

John D. (Dickenson) Stephens¹

John Dickenson Stephens was born near Bunceton, Missouri, on Sept 23, 1826. He was the eldest son of his father's second marriage. He went to private schools and was qualified as a teacher. He taught from 1844-1846.

In 1846, at the beginning of the war with Mexico, he volunteered and was assigned to a regiment. He marched to the front but saw no active service. When the war ended, he returned to Missouri and began to study medicine. But then gold was discovered in California. Together with his brother and friends, he headed to the gold mines. He met with little success.

He and his friends were in Sacramento and then traveled to Yolo County. He decided that there was a chance here for a struggling easterner. He bought raw land and began to farm and ranch. He lived in an old adobe house constructed by Indians west of Madison. He was the first in the county to successfully grown grain.

During this time, he returned to Missouri and married Mary Alexander in 1854.

In addition to farming, he was a pioneer in introducing high grade stock. For years his sheep won prizes at the state fairs and county exhibitions.

He also raised mules and horses, Durham cattle and Poland-China hogs. The only drawbacks in the county were adequate marketing facilities and the shortage of water.

In 1863, he organized the Capay Ditch Company, which built a reservoir for storing the waters of Cache Creek canyon and thereby providing water to irrigate the farmlands. He worked with John Q. Brown and managed the Woodland Gas Works for many years. Eventually in 1901, this business was consolidated into Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) He, with a group of wealthy Woodlanders, bought out J. W. Peaks Water Works. They contracted with the town to lay new and larger pipes down the streets and to expand water services to the residences and businesses. He was president of the Water Works of Woodland until he sold it to the city.

Always on the lookout for more opportunities for wealth, he invested in the Comstock Lode in Nevada which enabled him to return to the county with increased finances for more investments.

Recognizing the need for the town to have its own bank, he formed an alliance with various moneyed men of Yolo County and financed the Bank of Woodland in 1868. He was the first and only president of the Bank. "The bank never lost the confidence of depositors, never refused to meet an obligation, and never betrayed the trust of even the humblest individual. Its record was unimpeachable, its investments conservative, its policy cautious yet progressive and its results certain and satisfactory."

He died on Aug 17, 1898.



¹ from The History of Yolo County by William O. Russell et al. 1940.

540 Main Street

by Kathy Harryman

This commercial building was built in 1870 by Charles A. Brown, a carpenter; Levi S. Craft, contractor and brick maker; and L. S. Sill. Originally it was three stories tall. (See Pugh's drawing on the left.) The top floor was owned by IOOF Lodge No. 11 until 1905, when the Odd Fellows contracted the mission style building at Third and Main.

About this time the third story was removed, and the window hoods and cornice brackets were lost. The second story of the building was rented for professional services: J. C. Ball, Attorney of Law, and F. M. Brown, Insurance Agent.

The original design of the building was Renaissance Revival, but the street level arcade was decorated with ornate arched windows and Corinthian columns. In the photo, the bank is on the left (corner of Main and First Streets). The IOOF was on the third floor.



In 1873, the building was purchased by the *Bank of Woodland* which used one of the two street level storefronts. Organized in 1868, the *Bank of Woodland* was Woodland's first bank and the first incorporated bank in the valley. Its formation symbolized Woodland's growing wealth.

The bank began the commercial development of the county. It was chartered on November 31, 1868, and opened on February 20, 1869. John D. Stephens started the bank by securing subscriptions in the amount of \$100,000. For fourteen years the bank flourished. Stephens was president until he died.

The year 1892 was not a good one for Woodland. In the early hours of April 19, 1892, a severe earthquake hit the community. Some of the most impressive buildings suffered damage including this building.

Three months later, on July 2, 1892, a carelessly thrown cigarette landed on dry weeds. The north wind was blowing and blew embers onto a small barn on Dead Cat Alley. The fire raged out of control. Sacramento fire fighters had to be called in to save the town. It was the most destructive fire in the history of Woodland. A two-block area of the commercial downtown was destroyed. Fortunately, this building was saved.

The *Peerless Saloon* was next door to the bank from about 1893-1909.

In 1903, the bank decided to move. In 1916 the charter expired, and the directors decided to liquidate. The shareholders and stockholders organized the *Bank of Woodland National Association*. It was housed on the corner of Main and College Streets.

In 1928, Van Vliet purchased and remodeled the 540 Main building.

In 1928, *Safeway* grocery store was located here. It was called the *Piggly Wiggly- Safeway* store. *Safeway* has been in five locations in this city. The first one was called *Skaggs-Safeway*, located where the *Blue Wing Gallery* is today.

The building was also home to *Sullivan's Dance Studio*, *Halley's Dance Studio*, *Arthur's Drug Store*, *R & J Family Pharmacy*, *Von Zephlin's*, and *Sofie's Furniture Store*. It was also a crepe shop.

Embellishments have been here since 2019.



Woodland Bank, after the removal of the top floor.

Woodland Bank notes.



Zoom Interview with Supervisor Sandy

by Kathy Harryman

Mary Aulman and I recently interviewed Yolo County Supervisor Gary Sandy, who represents District 3, encompassing part of Woodland.

Our questions concerned the Gibson House.

Us: Is the entire (Gibson House) collection online yet?

Sandy: Sort of. The database is online but no photographs. The work was interrupted by Lulia's departure.

Us: Can the interior of the Gibson House be visited?

Sandy: Yes

Us: Will Lulia's position be replaced?

Sandy: Yes. They (the county) are waiting for Heather to return, which should occur this month (March).

Us: Are financial plans in place to retain the position?

Sandy: Yes. \$10,000 per annum in addition to a full-time position will be budgeted for exhibits, etc.

Our courthouse questions were not answered.

*We are looking for someone to follow up on these items. Your help is always needed – **Kathy**.*



Big Day of Giving is coming soon.

Please remember to donate to the Yolo County Historical Society. Our focus is to paint the outside of the county fair museum building. Dino Gay has worked on the paint colors with Bart Vanucci, the Fair Director. It will look amazing. I have presented information to the **Sunrise Rotary** and the **Morning Lions Group**. I am hoping both groups will contribute to help with this project.

Our goal is to help future generations understand their heritage by building a legacy for the future by preserving our past.

The museum will be open on **Saturday, April 8**, from **10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** The Legion is sponsoring the morning. Make it a point to come and visit.

Hattie Happenings

by Merrily Dupree and John Cain



Our current exhibit opened on March 18. It is modern and fun. It presents three board games with connections to Davis: 1968 and 1982 versions of "Davisopoly" (based, of course, on Monopoly) and "Coffee Time," recently developed by five Davisites, including our Hattie Weber volunteer, **Aaron Wedra**. We have put the boards, box lids and some of the pieces and cards into one of the cases. The text includes brief directions for playing and the histories of the games.

We are continuing the accession of many items, from **John Lofland**, and others. After that task is completed, we will begin improving the Native American exhibit, by learning more about the materials in our collection and about the Patwin people.

There are a few issues with the plumbing and water intrusion problems with the building. Since it is a city building, we will talk to the City Historic Resources Management Commission.

There was an attempted break in on one of the WPA Building doors. We managed to lock it and will soon have it repaired (we, and not the city, are responsible for all repairs to that building).

Our visitor totals are as follows: Feb. 4-38, Feb. 11-29, Feb. 18-25, Feb. 23-19, and Mar. 4-23.

Business Buddies

Please support these local businesses.
They support the Yolo County Historical Society.

Corner Drug

Legislative Intent Service

Pleasant Pheasant

Simas Family Vineyard

Yolo Ice & Creamery

Patrons

The following folks support the *Yolo County Historical Society*. We could not run this organization without their help. Thank you very much!

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

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