Pylman ably assisted by his wife Yvonne. Refreshments were provided by Yvonne. A good time was had by all and many thanks are due to the speaker, organizers and server.

Graham's family included (in part) his Grandmother, Edith Morse Connor. She was the daughter of Steven Turner Morse and sister of Sarah Morse Smith, mother of Nettie Smith Pylman. Graham's father, Darrell Connor, was related to J.B. Greene who settled in the lower part of Merritt Island (1850) and to the Johnstons who lived across the Sacramento River (Rosebud). The audience included a lot of cousins.

In 1858 Hamilton Simeon Conner left New Hampshire and came to California via the Isthmus of Panama. He came to work on his uncle's (Josiah B. Green) dairy farm. His descendants are still farming on Merritt Island.

From these people Graham heard of the Sacramento River as "a clear green stream with white sand on the bottom and big green sturgeon swimming around." Graham also heard other tales.

One time, after a flood, Steven Turner Morse had to dig down the length of one spade handle to locate the top of a fence post and reestablish his ranch limits.

During one flood it was possible to sail on a boat from Franklin to Dixon.

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ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER
MONDAY

JANUARY 18
6:30 PM
JEAN HARVIE CENTER

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# MEMOIRS OF GENERAL WM. T. SHERMAN

"MEMOIRS OF GEN. W.T. SHERMAN, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF." 4th EDITION REVISED, CORRECTED AND COMPLETE. N.Y. CHARLES L. WEBSTER & CO 1891 (VOL. I AND II) Vol. I P 37 Early recollections of California 1846-48

Browsing through the Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman, one finds some interesting and quotable anecdotes from the time he spent in California as a

young lieutenant in 1847-48.

His trip to California was made on the U.S. store ship Lexington. The ship sailed from Governors Island to Fort Columbus (N.Y.) and was towed to sea by a steam tug on July 14, 1846. New York to Rio De Janeiro took 60 days and they stayed a week. In October the ship approached Cape Horn and waited one month until wind favored the passage. The weather was very rough. Valpariso, Chile, was reached 60 days after leaving Rio, where they stayed 10 days. The ship arrived in Monterey Bay, California January 26, 1847, 198 days out of New York.

Monterey was a mixed settlement of Americans, Mexicans and Indians. The total population was 1,000. There was an abundance of game--elk, deer, wild geese and ducks.

Sherman lived in the customs house at Monterey as a staff officer. He went to Los Angeles with General Stephen Watts Kearney, and returned to Monterey escorting a Mormon detachment. The trip north took 15 days to Monterey via Santa Barbara. The Mexican war was going on.

Lieutenant Sherman's next journey was to Sonoma via Gilroy, San Jose and Santa Clara, San Francisco (Mission Dolores area) and Yerba Buena Cove (Ferry Building area), mostly inhabited by Kanakas (Hawaiians). From Yerba Buena Cove the group sailed up San Francisco Bay and across San Pablo Bay to the mouth of Sonoma Creek and on to

Peace and harmony reigned in Upper California; Sherman characterized Lower war in Mexico. California as a "miserable wretched dried up peninsula.'

During the spring of 1848, while Sherman was still in Monterey, "Two men arrived from Captain Sutter on special business and wanted to see (Col.) Gov. Mason in person." Sherman was called in to test ore--it was gold!--not thought to be important as some had been found in the San Fernando Valley. Sutter wanted rights to the quarter section in which the gold was found in Coloma (Placer County), where he was building a sawmill. Colonel Mason's reply was that California was a Mexican Province held by conquest and therefore, no United States laws applied to it, much less, Mexican land laws which needed to be studied. Besides, Sutter was not likely to be disturbed by trespassers since there were no settlers within 40 miles. "That gold was the first discovered in the Sierra Nevada, which soon revolutionized the whole country, and actually moved the whole civilized world," Sherman wrote. However, at the time there was more interest in quick silver found 12 miles south of San Jose.

During this time the first overland mail arrived, brought by Kit Carson from Taos, New Mexico to Los Angeles then to Monterey. Carson was famous from the Fremont books. Lt. Sherman was surprised at the small stoop shouldered man with reddish hair, freckled face and soft blue eyes--nothing to indicate extraordinary courage or daring.

In the summer of 1848 more and more reports of large gold finds at Sutters Mill developed into a Some soldiers deserted; citizens (in Monterey) formed wagon trains to go to gold fields. Prices of goods became distorted--especially for mining supplies, mules, horses and tin pans. Sherman convinced Governor Mason it was their duty to go see and report to the U.S. Government.

Toward the close of June 1848, Col. Mason, Lt. Sherman, 4 soldiers, 1 black servant and a good outfit of horses and pack mules took the usual route for Yerba Buena Cove. Capt. Folsom and two citizens joined the party. To get the horses by scow to Sausalito took a whole day, because they couldn't leave until high tide. The men went by schooner. Upon reassembly they rode to San Rafael Mission. Next day to Bodega, where they spent the day with Stephen Smith, owner of the only steam sawmill in California. Smith had a Peruvian wife. Naked Indians were employed to make adobes. Next they moved from Bodega to Sonoma via Petaluma where they spent the day with Gen. Vallejo. Then they crossed over via Napa, Suisun and Vaca's ranch to the Puta(h). ("In the rainy season the plain between the Puta and Sacramento Rivers is impassable, but in July waters dry up and we passed without trouble, by the trail for Sutter's embarcadero.") The only means across the Sacramento River was an Indian dugout The animals swam and dispersed, but we captured enough to reach Sutter's Fort 3 miles back from the embarcadero. There we camped at the old slough or pond near the Fort. Indians found and returned our animals upon Sutter's command. The fort was adobe. One old adobe outside the east end of the fort was known as the "hospital." By July of 1848 gold mining activities had increased rapidly. There were many encamped both coming and going with gold stories. The military group stayed as "Honored Guests" for a huge 4th of July celebration. The military group stayed as

July 5, 1848, they resumed their journey toward mines. It was 25 miles to Mormon Island, the mines. where 300 Mormons were encamped at a rich strike downstream from Coloma. Sam Brannan was on hand as acting bishop (priest) collecting tithes. ' the midst of a broken country, all parched and dried by the hot sun of July, sparsely wooded with live oaks and straggling pines lay the valley of the American River, with its bold mountain stream coming out of the snowy mountains to the east." It was low ground on the spit which formed the island --running good yield. A few bush huts served as stores, boarding house, and for sleeping. Everyone All types of gold was slept on the ground. abundant. The Governor (Col. Mason) was asked if Brannan had the right to collect tithes. Col. Mason answered "Brannan has a perfect right to collect the tax if you Mormons are fools enough to pay it." They stopped paying at this point but the tithes are said to be the start of Brannan's fortune. summer and fall of 1848 he rented the hospital outside Sutter's Fort for a store and made more than any merchant in California at that time.

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# MEMOIRS OF W.T. SHERMAN (cont.)

They arrived at Coloma the next day, at noon. In July 1848 the American and Yuba Rivers were the only prospected areas. The horses had only sparse grass to eat so the group headed back to Sacramento. The Yuba and Feather Rivers were said to have wonderful "diggings." The group returned to Monterey for a message from Mazatlan. They traveled to Sutter's Fort, took the one canoe ferry across the Sacramento River while the animals swam; thence to Benicia (named for Vallejo's wife) on the Carquinez Straits. In the Montezuma Hills (Birds Landing area) they passed nearby the solitary adobe house occupied by Mr. Lansford Hastings. (Mr. Hastings was the one who delayed the Donner Party promoting his Utah Cut-off) At Benicia, Dr. Semple had a ferry--a ships boat with a lanteen sail. It could carry at one tide 6 or 8 horses. The party took several days to cross over. They then traveled up the Amador Valley to Alameda Creek (Niles Canyon) to old Mission San Jose and on to San Jose Pueblo. At San Jose the party split, Folsom and others went north to Yerba Buena and the rest continued on to Monterey.

Dispatches said the war with Mexico was over. The treaty was signed in May and the news arrived in California in September. The news about the gold discovery was sent to Washington. Many troops deserted to the mines. Three hundred dollars a month kept a man at a job.

Sherman later returned to Coloma with two partners where they opened a store and made \$1500 each on \$500 investment. On a later trip Sherman was at Sutter's Fort and helped to lay out the "town mostly around the fort with roads (J & K) leading to (Sacramento) river bank." Sutter contended the town could not exist at the river bank because it was flooded every year. It was built there anyway, floods and fever notwithstanding.

# **FOOTNOTE**

(William M. Holden wrote a very readable book "Sacramento Excursions into its History and Natural World." When he wrote "A Petite History of Sacramento" for California Chronicles we just had to borrow some of it.)

Captain John Sutter left Switzerland and five years and 20,000 miles later by way of Honolulu and Alaska he sailed and rowed up the Rio de Sacramento into the heart of wilderness and landed on the bank of the American River on August 12, 1839.

"King Kamehameha III of the Sandwich Islands was instrumental in the founding of Sacramento, for he assigned eight of his islanders, including two women, to go with Captain John Sutter to California and help start his colony. The Hawaiians constituted the large majority of the 13 original colonists of New Helvetia, or New Switzerland, seed of Sacramento. With Sutter were also a German, a Belgian, an Irishman and an Indian who joined Sutter on the Oregon Trail.

"As to those Hawaiians who adventured with Sutter from their faraway tropical islands, he paid them the supreme compliment when he wrote: 'I could not have settled the country without the aid of these Kanakas. They were always faithful and true to me.' Some of the descendants of the valiant Hawaiian colonists live in Sacramento today."

# MORE ISLETON MEMORIES

The June issue of the newsletter brought back Isleton memories to Joy Eddy Walther. The following excerpts give a child's eye view of living in Isleton.

"I remember Aileen Balsmeier when she was the Asparagus Queen--it might have been the year I was a queen train bearer--I am not sure--me in a little gold crepe paper costume dress (that was scratchy!).

As I remember the Asparagus Festival, there were several food stands that gave out cooked asparagus and mayonnaise: free. There was a stand down by Dunns' garage and as I stepped up to the counter for yet another plate of "grass" the adult at the counter said "You again? You must really like asparagus!" I still do, too. If it wasn't free my dad must have gotten a sizeable bill to cover my consumption.

I recall a carnival coming to town and locating on the east end of town in the then empty land adjacent to the road going up the levee toward Rio Vista. We kids were NOT ALLOWED to go into that area-day or night as it was "dangerous."

I remember the huge pile of sand by that same levee road and the Gardiner Store. They were dredging the river (that equipment was a delight to watch with their big clam shell jaws and long booms). On pleasant afternoons our mothers would take us up there to play. They'd sit in a spot on the uphill side that was off limits to us, but we could scamper over all the rest of it. What fun we had! Of course when we got home we were hosed off and that was part of the fun.

We lived in the old Gardiner house across from the Methodist Church--I remember Grandma Gardiner playing the pump organ as we sang "Little Brown Church in the Vale."

For a while Dad worked as a mechanic for Dunn and Bonetti--just down the alley. Along the alley was a little house where some Portuguese folks lived. The lady of the house baked bread and Nelson and I would go, stand around and sniff and drool. She would give us some. It was soooooo good!

After World War II Dad bought a new Dodge from Mr. Dunn and was so excited to get a new car that when he wrote the check he wrote the right figures but forgot the hundreds in writing out the amount--both Mr. Dunn and The Bank of Alex Brown honored it--banking was different then!

I remember all the asparagus canneries along the river-they dumped the cut-off stems in the river and they made a visible line downstream.

I remember Wood Island--we used to go there and play at the water's edge. It was most fun at low tide when the mud flats were exposed and layered with oozy gray mud silt. We'd run and slide and roll in the mess and looked like we had been dipped in chocolate. It all stopped one day when Nelson slid into a tin can lid and slashed open the skin over his knee. It folded back and looked awful. Our mothers had to get him to Rio Vista to a doctor in a hurry and they had us other little chocolate drops to cope with too--it was some afternoon to remember. It was shortly after that they dredged Wood Island away and our fun place was gone forever.

(continued on page 4)

### **WELLS FARGO**

(Ed. note In 1850, Wells and Co. merged with Butterfield, Wasson & Co. and Livingston, Wells and Pomeroy's Express, to form the American Express Co. Wells & Co. also was part of Wells, Fargo Express Co.)

Wells Fargo Bank, the oldest bank in the west, was founded in 1852 during the turmoil and upheaval of the California Gold Rush. Henry Wells and William Fargo formed Wells, Fargo and Co., an "express and exchange business," opening the first offices in San Francisco and Sacramento. One of its early services, an important one for the Forty-Niners, was to exchange currency for gold nuggets and dust brought in from the mines. The company's current corporate logo, the stagecoach, is in fact based on those Gold Rush origins, evoking a time when the bank also provided express service and mail delivery. For more than forty years, when the U.S. Postal Service was not equipped to serve the west reliably, Wells Fargo carried freight and mail over 3000 miles of territory between California and Nebraska and from Utah into Montana and Idaho.

The image of the bank's Gold Rush origins and its history in the development of California is carefully preserved by the Wells Fargo History Department, based in San Francisco. Toward this goal the Department manages the historical resources owned by the bank and provides reference and educational material for the community on the history of the company in the American West.

Support of education has been part of Wells Fargo's history from the earliest days. Henry Wells founded the Wells Seminary for the Higher Education of Young Women in New York. Wells Fargo express agents often served as school trustees. In later years, the company established corporate libraries and a library association for its employees. In the early 1900s, Wells Fargo sponsored traveling exhibitions for University of California Extension. The company's first history room opened in San Francisco in the late 1920s, and was later reopened as the Wells Fargo History Museum in 1986.

The History Department staff also does quite a bit of research and publishing, producing papers of Wells Fargo and its interaction with various communities. Current projects focus on women in Wells Fargo and Wells Fargo in the Chinese community. Robert Chandler, senior research historian with the History Department, recently published an article on Wells Fargo's Gold Rush origins in California History (Fall 1991).

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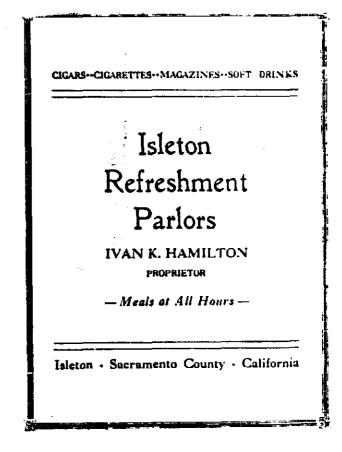
There is a replica of a Wells Fargo express agent's office in the B.F. Hastings building on Second Street in Old Sacramento and a Museum in the Sacramento headquarters on Capitol Mall. Both are very rewarding visits.

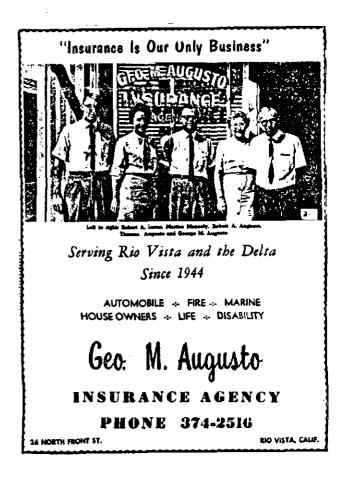
(This article was excerpted from the California Chronicle publication of the California Historical Society.)



### MORE ISLETON MEMORIES (cont.)

One memory begets another and I must quit but first I just have to tell this. There was a movie theater about opposite D & B Garage and it played silent movies. There was an old town character whose name I've forgotten--but he was a typically undergroomed wild westerner who carried a gun--always. As the story goes, 'Good Guy Joe' was easing his way around to the right of a large rock outcropping when onto the screen comes 'Bad Guy Sam' trying to get him from behind. Well, our town character sees this guy Sam and ho'lers "Look out behind Joe," whips out his gun and fires through the silver screen to save "Good Guy Joe'. All I know is that there was a patch on the screen even the last time I went there."





# **NEIGHBORS**

There is an interesting article in the latest edition of the San Joaquin Historian. "Arboreal Monarchs of the San Joaquin County" tells of the part played by the Valley Oak, Interior Live Oak and Blue Oak in the settlement and development of the San Joaquin Valley. Many names on the land come from the trees, i.e., Oakdale, Live Oak, Los Robles and Encino.

The Yolo County Historical Society newsletter points out that three points of historic interest in Yolo County have been named to the California Department of Parks and Recreation's Point of Historical Interest List. They include the Yolo County Museum and the Yolo County Courthouse both located in Woodland. Also included was the "Leonidas Taylor Monument significant as the only such free-standing monument in Yolo County, and the only one on the banks of the Sacramento River. Because of its solitary location and the poignancy of its inscription, the obelisk became a noted landmark soon after its installation. By the time the Monument School was built nearby in 1861, the prominent bend in the Sacramento River was known as 'Monument Bend.' The Monument is a tombstone erected by the family of a young man from St. Louis, Missouri, aged 24, who died in the explosion of a river steamboat and whose body was never found. It is likely that travelers in the early years of California's statehood viewed the Monument as a memorial to many young men who died in steamboat accidents in California in the 1850's, far from their families in the midwest and east.

The Rio Vista Museum Association plans to build a two-story addition directly behind the current building. It will be a lengthy project so let's give them all the support we can!

Los Mequanos, the East Contra Costa Newsletter reports on the Original Delta Residents. "The first known human residents in the Sacramento/San Joaquin Rivers' Delta arrived some 10,000 years ago. These people came across the Bering Straits migrating from Mongolia/Siberia over Alaska and through the Pacific Northwest and settled where the living was mild and without too many hardships.

During the warm summers, they lived on the lowlands, but when the winter rains came and the spring thaw caused the Delta lowlands to flood, they moved to higher, drier ground. It is estimated that some 30,000 lived in the Delta, one of the most productive areas. They were hunter/gatherers, and the Delta lowlands provided them with fish, clams, waterfowl, and wildlife from muskrats to tule elk. On the highlands, they found acorns and other grains, and were known to graze on grasses.'

## **SOCIETY NOTES (cont.)**

### NOVEMBER MEETING (cont.)

Darrell Connor, as a boy looking out of his third story window on the back of Merritt Island over the future Holland Land, saw a heron rookery and watched pelicans herd fish into the shallows and then eat them.

Steven Turner Morse's brother Ira Curtis Morse kept a journal of his trip across the U.S. in 1852-He started in Lockport, Illinois (home of many future Deltans), took a steamer down the Illinois River to St. Louis and then down the Missouri River to St. Joseph. He was hired as a teamster driving to Salt Lake City.

The next spring, Curtis joined a large wagon train to California. The trained included 55 men, 2 women and 100 cattle. He met grizzly bears and Indians, crossed deserts and mountains and finally delivered the cattle in the San Joaquin Valley. After a brief session in the mines, Curtis Morse joined his brother Steven Turner Morse in purchasing a ranch on Schoolcraft (Ryer) Island.

Amanda Massey Wilson, wife of Hamilton Simeon Connor, came across the plains as 2-yearold Amanda Kilgore in 1850-51. Her Uncle, Mathew Kilgore, kept a journal of his trip from Iowa to California in 1850-51. He describes making 5 to 30 miles a day, Indian encounters, fresh graves along the trail, deserts, dust, traveling at night and people unprepared running out of provisions.

These journals point out the importance of writing down your life story. Daily life is interesting!

As one of the listeners at the meeting observed, "No wonder so many people live so long around here--only the fit survived the trip."

### ASK A FRIEND TO JOIN

Do you know someone, family or friend, who would enjoy hearing about and supporting the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society? It's fun to be part of preserving and sharing our local history.

Regular	***************	\$6.00
	*****************	
Sustaining	***************************************	\$20.00
Th	******************	<b>* * * * * *</b>
Life	***************************************	\$150.00

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# **BOOKS OF INTEREST**

The Hearsts: Father and Son. William Randolph Hearst, Jr., and Jack Robert Rinehart, Niwot, Colorado. Casserly.

A Pictorial History of Belvedere 1890-1990: A California Island Town. Ed. Beverly Wright Bastian and Barbara Britton Gross. California Landmarks Society, Tiburon.

In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America. Earl Pomeroy. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<u>Yesterday in San Diego</u>. Arthur Ribbel. Rancho Press, Oceanside, California.

- Discover Historic California: A Travel Guide to over 1500 Places You Can See, Revised. Glen Guide Books, Pico Rivera.
- Big Alma: San Francisco's Alma Spreckles. Bernice Scharlach. Scottwall Assoc., San Francisco.

Historical Sketches of Southern Alameda County. First published as a series of articles June 8 -November 18, 1989. Alameda County Historical Society, Oakland.

Galloping Bungalows: The Rise and Demise of the American House Trailer. David Thornburg. Shoe String Press, Hamden, Connecticut.

- <u>Tiburon, a California Railroad Town</u>. Ed. James Heib. Landmarks Society, Tiburon.
- Strawberry Road: a Japanese Immigrant Discovers America. Yoshima Ishikawa. Kodansha Int'l/USA, Putnam Publishing Group, East Rutherford, N.J.
- Bridging the Pacific: San Francisco's Chinatown and Its People. Thomas W. Chinn. Chinese Historical Society of America.
- Available in the Sacramento City-County Library System

# THINGS TO DO

The Sacramento History Museum has an exhibit called World War II: Sacramento Home Front. It is nostalgic for some and an excellent portrayal of Sacramento in the early forties for others. The music, posters, furniture and movies bring back a time and a city of fifty years ago. Open until March 7. 101 I Street. Don't miss it!!

The next exhibit, to open in April, is The History of the Chinese Communities in the Sacramento Region. Sounds like a winner!

It is an odd time to talk about spring, however, you won't want to miss a train ride from Rio Vista Junction through the Jepson Prairie and return. The rides are offered on weekends from the middle of April to the middle of May when the wild flowers are at their peak. The Jepson Prairie is so protected it is hard to see any other way. See Solano City, The Atlas Powder Works and the unique vernal pools. The train leaves from the Western Railway Museum. Take a picnic lunch. Train fare includes museum entrance. For reservations or information call (510) 778-RAIL.

SAVE MONDAY JANUARY 18 6:30 PM JEANNE HARVIE AUDITORIUM FOR ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER

Don't forget the TV show California's Gold--Friday at 8:30 pm on Channel 6.

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The Folsom Museum is open 11 am to 4 pm Wednesday-Sunday. 823 Sutter Street, Folsom.

# \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* **NEWSLETTER STAFF**

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