

# Yolo County Historical Society



JANUARY 2017

## Prez Says

When you receive this newsletter, we would have left 2016 behind and begun a new year. Some of you are glad that 2016 is over and are looking forward to a better 2017. 2016 will certainly go down in the history books as a memorable year in presidential history. This has also been a year where we have lost two patrons who consistently supported our organization: Robert and Lynn Campbell and Debby Truitt. They will be missed.

But this is also a time to look ahead to our future. I am very excited to share with all of you some plans for the new year. I met with Bill Grabert regarding the historical significance of the Conaway Ranch. There is a small article in this newsletter. Make sure you read it. Now that the holidays have passed,..... I will be more aggressive with our plan to open the historical court room at the old court house. Teri Laugenour is going to head a group of ladies who have volunteered to clean out one of our spaces at the IOOF building. When they are finished, we will have a full accounting of what is stored in that room. Yeh! I am beginning a History Club at Holy Rosary School. It will meet 2 times per month. I am very excited about that. We already have a History Club at Dingle Elementary under the direction of Yolanda Hudson. Our Schoolhouse program will also be 'modernized' by Jackie Scott. Bids will once again go out for the Hatti Weber WPA extension. There were some issues with the first try. I look forward to seeing the building renovated. Our World War I group continues to meet and plan.

Now that I have written it all down, it seems like a lot! Wow!

I hope your holidays were wonderful and that the new year brings you everything you wish for. Remember, as always...

History Rules!

Kathy Harryman  
President, Yolo County Historical Society



## What was the Great Flood of 1861-1862?

Here is some information about the Great Flood of 1861-1862 that I thought would be interesting:

- The Flood extended beyond the borders of California: Oregon, Washington, northern Mexico, British Columbia, Nevada, Utah and Arizona
- Rain fell during the months of November 1861 through January 1862
- Storms were a combination of snow, and warm rain; now called 'atmospheric rivers' that originate in the warm and moist tropical Pacific Ocean
- The entire Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys were affected; area 300 miles long, 20 miles wide, covering 5,000-6,000 square miles. The valley was a lake extending from the mountains on one side to the coast range hills on the other.
- The water flooding the Central Valley reached depths up to 30 feet; water covered portions of the valley from December 1861, through the spring, and into the summer of 1862.
- The Newspaper in Grass Valley reported that 9" fell in 36 hours
- The American River rose 55 feet in Sacramento
- Mining aggravated the flooding; log dams were erected to hold mining debris, large boulders, silt and sand filled in the river

channels, Sacramento River was raised more than 7 feet

### The Flood Damage:

- Most of California's population (300,000/500,000) was in Northern California and had settled along bodies of water. (Farming, transportation and irrigation)
- The Sacramento Daily Union reported that 1/3 of the taxable property in the state of California was lost (\$10,000,000)
- ¼ of all cattle were drowned (200,000).
- One house in eight was destroyed and 7/8 of all houses were damaged.
- Thousands of farms are entirely under water – cattle starving and drowning.
- All the roads in the middle of the state were impassable; so all mail was cut off.
- Steamers ran back over the ranches fourteen miles from the river, carrying stock, etc, to the hills.
- Fresh-water fish were caught in San Francisco Bay for several months after the peaks of the flood.
- Mats of tules ½ mile of a side broke free of the delta... ending up on shores around Monterey Bay. Local farmers used pitchforks to kill the snakes, which came out of the mats of tules onto the beaches.
- Although the number of people who drowned in the flood is not available, it is estimated that at least 500 Chinese workers lost their lives during the flooding due to their poorly built shantytowns

In conclusion,

A piece in the *Nevada City Democrat* described the Native American response on January 11, 1862: *We are informed that the Indians living in the vicinity of Marysville left their abodes a week or more ago for the foothills predicting an unprecedented overflow. They told the whites that the water would be higher than it has been for thirty years, and pointed high up on the trees and houses where it would come. The valley Indians have traditions that the water occasionally rises 15 or 20 feet higher than it has been at any time since the*

*country was settled by whites, and as they live in the open air and watch closely all the weather indications, it is not improbable that they may have better means than the whites of anticipating a great storm.*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Flood\\_of\\_1862#California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Flood_of_1862#California)

Newbold, John D. "[The Great California Flood of 1861-1862](#)"(PDF). *San Joaquin Historian*. San Joaquin County Historical Society. **5** (4). Retrieved 1 March 2016.

Lansing Wells, Edward (1947). "[Notes on the Winter of 1861–2 in the Pacific Northwest](#)" (PDF). *Northwest Science*. **21**. Archived from [the original](#) (PDF) on June 10, 2011.

<http://www.redlandsfortnightly.org/papers/Taylor06.htm>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/atmospheric-rivers-california-mega-flood-lessons-from-forgotten-catastrophe/>



### Business Buddies

The following businesses in town have financially supported the Yolo County Historical Society. We would like you to support them and keep your money local. If you know of any to join our support list, contact me. Businesses pay \$50.00 per year for advertising.

**L & S Printers, Main St.**  
**Zamora Hills Ranch**  
**Larry Shapiro**  
**Bernard & Lynn Gough**  
**Dahlin & Essex Inc.**  
**Alderson Convalescent Hospital**



### Articles from Past Newsletters

The following article was written in 1907 by R.P. Wallace of Woodland and reprinted in the October 1975 Yolo County Historical Newsletter. It was entitled

## “The Flood of 1861”.

Mr. Wallace prefaced his story with the following note:

One during the memorable storm which flooded a good part of the Sacramento Valley in March 1907, a small group of men sat around the stove in the Sheriff's Office in Woodland, listening to the experience of Tom Cummins, a pioneer settler of the Sacramento River District, as related by the old gentlemen himself. It was while he was engaged in hog raising on the river in Sutter County in 1861, and the subject of his recital was the flood of the winter of that year, which he thinks was the highest water the river people ever saw.

### **The Flood of 1861**

Mr. Cummins sat on the low doorstep of his little cabin and gazed anxiously out over the broad expanse of tule water which stretched from the horizon, forty miles away, nearly to the step under his feet. The rain descended steadily, as it had done for days past and the wind howled mournfully over the troubled waters, through the denuded branches of the cottonwood tree in the yard and around the corners of the house.

Day by day, Cummins had seen the overflow water from the Sacramento River and Butte Slough, near the junction of which stood his house; gradually rise, inch by inch, foot by foot, until nearly all of his ranch land had been submerged. ..Those bodies of water covered an area of land many miles in extent and resembled great lakes.

With a sigh, Cummins slowly rose and entered the house. His troubled eyes took in the scene of domesticity. His wife was on the floor playing with the babies. ...Is the water still rising, Thomas?" asked his patient wife. Mr. Cummins attempted to speak lightly of the situation, even while he felt it his duty to apprise his wife of the true condition of affairs. He reluctantly admitted that the water was gradually approaching the doorstep. ..."Well if worst comes to worse, Thomas; you know we have the boat. It's only a ride of about seven miles down the river to Mrs. Crenshaw's."....

Hours afterwards when the little ones had been fed and tucked away, Cummins lay listening to the noises of the night. ...His hogs, which had been the

source of all his revenue, screaming in their distress. From the sound he judged rightly that they had been driven to the crest of the knoll and were there fighting each other for dry places...

Cummins arose from the bed and made his way out into the kitchen. He put his foot in several inches of water when he stepped down on the floor, and almost at the same time, there came a crash from the adjoining room. The brick chimney, whose base rested upon the ground under the floors, had collapsed and fallen, tearing a great hole in the roof, where the bricks from above came through. The water had softened the ground beneath, causing the flue to settle and that with the waves and high winds had finished the job of destruction.

Hurrying to the bedside of his wife, Cummins found her trying to quiet the children who had been awakened by the noise of the falling chimney. He told her to dress the children. By that time, the waves were pounding with resistless force against the wall of the none-too-strongly built house which with every shock rocked on its foundations. Realizing that something must be done soon, Cummins remembered a door opened on the north side of the house, and that immediately behind it other doors opened throughout the house, thus forming a direct range of openings. (He decided to open all the doors). He was almost carried off his feet by the force of the wind and water...but the experiment relieved the situation.

The waves swept through the house...Cummins was frequently bumped up against the walls, and once came close to being washed out the open door...

(The water continued to rise and the wind continued to increase. The decision was to use the boat.)

It was a small frail boat in common use among duck hunters, called 'duck boats'. ...Cummins had acquired considerable skill in the boat's management, but it required his utmost effort to paddle the boat around the house against the wind and the waves. ..."it's risky, but it's our only chance," said Cummins as he set about making preparations for the journey. The children were handled in and wrapped snugly in bundles of the bedding which had been reserved for that purpose. Mrs. Cummins sat upon the floor of the boat, as near to the middle as she could get...

To be continued in our next newsletter....



**Thanks to the following** for generously supporting the Society. You too can be a Patron by donating \$100.00 to help us run our projects

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**99 Years Ago....**

Reported on January 5, 1918 in the Davis Enterprise. Headline: YOLO BOY GIVES LIFE FOR COUNTRY. "Vernon Maxwell of Winters is the first Yolo County boy to give up his life in the service. He was stationed at Camp Kearney (near San Diego) and was attacked by measles followed by pneumonia, which proved fatal. Informed of his death on Christmas Day, his family had visited him

and left just two days before his death, thinking he was on the road to recovery.

**In Other News.....**Plans are being made by the Yolo County Historical Society for the Woodland Armistice Day Centennial Parade on Saturday, **November 10, 2018**, commemorating the end of World War One. Our special planning committee will be soliciting parade entries soon with particular emphasis on marching bands, military units, motorized or horse drawn vehicles of the time and WW1 reenactment groups or individuals.



**Hattie Happenings**

By Dennis Dingemans, Director, Hattie Weber Museum of Davis History

The 100 plus donors who have given almost \$50,000 to the Museum to provide improved storage space will be pleased to hear that -- three full years since the City Council first directed retention and renovation for Museum storage uses -- there has been a flurry of progress in rehabilitating the WPA-funded 1936 Central Park Rest Room. The death last year of our project's original architect Ty Smalley was a sad turn of events. But, we have a new architect and she (Maria Ogrydziak of Davis) has an improved plan that will go soon to the City Council for conceptual approval. Pleasing greatly the Museum volunteers, the new plan retains both the three original rooms and the two rooms added in 1955 to provide recreation equipment storage. There will be cost savings from the decision to do less demolition. And, "let the building tell its own story" is an important historic preservation concept that justifies retaining more of the current structure's interior and exterior.

We are hard at work on an exhibit to celebrate in 2017 the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Davis in 1917. One theme will present biographic profiles of each of the first ten elected City Council members. Elected in 1917, the first five were: J. B. Anderson, S. Beckett, C. Covell, E. McBride, and B. Brewster. In 1918 new electees were J. Jacobson, W. Pugh, C. Porter, and A. Anderson. In 1920 and 1922 and 1924 no new people were elected to the Council. In 1926 F. Hays became the tenth person to be elected to the Council. Many of these first ten served multiple

terms – a pattern of low turnover that characterized the City Council for all of its 100 years. Downtown businessmen were prominent, including a banker, a barber, a hardware store manager, and a former Depot Manager. The Council included university staff and faculty from the beginning in 1917. These initial 10 had many productive terms as the city swiftly established core institutions such as provisions for fire prevention, water supply, sewer lines, and paving.

Another theme in our celebration of the City's centennial will explore the importance of two specific downtown fires as motivators. In November of 1916 a large (\$75,000) fire that was driven by powerful north winds destroyed much of G Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. This demonstrated vulnerability energized a core group of citizens – including many downtown business owners -- to petition County Supervisors to schedule a Cityhood election. In winter of 1917 by a large margin the voters chose incorporation and elected to the new council the leading advocates of cityhood. Then, on July 14, 1918, a second large (\$60,000 in damage) fire struck and burned the largest building in town – the grand 4 story Buena Vista Hotel—along with more than a dozen other smaller structures on G Street. Even the new Anderson Bank Building on 2<sup>nd</sup> and G just barely avoided destruction. A motivated City gave high priority to improved fire prevention and it worked. The rare large fires in Davis after 1918 were outside the downtown and few of them spread beyond the building in which the fire had started.

The Museum has on display several temporary exhibits in addition to our seven permanent exhibits. Perhaps this inventory will alert you to one or more that you want to see before they are taken down and replaced over the next six months.

First, an exhibit reviews some highlights of the Davis League of Women Voters which began in 1957 and disbanded in 2016. For assembling this display, we especially thank three of our volunteers: Merrily DuPree, Margie Blake, and Stella Dinger. They selected materials from our permanent files and from the boxes of LWV records that have been given over the past few months to the Museum by Joan Moses of the now-disbanded League. The Hattie Weber will be the repository of most of the

systematically maintained and very complete League records.

Second, we have on display a dozen items of high-style clothing dating to the 1920s and 1930s. Most are dresses belong to Roberta Stevenson's family and were brought from Ohio in the Mid-1950s when Roberta and her mother moved to Davis. Two of the garments are clearly "Flapper Era" in style. Several feature gold and silver threads as ornamentation. An additional three dresses from the same era were donated by Christal Waters after she viewed our exhibit and realized that the museum would be a good home for her very impressive family heirlooms. Two wool bathing suits from the era are of especial interest, including one that belonged to Ruth Risdon Storer, our town's first female physician. Several people associated with the UCD Design faculty and staff, having seen the exhibit, indicated to us that they would like to be considered as the final repository for items from our display.



Four other temporary exhibits include "Early Davis-area schools," "the Yolo Bypass at 100," "Davis High School Yearbook Covers," and "Putah Creek." The Museum is open and free to the public on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10 am to 4 pm. It is at 445 C Street in Central Park.

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**Dated Material**

**Vision Statement** *The Yolo County Historical Society strives to preserve, protect and acknowledge the diverse history of Yolo County through education, communication and advocacy*