

# Sutter County Historical Society News Bulletin

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April 2001

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**Rice Growing in Sutter County, 1992**

*(Photo Credit: Christy Carlos)*

## OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

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Audrey Breeding, Vice President

Dorothy Ettl, Treasurer

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The **Bulletin** is published quarterly by the Historical Society in Yuba City, California. Payment of annual membership dues provides you with a subscription to the **Bulletin** and the Museum's **Muse News**. At the April 1987 Annual Dinner Meeting the membership voted to change the by-laws to combine the memberships of the Society and the Museum.

The 2001 dues are payable as of January 1, 2001.

Student (under 18)/ Senior Citizen/Library .....	\$ 15
Individual .....	\$ 20
Organizations/Clubs.....	\$ 30
Family .....	\$ 35
Business/Sponsor .....	\$ 100
Corporate/Benefactor .....	\$1000

## President's Message

Organization and communication have been the main thrust of the Board of Directors for this past year. We are not 100% yet but we have made great strides and promise to keep working to provide SCHS members with the best in getting things organized and then getting the word out to you.

Our Annual Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup> and we hope you will attend. We will elect Directors for the next two years; review and approve a budget for 2001-02; and discuss some goals for the coming year.

So what is the "state of the society"? Our membership continues to be very strong, we are solvent and preparing to start another building project, our meetings have been well-attended, but *best of all*, the Society members are interested and motivated about the future and the Directors are working hard to increase public awareness and support for the preservation of the history of Sutter County.

We started out last April in a period of stress, disorganized and working to get the society back in order after the unexpected death of one of our most involved members, Linda Leone. Our first meeting was one of exploring and questioning what had to be done. I think we were successful in filling all the holes and soon were on the road to happier times. Sharyl jumped right in to continue editing and publishing the Bulletin; she was joined by Phyllis, and recently Christy, to make a very productive team. Dorothy stepped forward and took on the job as Treasurer and managing the mail; Connie continued as our long-standing secretary (with lots of input about what was done in the past); Audrey, as Vice President, added her knowledge and assistance to a new president who had little experience or knowledge about the workings of the Society. I can't stress enough how impressed I was with the Directors who pitched in and steadied the business of the Society with their hard work and willingness to sit through long Directors' meetings and give support as needed.

Our greatest accomplishment this year has been one of stabilization. The Bulletin is back on schedule; thanks to Steve Perry, the Hock Farm doors project is coming together; and we are ready to kick off the Century Farm project. We are also working on two new projects you will be hearing about soon. In addition, we are also meeting with the Museum staff and Commission seeking a Museum building project we can support.

We have really had a successful year and next year, with your help, will be EVEN BETTER. Thank you for supporting the Historical Society; your comments, questions, and input are always welcomed.

John V. Reische  
President

## Director's Report

With Spring springing up all around, it must be time for the Museum's annual fund-raiser *Wear & Remembrance*, A Vintage Apparel Fair on April 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>. Visit the two dozen vendors of vintage clothing and accessories in Franklin Hall at the Yuba-Sutter Fairgrounds for a sensory delight of colors, fabrics, textures and styles. Find hats, shoes, jewelry, accessories, textiles and Western wear for women and men. Admission is just \$5.00 or \$4.00 with a bright pink coupon from the Museum. Show hours on Saturday are 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Marvelous lunches are available by Java Retreat.

*Our Photo Album: Yesterday in the Yuba-Sutter Area* remains up in the main gallery through May. If you haven't seen this excellent collection of local historic photos yet, here's your chance.

June will bring a new exhibit on the history of local aviation. Beginning with the first attempts at becoming airborne following through to post World War II, local aviation is a colorful story. Area aviation historian and longtime Museum member Allen Herr will act a guest curator for the exhibit. The exhibit will remain through September. The Summer Children's Program will have an aviation theme. Watch for news of an adult program to accompany the exhibit. Prepare to be amazed!

Remember to stop by the Museum to meet our Fulbright scholar, Leena Waismaa from Finland. While she is learning about American museum practices, she is helping with Museum duties. Her current project is entering new accessions into the Past Perfect computer program, a most important task that the staff had difficulty finding time to complete. We feel most fortunate that Leena will be at the Museum until July.

Work is scheduled to begin on the Museum patio this spring and at long last all the memorial pavers that were purchased will be put in place. Work continues on the agricultural wing permanent exhibits, with much progress being made, and the prospect of completion by Fall.

Julie Stark  
Museum Director

## Editor's Page

We are pleased to announce that the editorial staff of *The Bulletin* now consists of Sharyl Simmons, Phyllis Smith and Christy Carlos. As you may know, Sharyl Simmons has been an editor of this magazine for many years but the publishing of *The Bulletin* warranted the addition of two volunteers. Now, with a full crew of editors, we are back on the regular quarterly publishing schedule. We are looking forward to working together and have been brainstorming to come up with some new features and articles for the Bulletin. Be prepared because there are three of us recruiting members for articles and ideas for the Bulletin.

Our first thank you is for Dorothy Ettl who wrote two brief pieces on recent events that took place at the Museum. We routinely entice you to attend these functions, but have never followed through with letting you know what you may have missed. Dorothy was last seen taking notes at Kevin Starr's presentation so don't be surprised to see that report in the next issue. You are all encouraged to submit articles, however brief or long, to the bulletin.

John Reische provided us with an overview of the many ferries that used to carry people, produce and livestock across the rivers and streams in Sutter County. We would be very interested if

any of you can provide memories of the ferries or the people who ran them. Stand-alone articles on each ferry are on the burner for future issues.

The main story in this issue is from the pen - or is it word processor - of our own Christy Carlos. Christy offered us this great article about rice production in Sutter County long before she joined the editorial staff and we are excited about it and the obvious talent that she brings to the Bulletin. So, in order to let you know more about us, we are taking a piece of the editor's pages for the rest of the year to introduce ourselves. First up is Christy Carlos:

Christy Carlos brings newsletter publishing experience to the team. Before her retirement, she was solely responsible for an in-house department newsletter with readership of 1200 company employees. After retiring, for over two years Christy was the sole editor and designer for the *Yuba-Sutter Regional Arts Magazine* before that publication went to a tabloid format. She has also published newsletters commercially for local businesses such as The Bonanza Hotel in Yuba City. Christy has a quality management background and is a published poet.

Sharyl Simmons  
Phyllis Smith  
Christy Carlos

## Memorials

In Memory of **Douglas Bishop**  
Burwell L. Ullrey

In Memory of **Edward LePine**  
Jane Boone

In Memory of **Violet Coleman**  
Mary S. O'Neal

In Memory of **Margaret M. Madden**  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Gillet

In Memory of **Steven F. Danna Sr.**  
John Patrick Family  
Tom & Jean Pfeffer  
Sam & Becky Anderson

In Memory of **Marion McElroy**  
Lucille Berry  
Evon Gilstrap  
Dorothy Jenkins Ross  
Live Oak Women's Club

In Memory of **John C. DeMattos**  
John & Dorothea Reische

In Memory of **Jeannette McNalley**  
Helen Heenan

In Memory of **Dan Dillon**  
Jane Boone

In Memory of **Angie Micheli**  
Live Oak Women's Club

In Memory of **Leland O. Drew**  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Gillet

In Memory of **Lois Miles**  
Ann & Andros Karperos

In Memory of **Garlan H. Epley**  
Ida Philpott

In Memory of **Elwood Munger**  
Tom Pfeffer  
Berry & Donna McMaster  
Randy & Shirley Schnabel

In Memory of **Lucy Fahy**  
Suzanne & Leonard Reynolds

In Memory of **Bob Fizer**  
Bryan & Mary Fairlee

In Memory of **Art Nason**  
Joe & Jane Roberts

In Memory of **Tressie Green**  
Mr. & Mrs. Donald Gillet

In Memory of **Larry Nall**  
Ivadel Simmons

In Memory of **Art Hill**  
Ivadel Simmons

In Memory of **Lawrence Odor**  
Dale & Alma Burtis

In Memory of **Gene Lambert**  
Ev & Liz Berry

In Memory of **Ednah M. Reed**  
Marie E. Fuller

In Memory of **Dorothy Reissinger**  
Marian Regli  
Carolyn M. Oswald

In Memory of **Annette Walsh**  
Suzanne & Leonard Reynolds

In Memory of **Les Savage**  
Christy Carlos

In Memory of **Anna Williams**  
Live Oak Women's Club

In Memory of **Emil Steurer**  
Dewey & Barbara Gruening

In Memory of **Dodo Wood**  
Gene & Babs Lonon

In Memory of **Donald Scott**  
W. C. McFarland

In Memory of **Mary Ullrey**  
Bogue County Club

—————  
In Honor of **Elmer C. and Lela C. Smith** on their **Wedding Anniversary** of October 9<sup>th</sup>  
Catherine Booth

In Memory of **Florence Umfress**  
Meriel Davis

In Memory of **James Smith** on his **Birthday** of December 31<sup>st</sup>  
Barbara Smith

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## Where Does Your Contribution Go?

The above list of contributions contains gifts to both the Sutter County Historical Society and the Community Memorial Museum.

Currently, all donations to the Historical Society are going into the General Fund. These monies were exhausted during the construction phase of the Agricultural Wing and we are now repaying the General Fund from donations. We are currently investigating the next building project that the Society will undertake. Monies from the General Fund are used to pay the Society's annual insurance premium, post office box rental, Bulletin printing and mailing expenses and other operating expenses.

Once a year, a report of the Society's accounts appears in the Bulletin so that all members can see the income and expenses of the society.

All donations are greatly appreciated and help keep the Historical Society a viable entity in the community.

# Rice In Sutter County

by  
Christy Carlos

His memories added life to the history of rice farming in Sutter County. Even before he spoke, his sun-absorbed skin, the wrinkles around his eyes and on his forehead, and his shiny green-blue eyes told a story. He leaned back in the metal, rocking patio chair. His 100% cotton made-in-America T-shirt, Wrangler trousers, and his leather, oil-resistant Texas Steer work boots are standard uniform for a Sutter farmer. His wide hands grasped the arms of the patio chair but then became animated as he spoke. His right hand, the back of it spotted with flaky, brown scars--proof that too much sun upon the human skin for too many years is damaging--moved and drew pictures in the air with his stories. His hair, red and still thick for a sixty-year-old man, was cropped so that it barely hung from beneath his cap. Most all Sutter farmers wear baseball caps. Perhaps in some parts of the country these caps are testimony of some obscure loyalty but here, in Sutter, they are merely a tool for surviving the hottest part of the day. His thick arms, connected to a working man's squared shoulders, were a red-brown color and covered with light red fuzz. A fly circled him for a few moments, then landed upon the back of his left arm. With hardly a pause in his story, he whisked the fly up in his right hand and threw it back upon the heavy summer air. Nearly half a

century in Sutter rice fields had not slowed Barry Lemenager down too much. Then he began to speak about his memories.

*Rice has been here in Sutter my entire lifetime. When I was in about the fifth grade, I used to ride my bike to the rice field that Pooge Epperson farmed—it's the piece that I own now and I have rice planted there. It's behind Larry Munger's house. Anyway, when the rice harvest was over and the field was full of straw, I'd ride my bike down there after school and watch Doug Becker spin donuts on the rice straw with his military Jeep. That was in 1949 or 1950.*

Not only has rice been a crop of Sutter County all of Lemenager's lifetime but in September of 1889, The Sutter County Farmer reported that rice was growing in Sutter City. It was planted by Mr. Hering and it ". . . has shown a vigorous growth, and coming to maturity has headed out and bids to show as thrifty a yield as its parent plant had ever done in the Hawaiian Islands . . . ." Since it is believed that the earliest attempts of rice production in California began about 1860, Sutter County was not too far behind the introduction of rice in the state. But the earliest rice in Sutter County did not do very well. Some of this early



rice fell to adverse weather, or poor timing, and it is clear now that the early rice fields planted were probably just the wrong kinds of rice in the wrong types of soil.

From *The Sutter County Farmer*,  
February 25, 1916

Professor W. Mackie, who was working with the US Bureau of soils in 1908, is credited with raising the first successful crop of rice in the area just southwest of Biggs. A few rice plants were grown in the alkali soil of Fresno when he was conducting alkali work there. The raising of these few plants led Mackie to believe that rice might improve alkaline soil. Mackie wrote, in his own words:

In 1908 I was directed from Washington to inspect the black adobe soils west of Biggs for rice possibilities. This was done at the request of the Biggs Chamber of Commerce, which had heard of my previous rice experiments. Mr. Brink, one of the leading and progressive citizens of Biggs, went out with me in a horse drawn buggy in a driving rain storm to bore holes just west of the old Doty brick warehouse, almost empty by the failure of the wheat crops on the black adobe soil. Here a farmer saw me and when he found out what I was doing drove at once to town with the best joke of the season. At any rate, the Biggs Chamber of Commerce, the Sacramento Valley

Development Association and the Southern Pacific gave me the necessary financial assistance and encouragement. Forty acres of black adobe land were planted to Honduras and Kiushu varieties on the Crane Ranch southwest of Biggs. So certain was I that I planted an acre of eucalyptus trees as a monument to mark the site of the beginning of the rice industry in California. I still have a jar of that 1908 crop of Kiushu rice from the Crane rice near Biggs.

Kiushu is a Japanese variety of rice. It is believed the Honduras variety was not a successful crop because of its required long growing season. But as a result of the 1908 planting, the rice experiment station at Biggs was established. Mackie further wrote:

At this time I was in charge of the soil survey for the US Bureau of soils. One evening at Knights Landing, on the Sacramento River, after a day's work in explaining the nature of the soil survey, one of the farmers said, 'It was a good thing to give jobs to young fellows but of no particular use to farmers.' To my protests he went on to say that if I could show him one practical thing the soil work could do, he would be the better for it. I replied that the Sutter Basin, then full of overflow water, would one day be the best rice producing land in the world. The roars of laughter which greeted the statement most effectively

silenced but did not discourage me.  
I had just seen the maturing of rice  
at Biggs.

### **The Sutter Basin Company**

*I've been told by rice farmers who farm there that the price of water in the Sutter Basin is more than twice as much as I pay for my water to farm here--closer to Sutter City. The farm water in the Sutter Basin runs about three times more than the farmers pay over in District 10. It's just the price the Sutter Basin farmers pay to farm.*

--Observed long time rice farmer Barry Lemenager

No discussion of the history of rice production in Sutter County would be complete without some mention of the Sutter Basin Company and Reclamation District No. 1500. The formation of the reclamation district, commonly known as the Sutter Basin (or Reclamation District No. 1500), created many issues in the Sutter community and neighboring counties--some of which may occasionally be echoed even today.

The original reclamation plan provided for the release of Sacramento River flood waters over weirs and into bypasses. For the reclaiming of the Sutter Basin, a group of businessmen from Sacramento and Sutter Counties, led by William E. Gerber, petitioned the California State Legislature to form a reclamation district. This group formed a corporation called the Sutter Basin Company. Its first president,

William E. Gerber, was president of the California Bank of Sacramento. A board of directors was chosen for the Sutter Basin Company, including Perry J. Hiatt and Allan T. Spencer (who were large landowners in the Sutter Basin), and Charles Silva (a promoter and landowner). Gerber was acquainted with J. Ogden Armour, of the Armour Meat Company in Chicago. Through Gerber, Armour became interested in the Sutter Basin Company as an investment. The Sutter Basin Company required considerable capital and it is doubtful the required capital could have been raised locally, so Armour was an important member of the Sutter Basin Company. Stocks were issued, most of which were sold in the Chicago area. The Sutter Basin Company sent field men to purchase as much land in the proposed reclamation area as was available--most of this overflow land was purchased for about \$25 an acre--and the Sutter Basin Company eventually acquired more than 60,000 acres of land.

But then the Sutter Basin Company petitioned the Reclamation Board of California to alter the original Reclamation plan. The Sutter Basin Company asked that a change be made. By this change the Sutter Basin Company would have one plot of farmland of thousands of acres rather than two separated plots. Opposition to altering the plan came from residents of Meridian and Sutter Counties, who claimed the new plan would raise their flood plane. Assessments were made that many

called "downright robbery." The case was finally taken to the Supreme Court of California.

In the winter of 1919, with the levees of Reclamation completed to the point that some flood waters could be kept away and the east levee of the Sutter Bypass not yet completed, heavy rains brought floods that spread through a large part of Western Sutter County. The estimated losses from the 1919 floods were over \$1 million. Also in 1919, a compromise bill to end the Sutter County controversy was passed and signed by Governor Stephens. But the signing of the bill did not end much of the bitterness. Many families of the Sutter Basin owned their lands free and clear without debt, and to be forced with heavy assessments brought about by a group led by a multimillionaire from Chicago was almost more than they could bear. But bear it they did.

The newly acquired lands of the Sutter Basin Company, most of which were in the overflow and swamp areas (otherwise referred to as The Tule) were leased to farmers who were generally well-equipped with large tractors and heavy disc-plows. A significant pumping plant with irrigation system was completed in 1920 and two smaller pumping plants were built. Other engineering projects, related to the Sutter Basin effort, were the laying out of roads, grading of some main arteries of road, telephone and power lines were installed, and farming camps were built. The influx of engineers to support this effort transformed the town of Knights Landing into a lively

community. Saturday nights in Knights Landing usually meant a dance and many of the engineers (imported from other places) married local brides and settled nearby.

During this period, the Southern Pacific Company, that had already established a railroad line from Woodland to Knights Landing and across the southern part of the Sutter Basin to Yuba City and Marysville, built a branch line northward through the center of the Sutter Basin almost to the Sutter Buttes. Construction was under federal restriction because the United States was at war with Germany and materials were in short supply. But because the railroad would be tapping into an area of highly productive farm land, and food was in great demand, the Southern Pacific Railroad was granted permission to build this branch line. It is believed that this was one of only two railroad lines built during World War I.

Along this branch of the railroad the Sutter Basin Company built warehouses and packing sheds. The Sutter Basin Company, having rented out their lands at the beginning of farming in the Basin, now changed their policy of management and it was decided the crops produced on this land should be high priced crops. Plans were laid that established farming units for this type of farming for the Sutter Basin Company decided their lands would be farmed as corporation farms. Farming camps were established in various locations and tracts of land from 2,500 to 5,000 acres were assigned. But many of the tenant

farmers, who were already farming grain, rice and beans, were not interested in changing their farming methods and continued to farm as tenants of the Sutter Basin Company. Yet some rice, in about 1920, was planted by the corporation farms using farm camp labor.

### **Fisher & Giusti: Two Sutter Rice Pioneers**

Frank Fisher is credited with raising one of the first significantly larger successful rice crops on his ranch in the Meridian area during World War I. On land leased from the Sutter Basin Company, Guiseppe Giusti of Robbins raised an abundant crop of rice in 1919, after water was brought into the basin.

Guiseppe Giusti was born in Lucca, Italy, a lovely town in Tuscany. He arrived in San Francisco in 1901. He worked for Miller & Lux Farms at Firebaugh, doing most all the jobs required to keep a large cattle ranch going. From there Giusti moved to the Stockton Delta and entered into farming with his brother and two friends. But most of these first crops were lost to floods in 1906 and 1907. Giusti returned to Italy and on December 10, 1910, he brought his bride-to-be to San Francisco and they were married. He returned to the Delta with his wife, who did her part of the farming venture by cooking for the men--baking bread, making hams, bacon and sausages, and canning fruit and vegetables. And the Giusti's were known for making their own wine for

the table.

The early days of farming were not easy for many Sutter pioneers. The Guiseppe Giusti's moved several times from farm to farm until they finally settled near Robbins. The Giusti's first home was a makeshift house. Part of the house was a cookhouse on wheels - very much like a mobile home. Giusti was once quoted as saying:

*We did not have to go outside to see what the weather was like. We could tell when we were in bed. My wife wanted water in the in the house and I said you got it when it rains.*

In 1924 Giusti purchased 39 acres of land near Robbins. On this land, Giusti built a very fine home. From this small farm Giusti eventually acquired a farm of 2,500 acres. Giusti's success with rice farming was well known and he usually grew very good crops. One day Giusti went to the Sutter Basin Company office and asked William J. Duffy (one of the original operating staff members of the Sutter Basin Company) to go with him to inspect the rice fields. When they arrived at the rice fields, Giusti said, "Mr. Duffy, I will show you how to tell a good rice crop."

He then took off his sombrero-styled hat and tossed it out onto the rice field. "You see, it does not fall into the water. It stays on top. If it fell into the water, the rice would be too thin to hold it up."

The story goes that he then bet Duffy that he would get better than 50 sacks to the acre based upon his hat

test (which was an extremely good crop of rice for those days). Duffy told Giusti that if Giusti's crops yielded more than 50 sacks to the acre, Duffy would buy Giusti a new hat. It is said that after harvest that year Giusti was seen wearing the new hat that Duffy bought him--settlement of their bet.

### **Many Sutter Rice Pioneers**

Lemenager now leaned forward in the white patio chair. A long stalk of Johnson grass, the kind of weed that grows around the edges of most every crop in Sutter County, seemed to be glued to the bottom of his trousers. He thought for a moment about the question he had been asked and then began to speak . . .

*I started working in the rice in Sutter County in 1955. I think the very first farmers I worked for were Tom and Ole Pederson. But--I worked for a lot of Sutter farmers before I owned my own land. Vince Vanderford was probably the best rice farmer I ever worked for--on the Vanderford Ranch on Bogue Road--or Lee Webb. Vince Vanderford and Lee Webb were probably the best rice farmers I ever worked for because they worked harder at farming than anyone I ever saw--and they got the best crops for their work. I've been told that old Webb worked his employees from about the time they could see in the fields to 10 or 11 at night. Webb himself might be out there until midnight running the harvester. That*

*is--if the North wind was blowing, and if it wasn't raining. But Webb's wife worked hard too. Like many of the wives in those days--she didn't go to work at some other job in town. No. The wife was as much a part of the ranch as the guy on the harvester. Guys say that if you worked for Webb you were invited to breakfast. Kathryn Webb got up at the crack and made a huge spread of breakfast for the men before they hit the fields. Now--I'm not talking about some dinky continental breakfast with coffee you can hardly gulp down and some day-old roll. No. She made bacon or sausage, tons of fluffy eggs, biscuits and gravy, and the best hot coffee ever tasted. Then at lunch time she went out to the fields and took the men lunch so they wouldn't have to leave the field to eat and waste time at the cafe. Lunch was always good too and she must have worked awful hard to put it all together seven days a week during the peak of the work. But that's what the wives did then. For some of the men who weren't married and worked for Webb--Kathryn's cooking was probably better than what they had waiting for them in the ice box at home--or if they were cooking for themselves especially. I'm not saying that farmer's wives today don't make sacrifices and work hard to keep the farm going . . . because they do. But most of the wives work in town now, for some it is a financial necessity, just to keep the farm in the black and allow the family a decent living, which is wrong, but it is testimony to the*

*difficulties farmers face in today's complicated world. Farming in Sutter County, or anywhere, has progressed over the years but it hasn't gotten any easier.*

Leo Gunther, one of the very early rice farming pioneers, came to the Sutter Basin from Red Bluff and purchased a small tract of land in the southeastern part of the district. Though he suffered some rough financial times, he managed to rid himself of his debts, using his rice crops, and eventually acquired about 2,200 acres of farm land. Gunther induced several friends to buy land in Sutter County and in some cases he actually helped finance their initial land payment. It is said that he enticed Earl Mallory (a nephew), James L. Shelley (a nephew), Robert Kuster (an employee), and friends Wallace McWilliam and William McDermott to acquire Sutter farm land. Gunther developed his property near Lincoln to permanent pasture and alfalfa, as he tried cattle ranching. He got into a bit of a financial squeeze again and sold his entire Sutter Basin holdings to the Eaton Magoon Family for \$1 million, which was a tidy sum for the times. Gunther married rather late in life and had five children. Gunther's sons, Warren and Daryl, were also Sutter Basin farmers.

Martin Hansen farmed rented land in the Sutter Basin in 1920. He was an early day Sutter Basin farmer who made, and may have lost, a fortune farming in Mexico. He liked to

farm on a big scale. He purchased about 900 acres of land near Subaco, in the heart of the Basin. He established a camp at this ranch and farmed the land to grain, beans and rice. But the depressed conditions of post World War I seemed to catch up with him and he abandoned his hopes of owning this land. He opened a machine shop and garage in Knights Landing and died in the late nineteen-twenties.

Antonius R. Paulsen, a versatile farmer, building contractor and public servant, was born in Huorring, Denmark and came to America in 1905 at the age of twenty-two. At one time he worked for International Harvester Company in Chicago. In order to support his wife, he worked in the building trade but in 1937 he and his son purchased a quarter section of land near Robbins. When Antonius Paulsen's son, Regnar, returned from the South Pacific (where he had served in the US Army as a Captain) he expanded his agricultural holdings and owned about 3,000 acres in the Sutter Basin and the Natomas District and about 1,800 acres in the Sutter Bypass. Andy Paulsen and Pete Christiansen built a rice dryer and warehouse just north of Woodland, known as Sunset Rice Dryer, that was sold to Pacific International Rice Milling Company, Inc. Andy Paulsen served for thirty years as a director of the Rice Growers Association of California. When the senior Paulsen retired as a director, his son, Regnar Paulsen, was chosen in his place. Regnar Paulsen went on to become president of this organization.

There are many other Sutter rice pioneers--one as important to our history as another. It would be impossible to include all these courageous men and their families. Here are the names of a few more early rice farmers, not mentioned before, who were farming rice forty or fifty years ago, or before : Walter Raymond, Ernest and Oscar Zebal, Earl Wallace and Jack Wallace, Nate Wallace, Robert Geer, Andy Siller, Mas Oji, Arthur Oji, Henry Oji, Eaton and Genevieve Magoon, The Pacific Lumber Company (Yosuba Farms), William J. Duffy, Jr., Hank Richter, The Van Dykes, Don Myer, Francis Brubeck, Lee Brubeck, Gene Lay, Wayne Catlett, Albert Thomasen, Howard Mayfield, Lee Drew, Kasper Hoffart and Yuill Joaquin.

### **Methods Have Changed**

Rice found a fairly early home in Sutter County for several reasons: an excellent irrigation system, good drainage, naturally level land with good fertility, and heavy subsoil. Within the last sixty years or so, rice farming has become almost completely mechanized and the use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, has resulted in significantly higher yields of rice crops. When rice was first introduced to Sutter County, the crop was farmed in much the same way as had been established for other grain crops (mainly barley and wheat) except that rice was grown underwater. The pioneer rice farmers harvested rice with binders and stationary thrashers. It has been

written that the first harvesting in the Sutter Basin with a modern combine machine was done by Hank Richter in the fall of 1936.

Rice farming practices today are very much different than practices of the yesterday. Today the rice farmer prepares the seedbed with a landplane, floods the checked field, then the seed is flown on with an airplane. Most fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides are also flown on (except in areas where cotton has moved into the rice farmer's area or prunes have been planted).

Though the farming of rice has gone through many changes in Sutter County over the years--most of which have made rice farming easier and more efficient, many local farmers feel that one of the biggest challenges they face for the future of rice farming is the reduction, and eventual elimination, of the burning of rice straw.

### **Turkey in the Straw . . . Rice Straw**

For many years turkeys were brought to the rice harvested fields (mostly in the Sutter Basin) to pasture. The raising of turkeys was a big business in nearby Roseville and Lincoln areas and the young birds were brought in the fall of the year to feed on the rice stubble. Turkey farmers leased the lands for this turkey grazing.

Rice and watergrass seed made very good food for the turkeys. Miss Ethel Mulligan, and her brother Ira, brought their turkeys to feed on the

rice straw in Sutter County, as did the Fiddymment Family. Often in the fall of the year, 30,000 to 40,000 turkeys could be seen strutting across the rice fields filling their stomachs with the abundant rice waste and watergrass seed.

As methods of harvesting rice became more efficient, and farmers no longer did binding and shocking, less rice waste remained in the fields after harvest. Better methods of controlling watergrass in the rice fields meant that watergrass seed was no longer plentiful for the turkeys to feed upon so turkey farmers had to look elsewhere for feed for their birds.

### **Farming from the Sky**

Some of the very important advances in the use of the airplane in agriculture occurred in Sutter County. No pilot who ever crawled into the cockpit of a cropduster should be forgotten for their superior flying skills through power lines and low obstacles, their fearless maneuvering of unreasonable loads, and sometimes just their unflinching spirit in getting the job done. It is a dangerous job that has claimed the life of far too many.

Perhaps one of the most noteworthy of these first agricultural flyers is Herb Weggers.

Herb Weggers was truly a pioneer in the industry of agricultural aviation. He was not the first to use the airplane in agriculture but certainly one of the first to develop cropdusting as a regular business and integrated it

into a necessity of farming practices. Herb Weggers turned cropdusting into a year-round business. His first planes were rented and he flew from Dan Best's landing strip on the Nelson Ranch near Cache Creek. The planes were biplanes and were designed with a hopper to hold the material and gates and baffles to spread it. The planes were usually old planes that had been used during World War I. The original cropdusting planes were equipped with only a 220 horsepower motor but later this was changed to a 450 horsepower motor in order to handle the very heavy loads of material.

The first plane Herb Weggers used was an Eagle Rock. Weggers is believed to have been the very first to seed rice from an airplane. In 1929, he seeded rice for G. Giusti and E. H. Christensen.

There were several others who entered the business about the same time as Weggers: Speed Nolta (or the Nolta Brothers), Colonel Livingston Irvine, Charlie "Red" Jensen, Ray Nicholson, Vern Watts and Milton Watts, Jack Sweetser, LeRoy Lampson, Ed Walsh and Phil Wagner.

Colonel Livingston Irvine, a veteran of the British Royal Air Force in World War I and a colorful fellow, flew his plane so close to the fields that the wheels of his landing gear would almost touch the crop he was dusting. He flew so low that he had to dodge fence posts and raise the plane to clear ditch banks.

### **A Proud History**



*Some of the younger rice farmers come up with these 'new' ideas for farming rice and I have to laugh to myself because some of the ideas they're inventing we used in the rice fields thirty years ago.*

--Barry Lemenager.

Sutter County farmers were, and have always been, at the forefront of the mechanization of the rice industry.

One of the first successful developments of commingled paddy rice was put into practice at the Sutter Basin Growers Cooperative Warehouse, enhancing the methods for receiving, drying and storage of paddy rice.

Throughout history rice has been one of man's most important foods. This unique food helps sustain two-thirds of the world's population yet not much is known about its origins. Many archeologists believe rice has been feeding humankind for more than 5,000 years. The first documented account of rice was found in a decree on rice planting authorized by a Chinese emperor about 2800 B.C.

Rice arrived in America quite by accident. In 1685 a storm-battered ship sailing from Madagascar limped into the harbor at Charles Town, South Carolina. To repay the colonists for their repairs to the ship, the ship's captain made a gift of a small amount of rice to the local planter.

The 1849 gold rush brought people from all nations to California. To feed the immigrants, rice production became a necessity. Farmers in the

Sacramento Valley found that rice would adapt well to heavy clay soil conditions that were unsuited to other crops. By 1920, California was a major rice-producing state with Sutter County well into this effort.

In the early part of the twentieth century, Professor W. Mackie was nearly laughed out of the county by farmers when Mackie explained that rice would someday be an important crop to Sutter County. By 1950, Sutter County boasted rice production of an estimated 72,600 tons of rice on 44,000 acres--more of the counties land being given to the production of rice than any other crop. In 1995, Sutter County harvested 81,700 acres of rice. And in 1998, rice continued to be the leading crop of Sutter County with an estimated value of \$87.9 million.

Professor Mackie certainly would be proud.

(Note: Barry Lemenager is a Sutter County native who has worked in Sutter County rice farming since the age of 13 . Lemenager currently farms about 500 acres of rice in Sutter County.)

#### **Sources:**

##### Books

The Sutter Basin and Its People  
by William J. Duffy, Jr., 1972.

##### Interviews

J. Barry Lemenager

##### Periodicals

*Facts About USA Rice*

by The USA Rice Federation  
*The Sutter County Farmer*, 1889 - 1932

Newspapers

*The Marysville Appeal*, 1861 - 1921  
*The Independent Herald*, 1922 - 1954  
*The Marysville Evening Democrat*, 1916

Other

The Yuba-Sutter County Farm Bureau  
Website, County Information,  
<http://www.cfbf.com/co-58.htm>

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## Spend a Day Visiting Historical Places in Sutter County

If the scenic historical points of interest of Sutter County sound like an entertaining way to spend a day or two, then you might want to purchase *Sutter County Scenic Tour*, a guide to Historical, Cultural and Scenic Points of Interest. Available at the Museum, this 31-page booklet offers short narratives about 90 historical and interesting places in Sutter County for the afternoon explorer. A map is included. At \$3.00 it is a real bargain and essential for all local history buffs.

# Annual Meeting of the Sutter County Historical Society

## Buffet Luncheon

Tri-tip steak, baked potato, green salad, garlic bread and coffee

Saturday, April 21, 11:45 a.m.

West Sutter Veterans Building  
4<sup>th</sup> & Bridge Streets, Meridian

.....

We have an exciting program planned! Our topics:

### **Judith Barr Fairbanks Essay Contest Winners**

### **History of Railroads of Sutter County and History and Restoration of the Meridian Northern Electric Railroad Depot**

Our speakers are Mr. and Mrs. Mark Slattery, who live in the depot and have spent several years restoring it.

Following the program you are invited to walk one block to the depot to have a look for yourself.

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The luncheon is \$12 per person.

**Reservations and advance payment must be received by  
the Historical Society by April 17.**

Please complete the enclosed event registration form or call Dorothy Ettl (673-3412) or the Museum (822-7141) for information.

### **Schedule**

11:45 a.m. Doors open  
12:00 noon Buffet Luncheon  
1:00 p.m. Program

This luncheon, like all Historical Society functions, is open to the public - so bring your friends and family!

# The Era of Ferries in Sutter County

by  
John V. Reische

Previous to 1850, ferries were the only method of crossing the numerous streams that could not be forded. Until the great rush of travel, in 1840, but few ferries had been established, as what little travel there was had been on horseback and in this way the streams were easily forded. But with the great rush of people to the mines, some on foot, others with wagons or in stages, came the necessity for some facilities for crossing rivers, and ferries were soon established at all the principal crossings. The tolls charged at these places were exceedingly high, and would now be considered exorbitant, but were only in proportion to the extremely high rate demanded for every kind of service and all classes of goods.

The first ferry in the county was one established in 1843, by Captain Sutter and Nicolaus Allgeier, at the crossing of the Feather River near the town of Nicolaus. This ferry was the route from Sutter's Fort to Hock Farm. The first ferry license was granted on June 11, 1850 for the privilege for one year of keeping a ferry across the Feather River, immediately above the mouth of the Yuba, and establishing the following rates of toll: for one wagon, empty, \$2; freight, per cwt, 12½¢; mules, cattle and horses per head, 50¢; foot passengers, 25¢; man and horse, 75¢.

Ferries soon were being licensed all along the Feather and Sacramento Rivers - between Vernon and Fremont, Yuba City and Marysville, at Knight's Landing, Colusa, Bear River, Sacramento River at Butte Creek, Eddy's Ferry near Grimes, Fouts at O'Neal's Ranch (Meridian), and Moon's Ferry north of Meridian on the Marysville-Colusa stage road.

These are just some of the many ferries that were built and operated before the advent of bridges; most of the ferries slowly went out of business and by 1879 there were only Moon's Ferry at Meridian, Dunn's Ferry, Diefendorff's Ferry, Kirksville (Colegrove Point), Knight's Landing and Nicolaus still operating.

Ferries played an important role in the development of Sutter County; although there is little written history about them, they surely would provide many interesting stories about their operation, people who build and ran them, and happenings of historical significance.

Reference: History of Sutter County, Thompson & West, 1879

## A Sense of Place

We have been treated to two programs at the Museum in the last month or so that provided an insight to the way human beings interact with the local environment. *Dorothy Ettl* was kind enough to write up her impressions of the presentations for the Bulletin.

### Reading Sutter County History – A Sense of Place David Rubiales – February 27, 2001

I came away from David Rubiales' February 27, 2001 presentation at the Museum with a "sense of place" and a bibliography (available at the Museum) that will keep me reading for a long time.

Using neither the politically established borders nor the Sutter Buttes, Rubiales presented Sutter County as the area between the Feather and Sacramento Rivers. The region is given its character by the rivers, floods and agriculture.

One interesting tidbit: Sutter County is the only county totally in the Sacramento Valley.

### Native Americans and California Brian Bibby – March 3, 2001

Over one hundred people watched and listened as Brian Bibby showed slides and related Native American myths. He told of World Maker and Coyote and the origins of the bald eagle. He went beyond the Buttes and talked of "special/sacred" places in the Sierra and Coastal Range as well.

Bibby visited St. Petersburg, Russia where he photographed and studied one of the world's largest collections of pre-Gold Rush Native Californian artifacts. The items were collected in trade with Native Americans in 1841 by the Russians at Fort Ross. He also discussed other collections that are in Europe.

In his involvement with Grindstone Rancheria, Bibby works with Native American groups in the preservation of culture and art such as the making of baskets, as well as hairnets and headbands for dance ceremonies, and has taken part in ceremonial dancing. He described the brightly colored feathers, such as woodpecker scalps, used in their manufacture.

# Coming Events

## *April*

- 18 *Spring Children=s Program B Making a Pine Needle Basket*  
*Community Memorial Museum B 10:00 a.m.*  
*No charge, but reservations are required (822-7141)*
- 21 *Sutter County Historical Society Annual Meeting*  
*Luncheon in Meridian B Saturday 11:45 a.m.*  
*West Sutter Veteran=s Building B Reservations required B Details inside*
- 21-22 *Wear and Remembrance B Vintage Clothing*  
*Brought to you by the Community Memorial Museum*  
*Franklin Hall B Yuba Sutter Fairgrounds*

## *May*

*Check your Muse News for any newly scheduled events*

## *June*

- 1 *Taking Off B Early Aviation in the Yuba Sutter Area*  
*Exhibit Opens B Community Memorial Museum*  
*Reception scheduled for the evening of June 1<sup>st</sup> B Please check the Muse News for details*