

1911

SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS BULLETIN

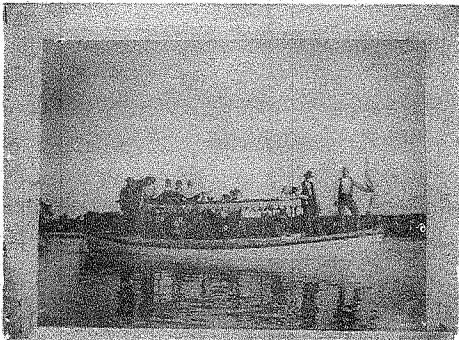
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YUBA CITY, CALIFORNIA

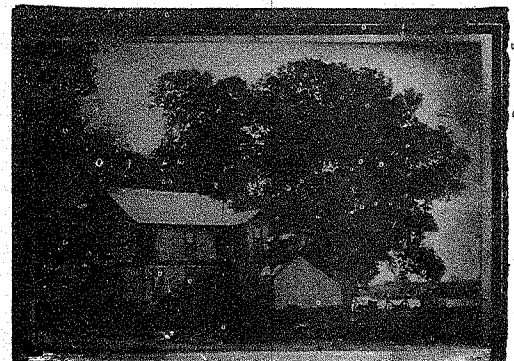
OCTOBER, 1956



MR. & MRS. JHAN B. WILLSON OF VERONA



PRODUCE TRANSPORTATION BOAT



VERONA CREAMERY, LOCATED ON FEATHER RIVER

SUTTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL MEETING

October 16, 1956

7:30 P.M.

Board of Supervisors Chambers

SPEAKER: Mr. Stephen Hust

TOPIC: The Beginnings of Sutter City
and
Escapades of P.D. Gardemeyer

Mr. Hust is no stranger to people interested in Sutter county history. Everyone has read, with a great deal of interest, his writings in the local paper, The Independent Herald.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tentative Program
Fifth Annual Symposium
Historical Societies of Northern California and Southern Oregon
Sonoma, California
October 12, 13, 14, 1956

Friday . . At Mission Inn (Headquarters for meetings and hotel accomodations)

6:00 8:00 Dinner

6:00 8:00 Registration

8:00 8:15 Opening . . Mrs. R. R. Emparran, President,
Sonoma Valley Historical Society

8:15 8:30 Mr. Harold Schutt, President, Conference of California
Historical Societies, "The Progress of the
Conference."

8:30 9:00 Dr. Aubrey Neasham, Historian, State Division of Beaches
and Parks, "Sonoma Valley's place in
California History."

9:00 and after Social hour and refreshments.

Saturday . . At Mission Inn

8:00 9:00 Registration

9:00 9:15 Mr. R. R. Emparran

9:15 9:45 Dr. John Hussey, Regional Historian, National Park Service,
"The Story of the Bear Flag and Revolt."

9:45 10:30 Questions and General Discussion

10:30 11:15 Mrs. Helen S. Giffen, Secretary, The Society of California
Pioneers, "The Story of the California Missions",
with slides

11:15 12:00 Questions and General Discussion

12:00 1:15 Luncheon. Introduction of Members and Guests

AFTERNOON Dr. Hector Lee, Chico State College, Presiding
 1:15 3:15 Reports of Societies and Discussion of Problems and Projects
 3:15 3:30 Announcements of Planning Committee. Other Announcements
 3:30 5:30 Conducted Tour of Historic Places in Sonoma
 7:00 9:00 Dinner (For those remaining over for Sunday program)

Sunday . . At Mission Inn

10:00 12:00 Conducted Tour of the wineries
 12:00 2:00 Luncheon and free time
 2:00 5:00 Visit Pony Express Retreat and Pony Express History and
 Art Gallery, located in San Rafael, California.
 Sherry and Port wine and snacks will be served.
 5:00 Adjourn

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Annual Meeting for 1957

The date for the Annual Meeting of the Conference of
 California Historical Societies has been set for June 20,
 21, 22, 1957. San Diego was unanimously voted as the
 location by the Conference in convention at San Jose.

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Excerpts from Conference of California
Historical Societies Newsletter

While on the subject of the gold rush it might interest the curious Californian, and there are many, to know that there came to the Huntington Library from Phoenix, Arizona, during the past year one of the most interesting journals concerning that period ever to be added to the Huntington collections. It is the day-by-day account of Dr. Isaac S.P. Lord, of Aurora, Illinois, physician who, tainted with the madness of the time, journeyed overland to California in 1849, settled in the Marysville area and stayed in and around that vicinity until, with his hopes for a golden fortune completely shattered, he again journeyed eastward in 1851 via the Isthmus and reached Aurora a very, very happy man to be again at home. Such an experience was by no means uncommon, but Dr. Lord had combined excellent powers of observation with a good education, and his detailed descriptions of what he saw on his trip, as well as his many professional notes on the sickness and death along the way, with particular reference to the prevalence of cholera both in and out of California, make his account fascinating reading.

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Those members of the Conference who are especially interested in historical railroads will enjoy Short Line Junction by Jack R. Wagner and published by the Academy Library Guild of Fresno.

THE HAWAIIAN COLONY OF VERNON

By - Bernice B. Gibson

Gold is not always found in the hills of the Sierra Nevadas. Many gold nuggets of information may be found in our own dooryard if we but look.

Early in the summer of 1956 it was my pleasure to receive a letter from an historian living in the beautiful islands of Hawaii. He told me more in one letter about our neighbors in Vernon, than I had learned in a lifetime. I was urged to call upon a descendant of one of the original Hawaiian settlers and glean some information about South Sutter.

A lovely early fall morning Mrs. Irmina Rudge and I started out on our mission. It was one of those balmy mornings when one is glad to be alive and glad to be alive in Sutter county.

We crossed the "low" bridge at Nicolaus and wended our way down the levee to Verona. It was the first time either of us had been down that way since the flood. We were interested in finding the residence of Mrs. Mabel Willson Armstrong a descendant of Mr. and Mrs. Jon Willson whose pictures appear on the cover page of this bulletin. We stopped at the store in Verona to inquire how we might reach Mrs. Armstrong. We were shown the roof of her home which extended a bit above the crest of the levee. Mrs. Rudge and I were most graciously received by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong who were seated on the back steps of their home conversing with a neighbor.

Mrs. Mabel Willson Armstrong has lived on practically the same spot all her life. She was born in the "old house" which stood on the river bank. When she was quite young, a new house replaced the former residence. The "new house" built in 1900 stood in practically the same spot as it is at present, except, the construction of the levee shifted it toward the river about three feet.

Mabel is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jon Willson. Her father was one of the early Hawaiians who came to Vernon, however, he did not come with Captain Jon Sutter. It seems many of the Hawaiians of Vernon did not come with Sutter, nevertheless, Sutter's colony formed the nucleus for the settlement.

Jon Willson left home at the early age of fourteen years and joined the crew of a whaling vessel as a Captain's boy. The captain of the vessel was very fond of the boy and adopted him, (perhaps not according to law) but gave the boy his own name of Willson. He was taught many things as a sailor in those days. Among the skills he learned was needle work such as embroidering, crocheting and knitting. He remembered these skills and was able to do them in later life. The ship upon which Mabel's father worked, plied its way from Hawaii to Alaska and then down the coast to San Francisco to take advantage of the markets. Young Willson left the whaling vessel in San Francisco sometime between the years of 1880 and 1884. He made his way up the Sacramento River by boat to Vernon, the colony of Hawaiians. Before he was married he made his home with Mohonka and family, one of the earlier settlers of Vernon.

Mohonka owned a livery stable and a saloon. Willson worked for Mohonka whenever he was not employed doing farm work or fishing. Smallpox was a deadly disease of that time which occasionally broke out in the early settlements, thereby causing much grief. Mohonka had a daughter who was a victim of the deadly disease, Smallpox, while she was quite a young girl. She was buried in the little cemetery on the "point" across the river from Mabel Armstrong's home. There are sixteen graves in the little cemetery, however, no burials have been made there since 1918. When the little Mohonka girl died they were not permitted to bury her in the more popular burying ground across the river in Yolo county. Smallpox was so much feared that even the bodies of the victims were not allowed to be placed where the germs might spread.

Jon Willson met his wife while working in the hop fields near Wheatland. She was a descendant of Indian-Irish parentage. The young Mr. and Mrs. Willson spent several years of their early married lives, living in Collinsville, located below Sacramento in the river delta region. They fished for a livelihood which was the occupation followed by most of the Hawaiian people. They didn't stay in that section very long but came back and established their home in Vernon, following the fishing industry for a living. Nine children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Willson. They all attended school in the former one room Vernon School. Three sisters are the only survivors of the family. Mrs. Della Lauriano now lives in Oakland, Mrs. May Salisbury lives in San Francisco and Mrs. Mable Armstrong still lives in the old home at Verona. Mr. LeRoy Burns, a son of the Burns family of Vernon was one of the teachers in the old Vernon school. Several of the Willson children attended school while he was teaching. He now resides in Roseville. The late Miss Josephine Carrol was another of those early teachers whom Mrs. Willson remembers very well. Miss Carrol passed away about two years ago in Sacramento. Mabel graduated from the high eighth grade about 1913 at the time the elementary schools were changing from nine grades to eight grades. She did not continue her schooling but spent the rest of her early life caring for her mother, who passed away in 1934. Mabel did not marry until after her mother's death. She was thirty-eight years old when she married Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong came to Verona in 1929 and engaged in the grocery business for several years. Later he went to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and commuted to Sacramento for eighteen years. He is now retired and drawing a well earned retirement.

Life in Vernon in early days may have been difficult according to our standards but the people of those days enjoyed life and all was not work. They had their pleasures as well as their struggles.

Most of the Hawaiian people made their living fishing on the river. Different seasons produced different kinds of fish. Stripped bass, black bass, catfish and salmon were the principle kinds of fish sold. The catch was delivered by boat, alive, to the fish markets in Sacramento. Some of the markets were Davis and Johnson, Pancos and the Chinese markets all located on the river front. The fish were taken to market in a type of crate fastened to the side of the boat like a barge. The boat left Vernon early in the morning of one day, usually Saturday, and came back the next day arriving in Vernon about four o'clock in the afternoon. The boat also carried other

produce to market such as cream and cheese from the four cheese factories located in Vernon. Passengers also rode on the boat. The trading boat would leave Sacramento about ten o'clock Sunday morning on its return voyage. The trip upstream was slow and tedious but a welcome awaited it in Vernon about four in the afternoon. People came from all around the country dressed in their best and driving their most spirited horses hitched to fancy wheeled buggies and surreys. The boat would dock loaded with merchandise from the big city. It was a time for the older folk to visit and the younger men to court the lovely young girls of the country around.

In closing I would like to mention a few of the Hawaiian families who lived around Vernon in early days. The Murrays were a Hawaiian family who lived just above Vernon and did some farming as well as fishing. George Corner lived there but little was known about him.

W Shen Mabel was a child, an old Hawaiian missionary used to visit the homes and read the Bible to the families. He is well remembered because he wore a long white beard.

Parianai is an old Vernomite who is still living in Mendocino county.

Cook lived in Sacramento most of the time. He has a daughter living in Broderick, west of Sacramento at the present time.

Marie Jarrett corresponds with Mabel at present. Marie Jarrett's father was in Vernon in early days but the family never lived there.

Adams, another Hawaiian, lived on the "Point" across the river from Vernon. He didn't stay there long but moved to Sacramento.

Mabel Willson Armstrong tells a most complete and interesting story of the early history of South Sutter. We are very grateful to her for giving us an insight into the history of a very prominent community of Sutter county during the gold rush period.

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