

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It hardly seems possible but we are nearing the end of the Society's year but there is still much to look forward to which we can enjoy and not do all the organizing.

On our front cover is information about the Yolo County Historical Museum's May Festival which did not happen in 2008 but will be bigger and better this year. The Clever Clover 4-H groups will be helping with the Country Bakery again this year. These young people have volunteered to make the phone calls to members asking if they will bake cookies, cupcakes, or other goodies which will be sold to benefit the Museum.

Wednesday, **June 17th** we will enjoy our Annual Picnic with the Friends of the Yolo County Museum and the Friends of the Archives. Read more information on this special evening in our June newsletter.

While we won't have a lemonade stand at the Yolo County Fair this year, we will have an exhibit in the large Exhibit Hall. Of course, the Spring Lake Schoolhouse will be open for visits. We will need docents for both these programs. Most members will be receiving a phone call asking if you can volunteer some time to help with the staffing.

Finally, Woodland's 21st Annual Stroll Through History will take place on Saturday, **September 12th**. Volunteers are always needed to be docents in the open homes or characters in the Woodland City Cemetery. Plan now to attend this annual event which highlights the history of Woodland. Google Stroll Through History for more information.

Peace,

B.J. Ford, President

"HOLLYWOOD COMES TO WOODLAND"

Woodland Historian David Wilkinson is working on a new book "Hollywood Comes to Woodland." He is looking for photos and recollections or stories from people who have memories of the following Woodland movie theaters:

Elite, Dreamland, Majestic, Strand, Airdome, Granada, National, Bill's Theater, Woodland (Doc Dixon's) Theater, Legion, Yolo, Porter or State Theater and Sunset Drive-in.

Who knew there were so many theaters in Woodland?

All photos or stories about these movie theaters would be appreciated. David can be contacted at 530-662-9202 or E-mail: davwilk@pacbell.net. David wants your stories. Did you know who managed one of these theaters or special shows you may have seen at one of the theaters? He is especially in need of photos and more information on the early silent movie-era theaters.

WOODLAND CITY CEMETERY PROJECT

It took a lot longer than expected but the plaque recognizing both donors, and their loved ones buried at the cemetery, who gave \$100.00 or more to the Cemetery Fence Project, is now in place. It is located between the Cemetery Office and the Mausoleum.

We thank Marcia Cary for the design, Andy Gagnon Landscapes, Inc. who did the irrigation system, Dumars Inc. who donated the concrete, Concrete Unlimited for the concrete work, Aquarius Laser Etching and Design who did the beautiful plaque, and Cache Creek Monuments who installed it.

Road 27 and Yolo County's Rural Landscapes

By Dennis Dingemans

This article examines what can be seen when traveling along County Road 27 and provides historical perspectives on rural landscapes along the route. The road extends 20 miles from its western beginning in the rolling foothills (1/2 mile west of Road 88) to its eastern end at the Yolo Bypass levee where Road 27 would be. I selected this slice of Rural Yolo's agricultural scene to write about because, since it is half way between Woodland (Road 25) and Davis (Road 29), it is likely to stay agricultural forever as part of any separation buffer created to prevent the two towns from sprawling into each other. During mid-April I re-familiarized myself with the area by driving three round trips along Road 27, stopping to consult with residents and enterprises along the way. Historical maps from the UCD library and the Heidrick Agricultural History Museum were also helpful.

The terrain along this transect is flat and steadily slopes eastward/downward from a high of 185' (feet above sea level) at Road 87 down to 20 feet of elevation at the base of the Yolo Bypass levee. The road's slope parallels the terrain descent taken by Cache Creek (six miles north), by Putah Creek (six miles south), and by Willow Slough (located half way between Cache and Putah). Indeed, Willow Slough – the waterway few Yoloans know about—follows along Road 27's central 10-mile section. A corridor of streambank trees and bushes makes it easy to see Willow Slough as it meanders eastward from the foothills. Visible from the road are other watercourses that sometimes provide dense vegetation. The most important of these are the Yolo Central Canal, a 100-year-old irrigation system built right next to Road 27, and Moore's Ditch, a 150 year old canal that moves irrigation water a dozen miles southeastward from Cache Creek to near Road 98 where it meets both Road 27 and Willow Slough. A most interesting roadside scene is at the west end of

Road 27 where it begins as a curving unpaved track that then crosses a one-lane bridge over Union School Slough; nearby are derelict orchards, groves, and a complicated hydrological construction from about 1910 which allows the Union School streambed to cross under the Winters Canal as it supplies irrigation water into the start of the Central Canal. Some 200 beehives there this month add to the bird-filled soundscape.

Land subdivision and settlement happened fast after 1849 and then stabilized in a pattern of mostly large land holdings. In 1879 (as shown on maps in the DePue Atlas) there were already 39 landowners in the 2-mile wide corridor (including all properties within a mile of Road 27 that touch the road). Their 19,000 acres of land had only one owner with less than 100 acres. The 15 small owners holding 101- 310 acres had 14% of the total. The 19 owners holding 320 - 1000 acres had 52% of the total. The four **big**s (Chapman, Harlan, Fredericks, and Scott) each owned 1001+ acres along Road 27 in 1879 and together had 34% of the land. Little had changed – except for the actual owners – by 2008 when the Agric-Lands map showed a similar pattern of 44 landowners in mostly large holdings. In 2008 the 3 **big**s (Connaway, Heidrick, and Kasbergen) owning 1000+ acres each had 40% of all land in the 2 mile corridor width. The 27 who own between 100 and 1000 acres each had together 55% of the land. The 14 who hold less than 100 acres today all have at least 23 acres, so the County is not permitting Road 27 to be developed as ranchette exurban housing.

With only about 40 landowners along the corridor at any time, it is no surprise that few homes have ever been built here. The 1908 and 1915 maps show just two-dozen farmsteads along the road and in 2009 there are just 35 dwelling units adjoining Road 27. And these houses are not a very impressive lot. This isn't, and never was, an area of agricultural mansions. Today only 2 of the 35 would be called grand or impressive, and one of them – the porticoed Beeman/Bullard house at Road 99 – is on the county's inventory of historic homes. Much more common are the 9 mobile/modular houses and the 11 ramshackle or derelict housing units. There are another 13 modest homes that would

be described as “middle class” in their size and maintenance.

Few of the 45 houses/yards today look like thriving farmsteads from the era of a hundred years ago when Yolo County’s typical farming unit included clustered farm buildings and produced a mix of field crops, orchard products, and animals. Only two places today seem to have cattle, and one is an odd herd of about 40 Holstein steers and bulls. Four places seem to have horses along Road 27, and these appear to total less than a score. Three farmyards have sheep and the only place with visible poultry has a small flock of Emu. I didn’t see a pig yard. Five barns survive, none in good condition, and all seeming to be used as equipment storage sheds. Three tank-houses can be seen, but one is truncated, one is attached to a garage, and the most beautiful (a white “Yolo Style” with tall, tapering base) is NW of Road 27/89.

Field crops predominate and only half a dozen (new) orchards are to be found, most in the western half. Grapes haven’t appeared yet in any numbers. Barley, wheat, and oats are seen from the road’s one end to the other, with oats being cut now for green forage. Alfalfa and other hay crops are about as prominent as are grains. Just two fields each have been already planted with corn or with tomatoes this early in the season. Ridged paddy fields for rice abound both at the road’s east and west ends, but none are the dramatic curvilinear form and none yet have rice planted in them.

One very large eucalyptus grove, planted as a fuel crop in 1985, stands out in the tree-scape. It is on the Wilkendorf Place side-road between Road 94 and Road 95, where a member of the family pointed out that decades ago his grandmother had planted the adjacent roadside corridor of 200 eucalypts. There are about 4 miles of roadside “avenues of trees” on Road 27, the most impressive being the olives and the mixed-hardwoods ruderal plantings between Road 100 and Road 93.

The most dynamic parts of the agricultural landscape along Road 27 are a half dozen of enterprises that deserve particular mention for their economic contributions or for their

appearance. Various of these six support the county’s emerging emphasis on organic agricultural and sustainability, remind us of a near-century of seed and seedling production, and show us the regional and interstate connections of our farmers (and farm-related entrepreneurs).

First, is Hedgerow Farms with offices 150’ north of Road 27 and Road 89. Owner John Anderson developed his 30-year interest in habitat restoration into a thriving business selling native grass seeds. The roadsides adjacent to his 600 acres of land are verdant with shrubs and bushes and young trees as well as the grasses and flowering plants that are his core business.

This month he is growing a large field of lavender and a field of poppies that are a delight to the eye. Hedgerow Farms gives tours of their fields and their delightfully crowded five-acre farmyard. Their current price list contains 105 grasses, sedges, rushes, and forbs.

Second, is the large cluster of new greenhouses between Road 88 and Road 89. Westside Transplant, headquartered in Firebaugh, started constructing their branch operation here two years ago and opened for business in March of 2008. They sell young tomato, melon, broccoli, and other vegetable seedlings to commercial growers, with many organic applications and some direct marketing of eating tomatoes etc.

Third, is the “Winters Dryer Plant” of Sunsweet Growers (of Yuba City). Just west of I-505, this complex of 8 big sheds and warehouses has been expanding since 1959. Fruit and nut boxes are stacked high in the yards and various sorting machines must be fun to watch during the harvest season.

Forth, is the two-year-old headquarters office and high-tech research facilities complex built by Cal/West Seeds at the southeast corner of Roads 27 and 98. This attractive new physical plant replaced previous scattered facilities in Woodland. From this site the thriving company controls branch plants in Wisconsin, Washington, and California. Cal/West Seeds sells a great

variety of seeds, but alfalfa varieties (another valuable county crop) are their best sellers.

Fifth, is the headquarters of the J. H. Meek and Sons farming enterprises located at the southeast corner of Roads 27 and 99. The family has farmed in various locations in the county for over a hundred years, but this site is now their control-point for thousands of owned and rented acres in three counties. The modest original residential cottage is dwarfed amidst huge indoor and outdoor equipment storage areas. Three massive, distinctive structures (all over 60x150') were built in parallel: a 70-year-old wooden barn, a 40 year old corrugated metal barn, and a contemporary brightly-painted metal shed. Their office staff is happy to arrange a conversation with the 90+ years old senior Meek and they display their pride in newly adopted high-yield tomato varieties developed by research here in Yolo County.

Sixth, is the Medlock Field operation of Growers Air Service located between Willow Slough and Road 100. Started in 1964 by a Davis-era pilot with international experience, the field's hangars house 6 planes for aerial applications to agriculture fields. One of their bi-planes, a design based on local innovations, just got donated to the Smithsonian. They are the biggest agricultural air service in the Sacramento Valley and their work area is displayed cleverly by the office wall's 8' by 12' assemblage of 100+ topographic maps (expertly fit together, of course, as you would expect in a business where precision is required). Servicing the Yolo rice industry was Medlock airfield's main original business. Road 27's other past contributions to the rice industry are still visible in the now-derelict Rice Growers Association of California mill (best seen from highway 113) and the abandoned rice warehouse appropriately named "Arroz" (Spanish for rice) at Road 89.

EXHIBIT AT GIBSON HOUSE MUSEUM

During the month of May there will be an exhibit on the African American families who once lived in the Capay Valley around the turn of the 20th Century. Mimi Schiffman, from Davis, compiled a photo-history of some of the families who lived in Guinda, Rumsey, and Esparto. This exhibit was displayed at the Edwin Meier Hall Administration Bldg. during the months of February and March. If you haven't had the opportunity to see this exhibit before, or would like to view it again, the Gibson House is where it will be available. Not only are there pictures to see but you will have the opportunity to read about the interesting lives of the families who lived there. Mary Frances Gaither, a nurse/mid-wife and her family are featured as well as the Green Berry Logan family of Guinda, and the Watkins family from Rumsey. The exhibit can be seen at the May Festival.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

If you have a story, or stories, that you would like to share about your family who live, or once lived in Yolo County, please submit them to the Historical Society for inclusion the newsletter.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES DEADLINE:

Articles for the newsletter will be accepted until the 20th of each month. Please either e-mail Jeannette Molson at: JLMolson@aol.com or mail to the Yolo County Historical Society, P. O. Box 1447, Woodland CA 95776.