



**Judith Barr Fairbanks Essay Award Winners  
Haley Hawkins, Kace Ingvoldsen, Joanna Jarvis**

*(photo by Sharyl Simmons)*



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\*The year the director joined the Board.

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## President's Message

As I began to write my first President's Message, I ponder on what the Sutter County Historical Society will look like in five years. This must have been something all the past presidents of our Society thought very seriously about. They all had something in common -- a deep appreciation for our forefathers, foremothers, and the events that made Sutter County what it is today.

I wish to thank Audrey Breeding, our past president, for her leadership in the past two terms. She has handed over our Society to me in wonderful shape with a bright future. I also wish to thank Steve Perry for the outstanding job he has done for us with the Hock Farm monument and the work he continues to do on the new museum addition, the Dorothy Ettl Meeting Room.

Please let me know or one of the directors what programs you are interested in having the Society present.

We also could use two more directors. It would be nice to have someone from South County, Pleasant Grove or the Nicolaus area. I would also like to have the west side represented, perhaps someone from the Meridian area.

One of my first goals is to read the Thompson and West History of Sutter County. My research this year has led me to realize that I grew up in an area that flooded every year until the building of Shasta Dam. This explains why in the area where I grew up there are no century farms, that is, farms under the same family's ownership for at least one hundred years. I also found out the Sutter area flooded each year until the building of the Wadsworth Canal. What things do you know about Sutter County and what things would you like to learn about?

I hope to continue enabling the Sutter County Historical Society to serve as a strong voice for preserving our community's history.

Sarah Pryor,  
Daughter of Walt and Celia Ettl,  
Sister to the late Dorothy Ettl  
New President

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## Director's Report

We invite you to see the WWII Cartoon Exhibit from the Museum's collection that will be up through mid-August. It is good for more than a few chuckles, even if it reflects life during wartime. It is more about human foibles and how a sense of humor bolsters up the human spirit, even in the face of extreme difficulties. I'm sure you'll be glad you looked at them. It helps us to understand how the American spirit was sustained through such trying times.

Although at this writing we are still waiting for the new meeting room building to receive electricity, there is the promise of completion in the very near future. Then we will be busy with the last details, such as furnishings and landscaping, to help get the building ready to use. Our building committee is working hard to meet the goal of having it ready by September. We are excited to have such a nice, new room for Museum programs, and we look forward to having it available for the community as well. Rental information for events or meetings will soon be ready.

Rebecca Flower, our Volunteer Chair, has just let us know that additional volunteers are truly needed. Several of our long-time volunteers have retired, and what was recently an ample list of volunteers has shrunk to not quite fit the Museum's needs. Let us know if you have a few hours a month or know someone who would be interested. Rebecca provides an orientation, so no prior knowledge is needed.

One of our area's best-kept secrets is an amazing artist who creates paintings from fused glass. Paul Boehmke of Sutter paints both scenes and architectural themes with glass. Yes, they are really paintings, and they have to be seen to be believed! He has created a portrait of the historic West Butte School from an old photograph at the Museum. The school is being restored by Middle Mountain Foundation for use as a nature interpretative center. Paul's painting of the school will be among those shown in an exhibit of his work at the prestigious Solomon Dubnick Gallery in Sacramento. The exhibit will open on August 13<sup>th</sup> during Sacramento's Second Saturday Art Walk. The gallery is located at 720 Rhodin Lane between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets. Let me assure you that the exhibit is worth a trip - you simply can't imagine the beauty of the Sutter Buttes in a painting using layers of sheet and powdered glass. Paul also creates beautiful handmade furniture with intricate inlay and is a master of lighting integrated with furniture and sculptural forms. This is his first major exhibit, so be the first to know about this remarkable and outstanding talent right here in our own community.

We look forward to our next exhibit, opening on August 26, that showcases our own Clara Sheldon Smith, turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> century art photographer. Her talent was recognized beyond the boundaries of our community, and one can easily understand why when we look at a body of her outstanding work. We will remind you with a flyer about this wonderful exhibit.

The Museum seeks your support during this most challenging upcoming fiscal year. Remember to renew your membership, shop in the Museum Store, direct memorial and other donations to the Museum, encourage others to visit the Museum, and consider including the Museum in your financial planning. Together, we can do it!

Julie Stark, Director

## Memorials

In Memory of **Art Amarel**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Betty Alexander**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Bob Bailey**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Don Beilby**  
Norman & Loadel Piner  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Bill Burtis**  
Vern & Marilyn Ornbaun

In Memory of **Don Cardoza**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **James Harrington**  
Norman & Loadel Piner

In Memory of **Melvin E. Herrick**  
Marnee Crohurst

In Memory of **Doris Shidler Horstman**  
Arlene Chesnut

In Memory of **Geraldine Jones**  
D. Jane Miller

In Memory of **Bob Kodama**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Virginia Lauff**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Joan Davis Lindquist**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Gene Lonon**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **John Lucich**  
Everett & Liz Berry  
Bud & Joan Doty  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Cathy Noble**  
Bud & Joan Doty

In Memory of **Virgil O'Sullivan**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **Jan Richardson**  
Steven Richardson

In Memory of **Betty Lorraine Brady  
Schmidl**  
Helen Powell Heenan  
Margaret Pursch

In Memory of **Shirley Schnabel**  
Richard Bowder  
Mabel Bumgarner  
Karen Morrison  
Dean Park  
Bob & Rosemary Shull  
Anne Adams & Mike Hubbartt  
Ken & Vivian Calhoun

In Memory of **Jack Tanimoto**  
Tom & Suellen Teesdale

In Memory of **G. Dave Teja**  
Julia Moore Patton

In Memory of **Mary Elva Trefethen**  
Joe & Earlene Knight

In Memory of **Pieter van Eckhardt**  
Marnee Crowhurst  
James & Reta Overton  
Bruce & Gini Harter

## Gifts

In Honor of the Men & Women  
in the Military  
Bob & Lillie Inman

Outright Gift for the Courtyard  
Earl & Billie Burky

Outright Gift to the Museum  
The Seminar

## Outright Gift for the Kitchen Fund

Joni Adams  
Dorothy Jang  
Marilyn Kurtz  
Anne Fletcher  
Eleanor Knox  
Ruth & Berny Koch  
Robert Laycock  
June Otto  
Margit Sands  
Rose Wood



## Glass Negative Project

Some of you may remember the Odd Fellow's Building at the corner of Third and D Streets in Marysville. For nearly one hundred years, that building included a photography studio. The photographers who did business there include Amos Woods, J. J. Reilly, Enno Neumann, and Clara Sheldon Smith. By the 1970s, thousands of glass negatives were stored in the building and most (we hope) found homes elsewhere - locally and in far off places.

The museum has a very talented volunteer, local photographer and photograph preservationist Allan R. Lamb ([www.rustnscapes.com](http://www.rustnscapes.com)), who is working on digitizing the museum's photograph collection. Some of the most exciting work he's done for the museum is scanning and printing the glass negative collection.

The museum is always looking for a way to save the history of Sutter County and one of the best ways to do this is to expand the photography collection. Mr. Lamb has offered his services to accomplish this. While the museum would be happy to accept any donation of glass negatives, they are also offering an opportunity for you to share your negatives without giving them up. If you are willing to loan your glass negatives to be scanned and to give permission for the images to become part of the museum's collection, the museum will return the glass negatives in the condition they were received (even broken negatives can be scanned) along with a CD with your images in high resolution digital form. It's a win for everyone. Please contact the museum for more information at (530) 822-7141.

## Errata

In the last issue of the News Bulletin, the caption for the photo on page 5, in the article "He Wasn't a Company Man," should have read

"James Le Voy Sorenson in Yuba City."

## Judith Barr Fairbanks Memorial Essay Contest – 2011

*The Judith Barr Fairbanks Memorial Essay Contest honors Museum Commissioner Judith Fairbanks, a fourth grade teacher who loved history. The Essay Contest is sponsored jointly by the Museum and the Historical Society. The contest is open to fourth and fifth graders who are studying California history and the westward movement in the United States.*

*The title of the essay contest is "Letters Home." Contestants study California and Sutter County in the 1840s, '50s and '60s, then put themselves in the place of a migrant or immigrant new to the Sutter County area and write a letter to the folks back home telling them about how they traveled to the area, what they found and their experiences in this new land.*

### First Place

Haley Hawkins  
Camptonville Academy  
Teacher: Kathy Kunde

Dear Grandma,

I've missed you so much I wish you could have traveled with us. It was a long trip though. Day after day, we had dust blowing in our faces while our wagon moved toward our new home. Hannah and I played games of I Spy to pass the time. The springtime prairie is my favorite because it has lots of bright green grass. The cattle and ox love to eat it and the wildflowers are so colorful. On days like this, the fresh winds blow through the canvas top of our wagon. It is a refreshing change from the dusty desert.

Our family talks about what our new life will be like in this new place we are headed to. Life is so different on the trail compared to Springfield, Illinois. At the end of the day Pa builds a fire and Ma cooks supper over the flames. Hannah and I have chores. Hannah gets water and I wash the dishes.

Tonight we celebrated my eleventh birthday. Pa played happy birthday on his fiddle, while we sat underneath the sparkling stars. Tomorrow we will arrive in our new home and that will be a great birthday present. I wish you were here to see it. "Sutter County" our new home is beautiful. So far, I've seen rivers, mountains and the air smells sweet, like peaches. There are lots of butterflies and hopping bunnies. The flowers are pretty, especially the bright orange, yellow, and red ones called poppies.

One morning while I was picking blackberries for Ma's famous pie, I met an Indian girl my age whose name is Netdi. Her name means dreamer in Indian. She told me she is a Maidu Indian and lives in the valley. She lives here with her family because this land has lots of fruits, berries, fish and nuts. When I met her she was collecting acorns from the Black Oak trees that grow next to the river. Her grandma

grinds acorns on a rock and mixes them with worms and makes acorn, worm flat bread. She offered me a piece of it and I politely, but firmly, said "No thank you." The Maidu also collect willow and bear grass and weave it into baskets. She showed me some colorful beads that they make. They use them for jewelry, decorations and as money for trading.

We started exploring and wandered along the river. When we walked my toes squished in the wet mud and we got tangled up in the grapevines that grow along the river's edge. Some say the name "Yuba" comes from the Spanish word "Uva" meaning grapes. My friend Netdi said "yu-ba" was the name of a Maidu Indian tribe.

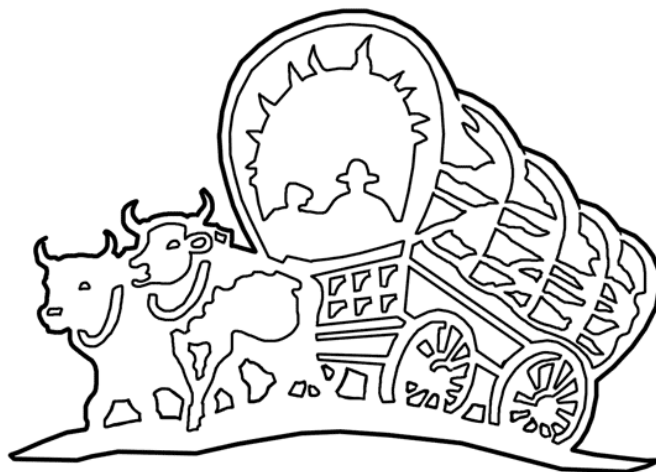
There is a small range of mountains here. A Spanish explorer named Luis Arguello named them "Tres Picos" meaning three peaks. Netdi told me her family calls the mountains spirit mountains. They believe when they die, their spirits go up there. Remember the river that we explored? The same explorer named it the Feather River, "El Rio de las Plumas" in Spanish because he saw feathers from wild birds floating on the water.

Netdi told me that her family planted and harvested wheat fields and takes care of large herds of cattle and horses for a man named John Sutter. He is a business owner in the area. Pa decided he wanted to open a business selling items to gold miners such as bedrolls, gold pans, picks, shovels, and sluice boxes. He met with Mr. Sutter yesterday about a parcel of land that he has for sale. Pa bought the land and will start building his store named "The Pick and Shovel." Hope he sells a lot. I want a horse!

Grandma, I hope you enjoyed hearing about my adventures and all that I have seen and learned in my new home. Netdi and invited me to have some salmon dinner with her family. Hope we don't have flat bread! I love it in my new home. The only thing missing is you.

Love,

Elizabeth





## Second Place

Joanna Jarvis  
Lincrest Elementary School  
Teacher: Brittany Cordano

August 2, 1865

Dear Grandmama,

How have you been? I have been fine. California is so much different than Minnesota! The weather is so mild, we can play outside, even in winter! We have fresh fruit all summer long because of all the orchards. Pa says the land is so fertile here that farmers can plant hundreds of fruit and nut trees.

On the way to tiny Yuba City we passed the big mining city, Marysville. It was so exciting to look out of the wagon and see a bustling city full of buildings, shops, houses, gold miners, and most of all, people. Oh, and I almost forgot to tell you that we went through the Sierra Nevada Mountains on our way to Sutter County. They are HUGE, especially compared to the teeny Sutter Buttes here in Sutter County.

Speaking of Sutter, we got to see John Sutter's Hock Farm. There are so many cattle and horses everywhere! And the best news of all was that we actually saw Captain John Sutter and he waved at us! Pa is going to take Sarah and me down to Marysville sometime soon, and we are going to look in shops and walk around, just enjoying ourselves. However, for now we are stuck having to help out on the farm. Sarah gets to milk the cows and I have to collect eggs, while Alice and Paula do the indoor chores and we all help Ma out with cooking and sewing.

Right now, I want to go outside, but Ma says no. Outside, everything is so spacious and beautiful. The land seems to spread on forever. The clear skies and green grass make me want to sing out loud. And where there is not green grass, there are rows and rows of fruit and nut trees. Sutter County is the most beautiful place I have ever been! It is so peaceful, with only little shanties scattered across the land. All the animals seem quite happy to be here too. The horses and cows have soft, green grass to munch on, and the chickens have plenty of feed. But not all of Sutter County is like that. Downtown Yuba City has a couple of bustling shops and a courthouse. There are so many beautiful large, grand, stately homes over by the courthouse. I wish we could live in one. Yuba City may have all of those, but it is still not as big as Marysville. Marysville has a shop for everything, but Yuba City only has a couple shops for mining supplies, fresh foods, fabrics, and other basic things like soap. I just really wish you could see all these sights, Grandmama. You would absolutely love them.

I am so glad that our letters can be more frequent because of the Pony Express. I can remember just a few years ago we did not have it. We might even be able to see each other sometime! Pa says word of a trans-continental railroad being built is spreading. Hopefully the time will come soon that we will see each other. For now, I am going to finish this letter.

### Third Place

Kace Ingvoldsen  
Nuestro Elementary School  
Teacher: K. Stephens

July 1, 1851

Dear Mom,

I just got to Sutter a week ago. None of my animals died along the way. It has been about a year since I left CO. It was a hard long journey. My wagon did not break luckily. I had to go over mountains, rivers and forests.

When I got here I set up my farm quick. I set up the fence in a day. It took two days to build my small cabin. I cut down at least two big trees. I saw some birds in a small tree. I was about to cut down a tree when a raccoon snapped at me. I tried to catch a fish for days. When I did catch one it was a small trout.

I was out walking and saw an animal with branch like things coming out of its head. I also saw blue flowers and big oak trees. I shot a mallard duck with my bow. I caught a bass with striped lines down its side.

My farm is very successful. I have sold twenty egg cartons and ten gallon milk jugs.

I saw Maidu Indians gathering acorns. I also saw them shoot a deer with a bow. When I was looking around, I found one of their bows. I kept it for myself. I do not use it very much.

One night there was a storm so I went to bed early. I woke up the next morning and the storm had stopped. I went out to check on my cows. There was not one in the field. So I saddled up my horse and went to find the cows. Since the storm, the ground was wet so I could see tracks in the mud. It took me a while to find them. I got them in the field and I counted them all. I was missing a calf and four cows and the bull.

The next morning I was looking for the cows and I saw some Indians gathering nuts. And I asked them if they had seen some cows.

The bigger one said, "Yes. On the other side of the meadow."

I said, "Thank you for the help."

I got to the other side of the meadow and there were four cows and the bull, but no cute little calf. It took me a while, but I found it in a log. I laughed when I saw it because it was so funny. It was hard to get out, but when I did it went to its mom. I got them back in no time at all. They were happy to see the other cows.

I like the land and the small mountains.

Your son,  
Farmer John

# From Tule to Tilling

by  
Larry Harris

*A history of the many, many conflicts during the reclamation in Sutter County*

Tule comes from the Nahatil word for bulrush. This plant grew ten to twelve feet tall in the wetlands that became Sutter County. Early settlers recognized that under the tangled cover of the tule there was rich, fertile soil waiting to be farmed. This is the story of how the tules came to be tilled.

In the beginning, many, many eons ago when planet Earth was evolving, the tectonic plate Farallon, sliding along on top of the earth's mantle, nudged into the North American plate. Being heavier, it slipped under the North American plate. After many eons it disappeared. Another tectonic plate, the Pacific plate, pushed northward, leaving a tell-tale trail - the San Andreas fault. The Pacific plate collided with the North American plate, wrinkling the earth's crust. The Northern California mountains were thrust upwards. In the Mother Lode of the Sierra Nevada, a 60-mile-long vein of gold was thrust to the surface. This mother lode was to be harvested by the 49ers. The bonanza and the thousands of Americans it lured west was the main factor that motivated the admission of California as a non-slave state without going through the usual territorial period. Much of the gold was shipped east to the North. As valuable as the golden harvest was, it is diminutive compared another valuable natural resource from the Northern California mountains. These mountains are the rain and snow

catchers that became the Sacramento Valley watershed.

The Sacramento Valley watershed, eroding the mountains as it carries sand, silt and soil into the valley, deposited the sediment on the floor of the valley, creating the alluvial soil of the valley. This sediment is deposited in layers. Some of the layers form aquifers. These aquifers consist of supersaturated sandy layers of water. They are our ground water that is pumped to irrigate crops and service municipalities. Aquifers are slow to recharge from irrigation runoff, rain and mostly, rivers and most aquifers are being overdrawn.

Recently, in geological measurement, the surface water from the Sacramento Valley watershed has meandered throughout our valley in two great rivers, the Feather and the Sacramento. As they meandered they have deposited sediment in their riverbeds. These deposits have elevated the river beds above the adjacent lands resulting in basins. There are six major basins in the Sacramento Valley: Butte, Colusa, Sutter, Yolo, American and Sacramento.

The year 1850 was historically significant for California. The state was admitted to the United States, John Sutter moved to the Hock Farm with his family, and the U.S. Congress passed the Arkansas Land Act. That act provided for the reclamation of overflow and swamplands. Of the more

than two million acres of wetlands in California, 125,000 were in Sutter County.

The overflow into the Sutter Basin from the west was from the Butte Slough, Butte Basin and Butte Creek. On the east side a slough named after John Gelhauser (now Gilsizer) began two miles north of Yuba City and flowed some 16 miles southwest into the Sutter Basin.

In 1868 the citizens of Yuba City decided to solve their overflow and flooding problems. A bond issue provided funds to fill in the mouth of Gilsizer Slough and also to build a five-and-one-half foot levee to forever protect them from flooding. Forever ended in 1871 and then again in 1875 when the community was flooded.

The Yuba City reclamation effort had three results. Closing off the mouth of Gilsizer pushed more water into Marysville. It started a levee war with Marysville. "Any levee you build, we can build one higher." This war culminated when W. T. Ellis could state "when another great flood occurs there will be two dry places in the valley, one, the Buttes and two, Marysville." No floods have occurred in Marysville since 1875.

The third effect of the reclamation project was to start Levee District No. 1, the first levee district in the state. It is still alive and well.

Also in 1868 the Green Act was passed in the state legislature, three days after the Yuba City project was approved.

Will Semple Green was the author of the Green Act. His uncle, Colonel D. Semple, had purchased the Rancho Colusa land grant from John Bidwell in 1850 for \$2,000. Bidwell later said it was worth a million dollars.

Colonel Semple's brother was Dr. Robert Semple, a Bear Flagger, a citizen of the California Republic who was at least six feet eight inches tall, maybe even seven feet tall.

Will S. Green, with his uncle, started the town of Colusa. An early name of Colusa was Salmon Bend. W. S. Green became the county surveyor, owner and editor of the Colusa Sun, developer of the Glenn-Colusa irrigation canal. He was called "Father of Irrigation" in Colusa County. He had a plan to reclaim the Sutter and Colusa basins.

The Green Act consolidated the reclamation acts and permitted the sale of swampland, in any amount, to private investors. The price of the land was \$1 per acre. Some of the investors were W. H. Parks, who bought 12,000 acres; L. F. Moulton, 12,000 acres; and Louis Tarke, 4,500 acres.

Some of this land was purchased using federal script available after the Civil War and obtained at a deep discount. Much of the land was purchased at 25¢ per acre. All of the swamp land was sold by 1871.

The landowners were eager to reclaim the land so they subscribed to the \$588,000 bond issue offered by W. H. Parks, who had a plan that was approved by General Barton S. Alexander, Army Corps of Engineers, to build a levee around the 125,000 acres and stop the flow of water from the north by constructing a dam from the Buttes to the levee of Reclamation District (R.D.) 70. He was to put a gate in this dam to control Butte Creek. Bricks from the gate are still on the Foster property.

Parks hired John Pennington, Sutter County surveyor, to build the dam. It was a dirt dam covered with

willow branches to prevent wave erosion. As they were building the dam, Will S. Green put an editorial in the Colusa Sun stating that the dam would flood land around Colusa and "should be busted." When the dam was completed and filling with water, a group of masked, armed men busted the dam. Parks built it again. This time Mother Nature busted it. He built it again; same story. The next time he had it built and it was almost full when an armada of 30 small boats carrying masked, armed men came sailing in. They overpowered the guards and busted it again. It was rumored that the masked, armed men were landowners in R.D. 70, whose levee was being washed away by the Parks dam water.

While the dam war was going on, a legal war also being waged. Levi Foss Moulton, who owned a total of 35,000 acres and who figured that 17,000 acres of his land would be inundated, was trying to get an injunction to prevent the dam from flooding his land. He thought that a small landowner rather than a large landowner as himself would have a better chance in court. He got Justus Laux to file suit. When the suit came to the court a very interesting development was revealed. It seems the W. H. Parks had gone to Justus with a wooden box filled with \$6,000 in gold coins and offered to buy his property. As this was ten times what the property was worth Justus Laux took it. In court it turned out that the plaintiff and defendant were the same person. Case dismissed!

Moulton then filed suit against Parks personally. Judge Keyser ruled in Moulton's favor on the basis of "protection of the general welfare." The case went to the state Supreme

Court and was upheld. Parks, although being called a "swamp thief" and "credit mobilier,"<sup>1</sup> became a very prominent figure in local politics.

Justus Laux apparently used his gold coins to buy property in the Franklin area as a Laux family was in that area in the early 1900s. A Francis Laux attended Franklin grammar school. A Laux road is located north of Colusa.

The swampland buyers could get their \$1 per acre back if they could get three years of crops. They built berms to keep the water from their land, even though the water would go onto their neighbors' land. It was a selfish, disorganized mess.

Meanwhile, on the western side of the recalcitrant Sacramento River, there began an ambitious reclamation program in the Colusa Basin. In 1870 landowners formed Reclamation District 108. These landowners, wealthy investors, formed a corporation called the Sacramento Valley Reclamation Company.

The Colusa County conundrum of reclamation was three fold. 1) Water drained into the basin from the north. 2) Water drained into the basin from the west from the Coast Range. 3) Water flowed into the basin from the Sacramento River sloughs.

They took bad advice from General Barton S. Alexander, Army Corps of Engineers, to build levees on the west bank of the river. The general's model was from the levees built on the lower Mississippi River that seemed to be working. (In 1927 the

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<sup>1</sup> The Credit Mobilier of American construction company gave cash and stock bribes to congressmen during the building of the Transcontinental Railroad.

worst flood in U.S. history devastated the lower Mississippi Valley.)

Will S. Green in an editorial reported "they fight like heroes but 2 out of 5 years the floods overwhelm them."

The Colusa Basin was eventually reclaimed by 1) building a "west side" or back levee for drainage to receive the Coast Range and northern water contributions; 2) building, with clamshell dredges, high levees on the Sacramento and 3) making the Ridge Cut of four hundred feet wide and twenty feet deep at Knight's Landing to allow drainage from the basin. Colusa County, aided by the Sutter bypass, has not had a major flood since 1916. Colusa County has become a prodigious rice bowl and diversified in tomatoes, almonds, walnuts, alfalfa and even pistachios.

Meanwhile, on the eastern side of the volatile Sacramento River, the Sutter Basin landowners, after being battered by floods in 1902, 1904, 1906 and a really big flood in 1907, followed by a similar flood in 1909, found, from recently installed gauges, that the Sacramento River that the Corps of Engineers had estimated to flow at 250,000 - 300,000 cubic feet per second actually flowed at 600,000 CFS.

The first reaction to this flow capacity was to buy two newly developed hydraulic dredges. They started at Collinsville, the mouth of the Sacramento River, to widen and deepen the channel. They made a cut across Horseshoe Bend to enhance the flow. The dredges were named, appropriately, the "Sacramento" and the "San Joaquin" as these rivers joined before the Sacramento exited into Suisun Bay. After working steadily they opened the channel until the tidal

effect was felt upstream. Before they finished, they had removed more "spoil," as it is called, than what was removed digging the Panama Canal.

In 1911 a reclamation board was appointed. The three members were Peter Cook, a Rio Vista banker; V. S. McClatchy of the McClatchy newspaper family; and W. T. Ellis, the Marysville levee building guru.

Flood control proposals were forthcoming. The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers came up with plans. Manson and Grunsky proposed a system that included bypasses in the Colusa Basin and the Sutter Basin. It was rejected - "levees could do the trick." Dabney came up with a plan to build levees 500 feet apart. His plan was seriously considered and was being accepted when the 600,000 cubic feet per second flow had to be reconciled. Dabney's plan would have been inadequate to handle that flow. In 1910 a young engineer, Thomas Jackson, came up with a plan that, had it been a novel, would have opened him to accusations of plagiarism, as it was virtually identical to the plan proposed by Will S. Green some 40 years before. It called for creating another Sacramento River.

A Sutter bypass was designed to accept 180,000 cubic feet per second of water from the Butte Basin, Butte Creek, and overflow from Butte Slough. It was to be three-quarters of a mile across, with the levees 120 feet wide, twenty feet high and twenty feet wide on top. It would be about 21 miles long.

The Green/Jackson plan was adopted. The path of the bypass was to pass through Sutter County in the center trough straight through to re-

enter its parent Sacramento River at the southern end of the county.

The project was proceeding smoothly until a request by the Sutter Basin Land Company was submitted to the reclamation board to alter the straight path of the bypass to go around their land. This land, about 64,000 acres, had been purchased by J. Ogden Armour, heir of the billion-dollar meat packing Armour Company. He had, with a partner, W. E. Gerber, planned to reclaim the southern section of the Sutter Basin, develop it and sell the land in small parcels. As the straight pass of the canal would transect the property, it would make reclamation more difficult and the land less desirable.

The reclamation board voted two to one for the change. V. S. McClatchy and Peter Cook voted for it and W. T. Ellis voted against.

Ellis' opposition to the change was that it would raise the plane of the canal four feet, unnecessarily lengthen the levee and would not let the canal fill in the trough of the basin. While these objections were being considered it was revealed that the president of the Alta Valley Farm Land company that had sold the land to Armour at twice what they paid for it was none other than V. S. McClatchy, who, of course, voted in favor of the change.

The Sutter County residents north of the Armour project became concerned that the change would be harmful and rose up against it. Thus started the north vs. south county war. No one was injured but feelings were very intense. Town hall meetings were held. North Sutter County asked for and received support from surrounding counties. It was big corporate business against farmers.

The Sutter County board of supervisors obtained an injunction from Judge Mahon to stop the Armour project. The legal battle that ensued ended when the state Supreme Court, three years later, voted for the change. A nearly 30-page detailed account of the legal travails was written in the Sutter County Historical Society News Bulletin in January, 1965 by Clement A. Guise.

With the legal problems solved, the Sutter Basin Company finished their levees quickly. When the injunction was served they had had eleven clamshell dredges working. All were removed except two. These two, company owned, were the "Gerber" and the "Armour." The company finished their levees in 1919.

The eastern levees had not been completed and during that winter the Barry and Tudor areas flooded. The landowners felt that the company levee was to blame and they considered blowing it up. Calmer heads prevailed and later a grand jury blamed the Reclamation Board for not finishing the east levee.

The reclamation board did not have cash for the project. They had to issue warrants. They hired 500 men to work clearing brush and debris from the channel.

Several clamshell dredges were hired. These dredges were called Tule Breakers and did the heavy lifting to build the levee. Each of these dredges usually progressed 90 feet a day. When the land was hard clay, men drilled two inch holes seven feet deep in the clayish ground and dynamited so the clamshells could take a good bite.

The levees were finished in 1920. The Sacramento Flood Control Project was approved by Congress and

finally funded in the 1920s. The project continued until 1945 when the Kennet Dam (Shasta) was built where the town of Kennet had been.

Even the federal government did not have unlimited funds. The Shasta Dam was not built to its design height as they ran short of money.

The Sacramento River Flood Control project included five major weirs. Four of the weirs were fixed-level weirs overflowing at a specific elevation. One was gated and was opened at a pre-determined level.

The Sacramento River banks had periodically been breached. At the Tisdale break the water rushed across the Sutter Basin to the Feather River at its entrance to the Sacramento River. The water piled up there and caused the Sacramento to back up. Logs from the Feather River floated as far back as Knight's Landing.

The granddaddy of the weirs, the Tisdale weir, was built in 1901-1902 as a permanent concrete structure called a "waste" weir by the State Public Works department. It was repaired in 1908, 1912, and in 1932 was rebuilt by the Corps of Engineers. In 2008 a two-lane road replaced the one-lane road on top of the weir and the boat ramp was redone.

In 2011 during a brief overflow some sturgeon were trapped in the Tisdale Bypass side of the weir. They were rescued by Fish and Game and sent up the river to spawn.

The Tisdale is the first weir to overflow and the last to cease overflowing. The Tisdale Bypass crosses the basin and flows into the Sutter Bypass.

Up the river near Colusa the Colusa Weir overflows into the Sutter

Bypass. Even further north the Moulton Weir also flows into the Sutter Bypass.

The most southern weir is the Sacramento Weir at Byte Bend. It is a manually operated gated weir and is opened at river height of 27 feet at Sacramento. This weir is north of the mouth of the American River. An interesting phenomenon occurs when the gates are opened. The American River runs uphill and discharges through the weir into the Yolo Bypass.

The most maligned of the weirs is the Fremont Weir, at the southern end of Sutter County. On the right bank of the Sacramento, it was constructed by dredge in 1924. It is 9200 feet long at a fixed elevation of 33.5 feet and has an overflow capacity of 343,000 cfs. During flood stage it overflows into the Yolo Bypass. The Yolo Bypass parallels the deep water ship channel from Sacramento and re-enters the Sacramento River just north of Rio Vista through sloughs there at an elevation of zero.

W. T. Ellis in his autobiography *My Seventy Two Years in the Romantic County of Yuba, California* relates what he calls "the eccentric flood of 1937." It was caused, Ellis writes, by a "two day cloudburst" northeast of Marysville, including Soda Springs (10.8" of rain), Lake Spaulding (17.63"), Mineral (14.13"), near Sterling (15.58") and Brush Creek (17.76"). The area averaged more than 13" of rain during the two-day downpour. No flooding occurred south of the Fremont Weir but \$14 million of damages occurred north of the weir as a result of some breaks and overflows, mostly in R.D. 784 in Yuba County.

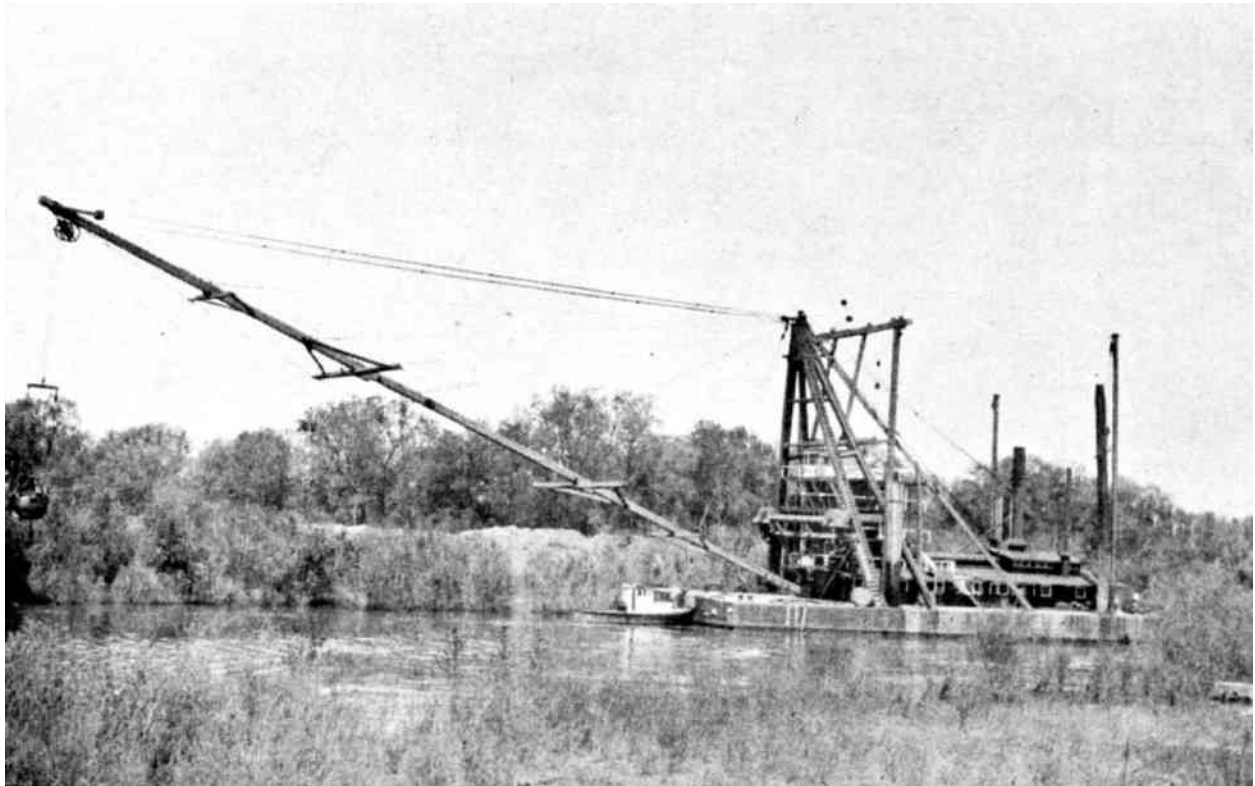
Ellis' contention was that 33.5 feet elevation of the weir should have been 30.0 feet to match the floor of



the Sutter Bypass, and that the flood plane of the Sutter Bypass was four feet higher than it should have been and that these were the causes of this flood.

One might think that Ellis' detailing this 1937 flood was saying, "I told you so."

Thanks to the vision and efforts of the early settlers, the task of changing from tules to tilling has resulted in Sutter County becoming an agriculture food basket of renown. Rice, dried plums (aka prunes), walnuts, peaches and processing tomatoes produced \$475,691,000 worth of food in 2009.



The Neptune  
*(photo courtesy of Community Memorial Museum)*

## Trivia

The amazing machinery used to reclaim the basin land was the clamshell dredges to build the all-important levees, the tracklayer tractors, 75 horsepower Holt and Best pulled disk plows through the gnarly tussock (roots) of the tules. These tractors were precursors of the Caterpillar tracklayer. Where the tules had not been burned a navigator was on top of the cabs directing the tractor drivers toward a tall post at the end of the field. The ditchers dug hundreds of miles for irrigation and drainage. The irrigation drainage pumps were huge.

The reclamation process was finally a concerted effort by the landowners and government agencies. Many landowners could not pay the assessments and lost their land. Others survived and became wealthy. The land purchased at one dollar an acre is now worth \$3,000 to 4,000 an acre.

It is estimated that Armour and his widow spent \$17 million to develop "the basin."

The dipper dredge "Plutus" was a gold mining dredge that worked in the Feather River in 1898. It would "dip" a bucket of material from the bed of the river and dump it into a sluice box system. It was inefficient and was soon converted into the "Atlas" digging ditches and levees.

Levee District #1 Sutter County bought a dredge to build and maintain its levees in 1905. It used the dredge until 1916 when the cost of overhauling it prompted the District to sell it and contract the work. The name of the dredge was "Sutter."

Reclamation District No. 108 bought the dredge "Jimeno" in 1904 to maintain and build levees. It operated for 15 years before it burned.

Reclamation District No. 1500 - the Armour project had two clamshell dredges that approached palatial, the five cubic yard Armour and the four-and-a-half cubic yard Gerber. They had hardwood paneling in the pilot house and refrigerated lockers in the galley.

Aquifers are formed by an impervious layer, an aquaclude, with a perimeter, the aquatard. They may be "confined" or open. Some aquifers are saline and many are very old. The largest aquifer in the United States is the high plains aquifer named the "Ogallala" from the town of Ogallala, Nebraska. This aquifer is under parts of eight states, extending to Texas. It is being overdrawn and will last less than 100 years at the present rate.

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# Theodore Benson Hull

## Fought for Levees

by

Carol Withington

During the early days of Sutter County, farmers watched in constant fear as water would rise, often leaving the "dreaded trail of sand" in its wake, virtually destroying their land.

Levees were necessary. Farmers sometimes spent half the value of their land for this protection. Yet they were compelled to build these levees or lose everything.

In 1868, Levee District No. One was organized by the Board of Supervisors. This district included 47,500 acres of land along the west bank of the Feather River.

Following voters' approval which would levy a tax to build a levee, contractors Messrs. Nathens and Co. was selected, and some sixty to seventy men and teams were employed as the construction crew.

"No doubts are entertained but the specified time will be amply sufficient for the completion of the levee, which will be 17 miles in length," the *Sutter Banner* reported.

Although the completed levee was often damaged by floods and required expensive repairs in years to follow, as a whole, the system was considered quite successful by the directors of the board, which included Theodore Benson Hull, an early-day farmer and levee advocate.

Hull was born on May 17, 1833 at Chautauqua, New York. In 1835 his family moved to Michigan, where the elder Hull purchased some government lands which he eventually made productive. Brought up on this family

farm, young Hull attended district schools and remained

During that year, Hull and three of his friends bought an interest in an emigrant wagon and four yokes of oxen. Together the young men crossed the plains to California, journeying by way of Beckwith Pass.

The adventurous foursome first arrived in Sierra County, and Hull was employed in mining above Downieville for seven years. He worked for himself the entire time and was quite successful.

In addition, he was one of six men who built a tunnel in that locality. However, this did not prove to be a paying venture. But Hull continued to labor hard. It is recorded that in fluming the river in different places, he whipsawed thousands of feet of lumber by hand.

In 1859, Hull gave up his mining endeavors and came to Sutter County where he obtained a squatter's claim to 160 acres. Here he began raising grain and from that time dealt extensively in purchasing and selling land.

Hull eventually accumulated 500 acres of valuable land on the Feather River where he set out an orchard of 60 acres, half of it devoted to peaches. The remainder was used for pears, apricots and apples.

On January 1, 1867, Hull married the former Maggie Wilkie, a native of Michigan. They became the parents of three children.

In 1904 specimens of Alexander

apples were sent to the World's Fair in St. Louis with the California exhibit. Hull was awarded the bronze medal for the finest fruit of that variety.

In addition, he cultivated the Japanese persimmon and raised stock of all kinds. Hull also owned and operated the Yuba City Flour Mill which burned down in 1903.

A prominent Republican, Hull was always active in public affairs. For 18 years he served as the Justice of the Peace of Vernon Township and for one term was president of the board of education.

He also served as one of the directors of Levee District No. One for 25 years and was a member of the County Board of Horticultural Commissioners. Hull was also a member of the first state drainage board, formed in 1904, which consisted of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys.

"Squire" Hull, as he was affectionately called, was one of the first men to take up the fight against hydraulic mining. He continued to be one of the advisors and members of the Anti-Debris Association up to the time of his death in 1906.

On October 17 of that year, a friend and neighbor found Hull lifeless on his dooryard. According to the *Sutter County Farmer*, his death was due to neuralgia of the heart. It was noted that for several days he had complained of chest pains. However, he was still able to attend to the regular business on his farm and in his orchard.

His widow remained on the home place for many years. Irrigated by a five-inch pump, the area was devoted to fruit and to truck farming, continuing in the tradition of T.B. Hull, Sutter County pioneer.



## **Do You Have a *Clara Sheldon Smith* Photograph?**

The museum is very proud to be planning an exhibit of Clara Sheldon Smith's work. Her talent elevates her work from documentation to art. We are always on the look-out for more samples of Clara Smith's work. She did a lot of portrait photography as well as scenic views and worked locally from 1896 to 1935. Do you have any of her photos in your collection that you would be willing to share with the museum? Some of her work is signed "Smith's Photo Studio" or "Smith's Studio" and some of the portraits are in paper folders with Smith's Studio embossed on the folder.

In return for a digital copy of the image and permission to include it in our collection, we would, of course, return the photograph in a protective sleeve and provide a digital copy of the image or a 5" x 7" archival quality inkjet print to the donor. Please contact the museum for more information at (530) 822-7141.

## Yard Sale a Big Success!

As we go to press, the amount raised at the yard sale held the weekend of June 17-19 to raise funds to benefit the new meeting room was almost \$4,000!!! A big THANK YOU to all those who donated merchandise, volunteered time and shopped at the sale.



## Coming Events

### July

- 14 10:00 a.m. Children's Program, Mountain Men  
at the park behind the Museum

### August

- 17 7:00 p.m. Museum Program  
David Rubiales on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ishi's appearance in Oroville
- 26 *Clara Sheldon Smith, Art Photographer* exhibit  
opens at the Museum

### October

- 15 Membership Luncheon at Ruthy's  
Program: Don Burtis on the History of Sutter City  
Look for more information in the next issue of the  
News Bulletin

# Puzzle Page

Z W H Y R D C B W W S N E G A T I V E C  
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- Alexander    Armour
- Clara        Colusa
- Dredger     Ellis
- Fairbanks   Gerber
- Greenact    Haleyhawkins
- Herblock    Hull
- Joannajarvis Kaceingvoldsen
- Larryharris  Mississippi
- Negative    Reclamation
- Sutterbasin  Yardsale

**SUMMER DAYS**

# **General Membership Meeting**

**Saturday, October 15 at 11:30 a.m.**

**at Ruthy's**

**229 Clark Avenue, Yuba City**

**\$16 per person**

**Program: History of Sutter City**

**Don Burtis**