Sacramento River Delta Historical Society NEWSLETTER

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

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 19, No. 2

DECEMBER 1999

SOCIETY NOTES

The Historical Exhibit at the Pear Fair in Courtland the last Sunday in July was well attended. The exhibit was laid out by Jim Dahlberg, Tom Herzog, Jerry Waterworth, Jim and Fran Bates, and Julia Herzog. These people also stored the exhibit away, a great contribution to our society. Many thanks. The day of the fair June Werlan, Dorothy Hays, Tom Herzog, Lenard and Lillian Souza, Gene Wiseman, Marshall Pylman, Bill and Margret Shelton, Terry and Jayne Alchorn, Barbara and Jim Dahlberg, and Denny Leary served as docents—a valuable job well done. We are indebted to Tom Herzog for his management of this event. Good job, Tom. MANY THANKS!

SEPTEMBER MEETING

The meeting was held at Bates School in Courtland. Chris Fulster, President of the North Delta Conservancy (an incorporated nonprofit land trust), presented "Windows on the Delta", a beautiful videotape of the Sacramento River Delta. The historically oriented tape shows how the Delta is used for farming and recreation. Mr. Fulster, aided by Tom Herzog, explained the role of the North Delta Conservancy in the "Battle for the Delta". The North Delta Conservancy are the primary protectors, as in "keep it as it is". The NDC attempts to reach a balance between the various interests all the while trying to maintain as much of the North Delta's uses, appeal and appearance. They have created some wetlands and they limited the Stone Lake Preserve to about half its original proportions, thereby preserving farm land which contributes to the economic chain "land to table" and recreation. There are many different groups interested in the Delta: its waters, wildlife and land; and naturally controversy follows. The Nature Conservancy is an international nonprofit land trust that purchases land to preserve various land types. The Fish and Wildlife groups want sanctuaries to be used only by schools and bird watchers. The Bureau of Land Management seems to eliminate farms and the present and future land use is Other groups are Cal-Fed (the latest conglomerate of groups interested in the Delta and its water), State Parks and Recreation, regional planning and

zoning groups and commercial enterprises. Obviously a great deal of compromise is needed. With give and take the farmers, hunters, fishermen, boaters, and government bureaus can each get some of what they want. Great strides have been made when farmers create wetlands in their off season. It is good for wildlife and good for the land. In addition North Delta Conservancy has a program whereby they collect duck eggs. They nurture them and release 1000 ducks a year.

SESQUICENTENNIAL

Continuing our chronicle of what was going on (through) in our area one hundred fifty years ago we present a quote from "Thompson, John, 'The Settlement of Geography of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, California'", a dissertation submitted to Stanford University 1957, P139.

"Once the in rush of Argonauts had begun, the water routes to Sacramento, Stockton, and landings upstream became the major lanes of transit. The Sacramento River maintained an early lead in sail & steam transportation.

"Viewed from the deck of a ship the tule and willow thickets of the central delta offered little of interest. The trip to Stockton on the San Joaquin seemed particularly dull. Ships followed a shoaling serpentine course between canebrake-like masses of tule. Clumps of shrubbery broke the continuity, but there were no trees. When the tule wall was burned away views were afforded of Mount Diablo and of some of the Sierra Nevada. Other breaks in the monotonous tule skyline were provided by the sails and topmasts of other ships, sometimes visible for miles. The margins of the lowermost Sacramento also were lined by tules and shrubs. The western backdrop, formed by the low and treeless Montezuma Hills, evoked little comment.

"Sacramento-bound travelers from more humid lands than California appreciated the appearance of wooded natural levees, probably first encountered at Brannan Island. The banks abounded with a scraggy white oak; these oaks, the sycamores, the other trees became larger upstream. Beyond the line of thickets and timber, the tule bank swamps looked like a succession of lakes at high

** Remember it is time to renew your SHRDHS membership for the next millennium **

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER MONDAY JANUARY 17th 6:30 PM JEAN HARVIE CENTER NL VOIS #1 002

In 1919 the Holland Bypass Co. was formed to reclaim and enclose with low tide levees an additional 3000 acres. Under manager Shanks the job was completed in 1924 at which time the Holland Bypass Co. was dissolved.

The Holland Land Co. was a private placement whereas the other development companies at the time were financed by public offerings. The company sold its land for \$226-\$375 per acre with no bond attached. The company sold or rented farms in pieces of twenty acres or more. By 1920 some 80 units (15,000 acres) were sold realizing \$4,250,000. Purchasers were screened for agricultural capabilities and civic interest. Excursion trains of prospective buyers arrived from San Francisco where they mingled with the local residents at annual picnics in Hinsdale Grove. General Manager Gus Olson became a masterful salesman.

The land is generally below sea level and to keep the land drained ditches were cut. Water level in the ditches always remains very high. Canals and ditches are used for both drainage and irrigation. In summer the pumps can deliver 2,000,0000 gallons a minute. When water levels permit water is siphoned from Elkhorn Slough which saves power costs. The big siphon has a 5 horsepower engine. Winter water is pumped out. Two and a half million dollars were spent to prime the tract for farming. The drained land was broken up by using at least fifty traction engines. But sinkholes remained where tules grew. The sinkholes were filled with very mushy ground which could easily shallow a tractor. However, through the years they have been, for the greater part, successfully eliminated.

A temporary setback occurred when boron began to appear and in the areas affected crops were stunted. It was discovered that the upward surges of water pressure in winter and spring brought the boron to the surface. It was found that the boron came from Indian Valley via Cache Creek through geologic layers. The University was called in and the problem resolved in 1932 by using overhead irrigation instead of spud ditches. Crops have been sugar beets introduced in 1917, potatoes, fresh peas for the eastern markets, tomatoes for canning, alfalfa, barley wheat, safflower, asparagus, onions and hay; also beans: limas, pink, whites, garbanzos, red Mexican. Seed was another big crop: pea, onion, carrot, sugar beet, lettuce, Ferris-Anderson contract-cut asparagus. More recent crops are figs, grapes, and dichondra seeds.

In connection with opening the "Holland Tract" to agriculture, the Oregon Nursery Company established a local nursery managed by Robert Schneider. Known locally as Schneider-Vaughn or the "Holland" nursery, it was located on Willow Point Road. "Orenco" owners with Mendenhall and Olson had hoped that the reclaimed land would sustain fine fruit orchards and nut groves. A 1920 photo shows bundles of saplings stacked in town where today stands the post office and church. Unfortunately the trees developed root rot from the high water table. After a few years the nursery closed and "Holland" was left to hay and row crops. The walnut trees raised by the nursery were eventually extensively planted along district roads where some survive today. At this writing (1999), despite the above, figs and grapes are grown in the district. The "Davis Survey" (UCD) recommended the Holland Tract for wine grapes because the weather provided hot days and cool nights.

As sugar prices picked up in the twenties sugar beets were tried again on a large scale. The Alameda Sugar Co. contracted for the first beets. It was sole contractor for 11 years. \$10 per ton was offered the farmer, regardless of sugar content. In 1923, Holly Sugar Co. bought Alameda. In 1934 the Amalgamated Sugar Co. under direction of General Manager Benning built the landmark refinery. Their brand name was "White Satin". Sugar beets and the refinery were another agricultural opportunity for district farmers when the seed business declined. In 1936 American Crystal Sugar Co. bought the plant and local land owner (since 1919) Lester Holmes was appointed General Manager and served until 1954, followed by Curzon Kay. The refinery claims a world record for tons per acre in 1947 and a record for pounds of sugar per acre in 1949. The plant permanently closed in the late 1970s when the sugar tariff was again eliminated.

Most of the 24 miles of roads were dirt and in the winter mud. The better secondary roads were gravel surfaced. Until 1940, only Jefferson Boulevard and Central Avenue were paved. Netherlands Road was paved in 1946. Ditches were open and all roads crossed on wooden bridges. These crossings were later culverted. Overall 100 bridges and culverts were built. John Merwin recalled driving home on Zee Line Road in winter and getting stuck in the sticky gooey gumbo. He fetched his Caterpillar and pulled the car back to the ranch.

In the mid 1930s, after levees settled, they were built up to specs. Willow Mound was a levee planted with willow. Situated along the Back Cut it was designed to break wave action against the back levee during the winter flood.

Two bridges connect to the district. The Minor Slough Bridge from Ryer Island built in 1933 is a swing bridge. A 191-foot span, it is 12 miles north of Rio Vista and is operated by a one cylinder gas engine. It provides an 18-foot navigable channel and at low tide a 22-foot clearance. It facilitates the "quick back way" from Rio Vista to Sacramento. The other bridge is a fixed bridge spanning Elkhorn Slough on the North Courtland Road. A prior fixed bridge crossed near the mouth of Elkhorn at its convergence with Sutter Slough and connected Merritt Island Road to Waukena Road on the Holland side of Elkhorn Slough.

The Oakland-Antioch and Eastern Railway served the District until 1916 when its right-of-way was purchased by the Sacramento Northern. The railroad entered the District at Riverview and terminated its Holland Branch Line at Oxford. The several stops in between were in sequence north to south: Riverview, Arcade (where the long trestle across the Yolo Bypass commences), Argenta, Bermuda, Tasco, Willow Point, Coniston, Newton, Central, Greendale, Silverdale, Sorroca, Valdez, Oxford. (An asparagus packing shed operated by DH&P was located at Valdez Station and years later a large Mexican labor camp supervised by Gabriel de la Torre operated at Silverdale.) These trains transported large amounts of produce out of the district.

Shallow bottomed lighters pushed by tugs also took product out of the District. Wagons, such as the Elgin barley train, hauled sacks of barley to the landings. Hay schooners are shown in photos moored at the back levee where a chute dropped from the levee to the deck and the bale was slid down the chute. Sugar beets were taken to "beet dumps" for continued transport by barge or train.

MAY MEETING

Cathy Hemby took us on a tour of the 1920-29 La Peritas, the Courtland High School Annual. It's hard to realize the small rural high school was so isolated. The school started in the basement of the Bates Elementary School in 1917. Alicia (Buckley) Selby was the first graduate in 1919.

The first class, 1920, set many precedents that lasted through the fifty-year life of the school. The annual yearbook, La Perita, began at that time. The first issue was sponsored by the community and contained many student-written essays and poems. We were reminded that at that time Locke was 4 years old, women had just won the right to vote, and the nation was under prohibition. There were many familiar names in that class which included, David Elliot, Elsie Goldman (Mrs. Phil Dixon), Doris Leffler, Doris Fisher, Vernon Hinsdale, Frank Mattrocce (new that year), Donna MacKay, Louise Ohlson, George Smith and Yen Jang. They started high school during the war (WWI) and they bought and sold Liberty Bonds and worked on Red Cross projects.

The advertisements provide a great deal of history and feelings of the times. We enjoyed the names of many companies that ranged in locale from Sacramento to Lake Tahoe. The first La Perita supporters included THE COURTLAND, Joe Fisher, Prop., CHAUNCY CHEW STORE, Groceries and Auto Parts, etc., the future home of THE BANK OF COURTLAND, (some builders moved to Courtland and over several years built the High School, Masonic Hall, Courtland Bank, and many houses), BURRIS AUTOMOTIVE CROSSING TENDER, CHANDLER AUTO, BUCKLEY TRUCKING, HOOD GARAGE AND MACHINE SHOP, FORD C.F. NELSON, BAUER & MILLER (later Miller and Jackson), COURTLAND NEW THEATER (movies), BAUSCH AND LOMB, STEREOPTICON and YAT SUN who would "Supply anything you need".

The 1921 La Perita mentioned the Trustees Dobbins, M. Van Loben Sels, W.J. Smith, W.J. Edinger; and the class was entertained at the Van Loben Sels home. There was a basketball team but baseball was the big sport. There was a girls basketball team too.

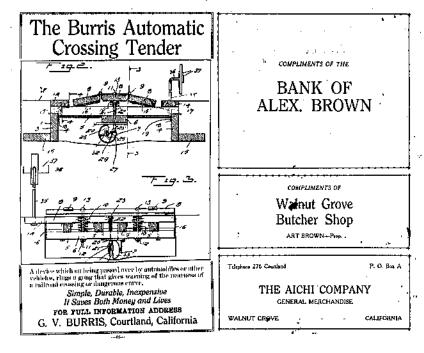
More marvelous advertisements, i.e., J.M. BUCKLEY & SONS, ISHAM AND WARREN, D.C., SIMPSON, groceries, FRANK CARR, NOAH ADAMS, building materials, FORDSON TRACTORS, C.F. Nelson, HOTEL RYDE for transient units and family meals, HOTEL SIMONI (Vorden), CLARK AND DOBBINS insurance, WALTER BROWN Ryde, California, C.W. JARVIS blacksmith, SHELL DISTRIBUTOR, BANK OF ALEX BROWN an ALCHI CO. Walnut Grove.

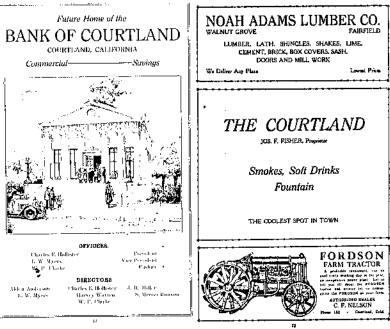
The 1923 edition promotes DELTA TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH Peter Huth and Isham, HOCHDOERFLER piano tuner, COURTLAND ICE CO., HAYASHI, KAWAHARA, BEN'S DRUG STORE, LION SODA WORKS (Walnut Grove), JOHN SKINNER, barber (Courtland), CALIFORNIA FRUIT EXCHANGE (cherries, apricots, pears, peaches, apples and plums), and IMPERIAL THEATER (Walnut Grove). They had boys and girls sports teams, as well as a class flower and class color.

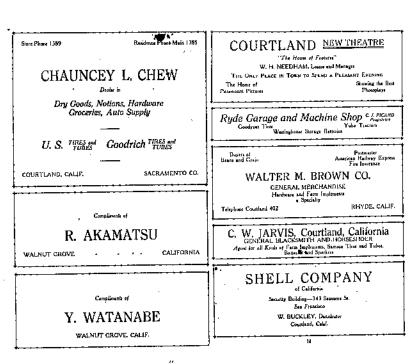
In 1924 ads were added for AMERICAN FRUIT, EARL FRUIT, WALNUT GROVE THEATER, N.C. BERRY (Walnut Grove), and HERZOG'S DELTA DAIRY.

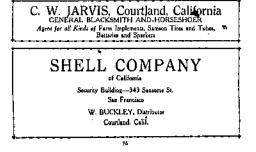
1925 saw the addition of a girls glee club and an orchestra consisting of piano, violins and a trombone. Languages were added to the curriculum.

(Continued on page 5)









RECLAMATION DISTRICT (continued)

Clarksburg, founded in 1849-50 became the District town. It sits on the neck of District land which fronts the Sacramento River. In 1919 plans for Clarksburg were unveiled: streets, stores, and hotels were planned. Irving Smith, a civil engineer and company employee, platted and subdivided Clarksburg into the town familiar today. Homes and gardens designed by St. Louis architects were proposed. Many families moved to the area in the early twenties. The new school and community church were built on company property within the District. Electricity and telephone service arrived around 1925.

Three schools existed within the District: Willow Point School, an early grammar school; the Japanese Cultural School on the North Courtland Road at Waukena Road; and the Clarksburg School. Willow Point was absorbed into the Clarksburg Elementary District and students were all schooled in Clarksburg. The Japanese School was for teaching Japanese culture and language.

Some of the early farmers identified with the district are Merwin, Hunn, Slater, Wilson, Yelland, Olson, Parsons, Heringer, Bealefield, Harter, Hapgood, Marshall, Reamer, Hinsdale, Pollock, Berneson, Schneider, Holmes, Burns, Hanrahan, Volz, Williams Gorter, Cook, DH&P and many others.

The Holland Land Company operated from 1914 to 1941. In those 25 years the company paid all bonded debt of Netherlands Farms and showed a profit. The Holland Land headquarters were on Netherlands Road, just past the school. Al Bealefield was in charge of District maintenance. Headquarters Bunkhouse and Heringer Bunkhouse reportedly were the best places to eat "in the whole country."

The District purchased a Model T Fire Truck in 1920. It was a soda acid rig equipped with horses, ladders, siren and bells. It was parked at the metal shop building

at Headquarters and later at the District Main Pumping Station and lastly in an open shed on the south side of the maintenance area. Headquarters burned in the early 1930s; the two-story office building was completely destroyed. The safe, which contained all the district records, was cooled for two or three days and opened. A few papers showed charred edges and the remainder were unharmed. In 1950 the Fire Truck was given to the Clarksburg Fire Department for historical preservation.

Many photos of District 999 were taken by a San Francisco Photography firm and later by Dell McMurry of Sacramento. These photos can be accessed at the Clarksburg Library and/or the University of California, Davis.

(Written by Kathe Hutchinson)

MAY MEETING (continued)

1926, when gas was replaced by electricity, Courtland High had its first football team. New advertisements included Larson Tires "only Service" (if you did not purchase your tires there, you got no air or other services), William Bates electrician (no relation to the town donor), BEN'S DRUGS and FUJII GARAGE.

In 1933 when THE BANK OF COURTLAND closed its doors (it later paid off everyone, even the small children), there were newsboys selling The Sacramento Bee in the streets of Courtland. Sadly the bank did not advertise in the La Perita again.

We look forward to more La Perita-based history.

	NEWSLETTER STAFF
Editor	Kathleen Hutchinson
Co-Editor	Carol Watsor
Typist .	Judy Johnsor

BOOK ORDER

To order a copy of "Historic Houses of the Sacramento River Delta", send \$12.95 per copy (mail order) to SRDHS, P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690.

No. of copies:		
Name (mail to)		
Address		
City	State	Zip

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	*********	\$15.00
Family/Busine	ss	
Patron		\$50.00
Life	**************	\$150.00

Make check payable to: SRDHS P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690

NAME			 	
ADDRESS			 	
CITY	·		 	
STATE		_ ZIP _	 	
TELEPHONE ()			

The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (SRDHS) NEWSLETTER twice a year (December and June).



SESQUICENTENNIAL (continued)

water." They were drained by small sloughs which cut through the wooded riverbank. Steamboat Slough and the Sacramento proper were walled in by thickly wooded strips. Overhanging branches and trees were a constant hazard to spars and rigging on vessels that had to proceed near the banks to avoid strong currents.

"The water voyage from San Francisco to Sacramento usually required six to eight days of sailing. At least until the lee of the 'Montezuma Hills' was reached, winds were dependable enough. Thereafter movement upstream was accomplished by taking advantage of tides or by use of kedge anchor or warping. Sometimes a rowboat was used to tow larger vessels. The tides eased keeled vessels over shoals that lay between the river outlet and Grand Island, to either side of the island, and for a short distance above the present site of Freeport. The kedge anchor and warping were employed when currents were strong and winds weak. The tows were tried when calm prevailed and currents remained weak.

"Most difficulty was encountered in Steamboat Slough, the favored channel for passing Grand Island. It was a seven-mile shortcut which smaller ships and steamboats followed but which northbound larger sailing vessels avoided because the current was too strong. The shallower-draught sailing ships warped through 'The Slough' or 'narrows.' Warping involved taking a coil or rope upstream from one's ship in a canoe or small boat, securing the strand to a sump or tree neath the water's edge, and bringing the line aboard, where the hands proceeded to pull. The slow progress was punctuated with the shock attendant upon striking shoals and snags and overhanging trees. Passengers alternately aided in the laborious operation, hiked or hunted on the shore, and visited with settlers. Once the main stream was reached, sailing was possible again, assuming a south wind.

"San Francisco-bound traffic, steam and sail alike, favored Steamboat Slough. Schooners and brigs drifted with the stream, stern foremost.

"From 2 to 3 days to as many weeks were consumed in sailing between San Francisco and Stockton. The eccentricities of the low-gradient channels, the wind, and the tide could make the trip most tedious. Sails were often of little use because the meanders constantly altered the relationship of course to wind. In such circumstances, more progress was made by rowing, where the channels were narrow and the levees offered a rooting, by manual towing. As a rule, there was no navigation at night.

"Wood-burning steamers appeared on the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers in August and September 1849. Almost immediately, regular service was established between San Francisco and Benicia, and Stockton, Sacramento or Stockton. By early 1850 a number of steamers were providing highly competitive service. The expresses reached Sacramento in 14 hours and returned to San Francisco as quickly as a little over 5-1/2 hours. The Stockton trip took between 7 hours and a day. Shoals and sharp meanders occasioned the delays. The Sacramento's Steamboat Slough required a 'considerable nicety' of navigation. At least one steamboat lost wheelhouse planking to overhanging trees while backing and filling around bends. Although trees presented no problem to San Joaquin River navigation, there were numerous times when power had to be cut and the vessel fended through river bends.

"Frustrated miners dropped from the erratic procession that filed through the mining camps, Stockton, and Sacramento as they realized that surer fortunes could be gained by tilling the soil than by turning gravel. They took up farming in various parts of central California. The Argonauts who set up shanties or tents along the Sacramento in 1849 were wood choppers or gardeners. The wood chopper followed the trade as an interim occupation before returning or going to the mines. They sold the fuel to steamers for \$12-\$15 a cord. The men who cleared gardens intended claiming pre-exemption rights to the land. These people found a cluster or two of huts at the Indian village which stood upstream and opposite the head of Steamboat Slough, and on the west bank a mile or so northwest of the present Freeport. In 1850 the settlement pattern along the river had intensified. A few houses and fields were in evidence at Washington and Sutterville: but southward into the delta country, there was little or no activity until a mile or so below the present Freeport. There were huts and fields here and across the river from Clarksburg, also a half mile north of Clarksburg on the east bank and for a mile along the east bank near the head of Sutter Slough. A similar pattern of fields and houses occurred along the east bank opposite Sutter Island and for a half-mile opposite the head of Grand Island. Sutter Island was farmed only at its eastern tip. Across Steamboat Slough, all fields covered much of the upper end of Grand Island. Other Grand Island farms, including orchards, extended from the junction of Steamboat and Sutter sloughs downstream to the present Howards' landing. No improvements are known for the remainder of the island, nor for Merritt, Ryer, Brannan and Sherman Islands. There appears to have been some tilled land along the riverbank where Rio Vista now stands."

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

non profit
organization
u.s. postage
PAID
permit #15
walnut grove, ca.
95690

STANDARD MAIL