

# Yolo County Historical Society



## Prez Says

Wow! It's over and we are beginning a new year. Presents are gone, parties are over, decorations are starting to come down, and everyone will have a New Year's resolution of dieting!

This year, our resolution is to bring more history into the county. The contract has been signed with the Fair Grounds, and I will meet with Sarah, the CEO, to try to plan some tag-along event openings for us. Opening during the Craft Fair was a start. Although we were there for short amounts of time on both Saturday and Sunday, the visitors who came loved the museum. They all want to know if it will be open during the week or on weekends. Those are questions we can ask.



We lost another building in town. The old livery stable on the corner of College and Dead Cat Alley is gone. According to Al Ebbe, from Blue Wing Gallery, the building was too far gone to save. The structure, a livery stable, was compromised by horse urine and poop. The homeless were breaking into the building and the insurance companies refused to insure the site. So, it is gone. That is too bad, but there are circumstances that happen that can't be helped.

We can't save everything, but we can at least bring attention to the public so that everyone knows what is happening.

I have had several inquiries regarding publishing history books. The board will address that issue and hopefully you will read about the criteria to access funds in either this newsletter or next month's newsletter.

I have included an article about a doll. I hope you will find it interesting. I have also included an article about the flood of 1861. It is riveting. I want to include more info about Knights Landing. I will do that in the next newsletter.

Finally, I wanted to let you know that I received an email from Mark Riley. He compiled a list of cemeteries in Capay Valley. He asked if we were interested. I said yes. I'm not quite sure what we are going to do with it, but I will take the information to the board members, and they will make a decision.

As Always Remember,

History Rules,

Kathy Harryman, President

# The Flood of 1861

by R.P. Wallace

*This story, about Thomas Jefferson Cummins and his experience during the flood of 1861, was written in 1907.*

Tom 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 water, through the denuded branches of the cottonwood tree in the rear 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 raise inch by inch, foot by foot, until nearly all of his ranch had been submerged. It was not exactly a new experience for him and his neighbors, who having lived on the banks of the tortuous stream in Sutter and Yolo counties of California for years past had come to expect occasional high water and levee breaks, when year after year the low lands lying back from the river, on either side, were filled with the water which the mighty river could not carry farther on its way to the ocean. These bodies of water covered an area of land many miles in extent and resembled great lake, but this winter of 1861 set a new mark for high water and Cummins, whose house had always been considered above the reach of the flood, because of the elevation of the little knoll upon which it stood, had at last become anxious for the safety of his wife and two small children. Anxiously he again scanned the dull gray banks of clouds overhead and raised his hand to better test the exact direction and velocity of the wind. Not a break in the sky could he observe and the wind, dead in the rain quarter, had not abated in the least. The water was still rising...and to add to his discomfort and uneasiness the short winter day was drawing to a close.

With a sigh, Cummins slowly arose and entered the house when his wife was on the floor playing with the children. She asked if the water was still rising. Cummins reluctantly admitted that the water was gradually approaching the doorstep. Mrs. Cummins said "Well if worse 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 house."

Hours afterward when the little ones had been fed and tucked away, Cummins lay sleeplessly on his bed and listened to the noises of the night. The wind had veered around to the north and had increased in violence as the night came on. It now amounted to a gale and came booming across the inland sea lashing that great body into fury. Immense waves struck against the side of the house with such force that the structure shivered and groaned with the compact...To add to the confusion and discomfort Cummins could hear his hogs, 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 on the rapidly diminishing area of land above water. Cummins soon realized that he was helpless to help his animals.

But he knew that the water must be higher than ever before...he felt that the water must have reached the floor of the house which was a few inches lower than the crest of the knoll.

Noiselessly Cummins rose from the bed and made his way out into the kitchen. He put his foot in several inches of water...and almost at the same time there came a crash in 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 room 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 the high wind, had finished the job of destruction.

Hurrying to the bedside of his wife, he found her trying to quiet the children. He told her what

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*continued* - **Flood**

had happened and bade her to dress the children...Returning to the living room, Mrs. Cummins succeeded in lighting a lamp. 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 foundation. Realizing that something must be done soon, Cummins remembered that 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.

After opening the interior doors, he made his way to the front and turned the lock. He was almost carried off his feet by the force of the wind and water which met him as the door flew wide, but he had the satisfaction of noting that the experiment relieved the situation. The house no longer rocked with such violence, but great waves were dashing through the house, rushed through it, carrying nearly everything in their path.

The water was still rising and the wind increasing. He felt that they must desert the house. Very calmly, his wife assured him that she was ready to undertake the journey in the boat. It was a small, frail boat very much similar to those in common use among duck hunters and called "duck boats". During his residence of several years on the river, Mr. Cummins had frequent occasion to use it and had acquired considerable skill in its management but it required his utmost effort to paddle the boat around the house against the wind and waves. Mrs. Cummins was ready with the babies.

"It's risky Dea, but it's our only chance." Cummins set about making preparations for the journey. He seized a large bundle of bed clothes, which he placed carefully in the bottom of the boat, then assisted his wife to enter it. The children were handed in and wrapped snugly in bundles of the bedding Mrs. Cummins set prone upon the floor of the boat, as near to the middle as she could while her husband placed himself in the stern, seized the paddle and released the 'painter'.

Then he began a battle of strength and endurance against the elements. Cummins was a young man in the prime of his strength. Inured to hardship all his life, and having spent most of it in the open air without those luxuries and health-undermining excesses often indulged in by the city born and bred, he was certainly a splendid specimen of physical manhood as he skillfully plied the paddle and gazed anxiously out into the darkness to guide his course favorably to the heavy waves which made the progress of the boat exceedingly slow and hazardous. ...One moment the craft would be lifted to sickening heights upon the crest of some mighty waves and the next be plunged into an abyss of dark depths. It seemed many times that the destruction of the small boat was inevitable but the gallant little shell struggled bravely on as although it too, realizing the great responsibility entrusted to it by its precious cargo.

The children frightened and drenched, cried piteously and the brave little woman in the bottom of the boat had all she could do to soothe them. She was soon burdened with another more hazardous duty – the boat was filling with water dashed over its side by the waves. Already tired and sick at heart, Mrs. Cummins began the monotonous dipping with a small tin can, realizing that upon her constancy, depended on the lives of the little group. After what seemed like hours, her arms grew numb with fatigue, and she felt that she must either relinquish her hold upon the babies or suffer the boat to fill while she ceased her torturing toil with the water. Mr. Cummins tried to cheer her though his heart ached in sympathy as he witnessed her apparent anguish and distress, still he was powerless to help her.

*What happens to the Cummins family? Stay tuned and in the next newsletter, I will finish the story.*



# Eulogy to a Gollywog

by Kathy Harryman

*It is important to note and was pointed out to us by member Robin Datel in her letter to the editor, published in our May-June 2024 newsletter – the British Gollywog doll has been a controversial item. The concern about racist overtones is not unlike that surrounding "Little Black Sambo" in the United States. As Robin notes, historical artifacts often carry remnants of earlier times and beliefs as well as stereotypes. Dolls often represent the latter (think Barbie) – BAS, Production Ed.*

Several months ago, our newsletter honored women who created dolls and became well known and oftentimes very wealthy. I am reprinting a portion of the March newsletter on the next page.

I am a collector. I have a lot of items that I like and being a collector, I can't just have one item. All collectors know this. Does it border on hoarding? I don't want to go there. My kids are overwhelmed that I have so many dolls. They keep wondering when I am going to get rid of them. Someday, I tell them. Never is what I really think! I have always loved dolls and because my mother came from an immigrant family of seven and money was scarce, she did her best to fulfill my desires. Yes, I was spoiled! I received a doll every Christmas until I was 12 years old! I now have a collection of over 400 dolls of various shapes and sizes, including the original dolls from my youth.

When I look for dolls to add to my collection, I have to be personally intrigued by the doll to purchase it. I love dolls that are handmade. There is a certain charm in viewing the doll and thinking about its own personal story. The doll must make me smile. During my collection years, I have been very fortunate to purchase some remarkable dolls that make me happy.

One such doll was my first Gollywog. When I bought him, I did not know much about the history of the doll. Being an historian, I began to research the origin of the doll. (See the article below.) This doll made me smile. He looked so carefree and happy. His hair was very unusual. It was made from some type of furry animal. His eyes were shoe buttons that were mounted on a white round old button. His body was made from an old sock, and his clothing was the typical felt cloth. His lined jacket coat and red pants with a bright red bow on his neck, told me he had someplace important to go. And his smile – it went from one side of his mouth to the next.

Every time I looked at him, I smiled. He sat in a basket with some of his black friends for a long time. But alas, his time came to an end. I had noticed moth marks on his trousers. There were only a few, so I thought all was okay. Well, it was not okay. His clothes are now moth-eaten everywhere. I can even see what his insides are made of. I was surprised to find that he was stuffed with yards and yards of some kind of industrial yarn.

I tried to save him. I put him in the freezer in a plastic bag. That method is supposed to kill all the moths. He stayed in the freezer for a few months. When I brought him out, he was even more damaged. So, I am forced to throw him away. He can no longer be with his friends in the basket.



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*continued* - **Eulogy**

What a sad note. He might have been the original doll that Florence Upton found in her aunt's attic. Who knows? I just know that I have enjoyed him for 20 years. He has made me laugh and wonder who made him and who loved him. This eulogy is a little different from normal, but his passing makes me sad. This does sound like a history lesson doesn't it.

**The Gollywog**

Florence Kate Upton was born in 1873 in New York, a child of immigrant parents. At the age of 15, Florence joined her father in taking classes at the National Academy of Design in New York. Florence's father died and at the age of 16, she obtained work as a professional illustrator. In 1893, she left New York and returned to her family in England. In 1895 she began to sketch out ideas for a children's book, using penny wooden dolls as her models.

Her aunt, Kate Hudson, found a blackface minstrel toy in her attic and Florence used this character in her story book. The toy named "Gollywog" provided the inspiration that she needed to complete her book. She created thirteen Gollywog adventures. The doll became a popular children's toy in England during a large part of the 20th century.

Unfortunately, she did not patent the name and it was used indiscriminately by companies throughout England in various advertising items. Upton continued to paint and study art. She became an accomplished society portraitist (*YCHS Newsletter*, March 2024).

## Update on Camp Haswell Preservation

by Moira Fitzgerald

The Dinner on the Arches raised \$8400 of which \$4200 is being donated to the Camp Haswell preservation project. A private donor has donated an additional \$1000. Our anonymous donor who promised to match a \$10,000 donation from the Dinner on the Arches has agreed to donate the \$10,000 despite the fact the dinner did not reach its goal. Yahoo!

With the previous money raised, plus the Dinner donation and the two private donors, we now have enough to repair/replace the roof but not add the security measures Yolo County Parks and Recreation would like. The roof project will begin in March or April 2025.



We will continue to fundraise for the security portion of the project as it is less time urgent.



# From the Hattie Weber Museum

by Merrily Dupree

This report describes an important event in Hattie Weber history: The 1937 WPA Restroom Building's renovation is now complete! On November 2, Jerry Lucas, our roofing contractor, and his crew removed the old cedar-shake roof and applied the new composition one. This was done in the nick of time: many of the old shakes had either been blown off or washed away. The new roof is very attractive and should last for thirty years. The price was \$5,210 plus \$700 for an asbestos inspection, required by Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District. We were able to pay for it entirely with funds from our YCHS WPA Building account. This money came from YCHS and individual donors, many of them YCHS members. We're extremely grateful for your support and your patience with what has turned out to be a twelve-year undertaking.

As Kathy well knows, every stage of this renovation project has been plagued with problems. She, Hattie Weber directors Jim Becket and Dennis Dingemans, and Davis architect Maria Ogrydziak all tirelessly worked to solve them in order to move us forward, even when six years had passed and we still had no contractor.

First, in 2012 we had to fight the City of Davis to save the building (the only one in Davis with the iconic WPA plaque!). When the City Council supported our plan to turn the building into a storage facility, the city agreed to give us only the cost of demolition (\$14,000), leaving us to raise the rest.



Then a surge in construction prices made it impossible to find a bidder we could afford. At first, we were told every door would have to be ADA compliant, an extremely expensive requirement, and a redwood tree growing close to the building would have to be removed. After much exhausting negotiation, we got the estimated price down. Finally, Joe Albertazzi, an amazing local contractor and history buff submitted a suitable bid and completed the renovation in 2020. However, the roof could not be included.

Four years later, we began looking for a roofing contractor but discovered an obstacle when a series of "campers" discovered that the area around the building was an ideal spot for a tent. We were afraid no contractor would agree to work in this situation. Eventually, this problem was solved with the help of a wonderful policewoman, who talked to several people, explaining that we were trying to have work done on the building. Suddenly the tents disappeared.

Then we discovered that the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Division required an asbestos inspection. We knew that we had paid for an inspection 2016, and the city was able to give us a copy of that report. But the Management District rejected it, saying it was outdated. We had to go back to the original inspector and pay for another one.

But seeing the WPA Building finally completely renovated has made all of this seem unimportant. A significant Davis building will be part of the community for many more years, and the museum couldn't ask for a more convenient and useful storage space. Historic preservation has its rewards!

## Patrons 2024-25

Thanks so much to the following for supporting the Yolo County Historical Society. We could not run this organization without your additional help.

You, also, can be a patron by **contributing** \$100 or more.

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# YCHS Newsletter

Yolo County Historical Society

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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.

We are a 5013c tax deductible organization

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See our website at [ychs.org](http://ychs.org)

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