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Yuba City, California

April 2015



**Sutter City, corner of Walnut and Nelson Streets  
Gardemeyer Mansion at left  
Note the snow on the Buttes**

*Photo courtesy of Community Memorial Museum*



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Sarah Pryor, President

Joe Bouchard, Vice President

Phyllis Smith, Secretary/Treasurer

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Joe Bouchard - 2009\*

Steve Perry - 1994

Constance Cary - 1987

Sarah Pryor - 2008

Kim Cupples - 2014

Leona Pennington - 2006

Bob Mackensen - 2002

Margit Sands - 2007

Phyllis Smith - 2000

\*The year the director joined the Board.

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The **Bulletin** is published quarterly by the Sutter County Historical Society in Yuba City, California. Editors are Phyllis Smith and Sharyl Simmons. Payment of annual membership dues provides you with a subscription to the **Bulletin** and the Museum's **Muse News** and membership in both the Society and the Museum. Contact us at [info@suttercountyhistory.org](mailto:info@suttercountyhistory.org).

The 2015 dues are payable as of January 1, 2015. Mail your check to the Community Memorial Museum at 1333 Butte House Road, Yuba City, 95993-2301 530-822-7141

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Organizations/Clubs .....	\$ 35
Family .....	\$ 40
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## President's Message

Our quarterly membership meeting is Saturday, April 11, at 2:00 p.m. at the Community Memorial Museum. At this meeting we will be giving awards to the three young authors who won the Judith Barr Fairbanks essay contest about local history.

We will also awarding certificates to Century Farms in Sutter County. I have been working on this project for the past year and have read a lot about Sutter County's farming history. At the meeting I'll share information I've learned about local farms and ask the farm owners to present the history of their farm or their ancestors who farmed the land. It should be a very informative meeting. Some of the farms to be honored are the Burtis and Captain Thomas Dean ranches and the William Sullenger, John Joaquin, Matthew Nall, McPherrin and Louis Tarke farms. There are many more century farms in Sutter County and if you are aware of them please call me at 530-755-0707 or 632-8817 so we can honor them also. The Century Farm project will not end at the April meeting but will be ongoing.

In a recent Appeal Democrat there was an article about an upcoming exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution, "Journey Stories." As part of the program, Julie Stark is collecting stories from people of Sutter County about their journeys. It could be how they or their families came to Sutter County, a trip that made them look at the world a bit differently or a personal journey of discovery that changed how they viewed the world. Everyone is on a journey in this life and it would be nice if at our meeting in April people shared some of their stories. It would be another way the Historical Society could help the museum.

Besides the membership meeting we also have a picnic in the Buttes at the Dean Ranch on Saturday, April 25. It is a beautiful site for a picnic. Joe and Kim are going to go on Friday before the picnic and remove the cow patties (or meadow muffins) so we do not have to worry about stepping in something very unpleasant. Last year I missed the picnic and Ellen McPherrin Evans and my husband took care of bringing the tables and chairs. Ellen had such a good time she will be coming again this year. I am so glad that I will be home this year and able to go to the picnic. I hope to see you there also.

Sarah Pryor  
President

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## Director's Report

Be sure to put the Museum on your list of places to visit during this spring and summer, as there are many things happening that will delight you. April events include the Spring Vacation Children's Program on April 9, beginning at 10:00 a.m. The program, suitable for children of all ages, will feature stories and fables along with fun craft activities. Refreshments will follow. No reservations are needed for this free event, and the whole family is welcome.

You can still view the Yuba City High School Student Art exhibit which remains through April 11. Over the years of sharing student art with the community, we are increasingly more impressed by the amazing quality of the art and the talent that the young artists display under the excellent tutelage of their teachers.

You will want to catch the brief exhibit of photographs depicting the art and graffiti created by German prisoners of war at Camp Beale (now Beale Air Force Base) during World War II, when a thousand POWs were held there. The prisoners functioned as valuable replacements for agricultural labor as Americans were called to the military to support the war effort. Their poignant drawings and writings reflect their longings for home. The exhibit will be at the Museum April 16 – 25.

We are looking forward to the opening of the new *Journey Stories* exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution on May 8 with a reception from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The exhibit examines America's history of mobility and love of travel, from immigration to America to expressing our freedom through migration and travel within our borders. The focus of this richly illustrated exhibit is how travel helped build and change America and how it reflects our very nature as a nation.

Remember that the Museum is encouraging you to write a journey story that is meaningful to you or your family. It could describe how and why your family came to this country or perhaps a special journey in your own life that you took for any reason. We hope that you will share the story of an important journey in your life or in your ancestors' lives, so that they can be compiled to form a "journey history" of our Yuba-Sutter community. Any story that is meaningful to you will be appropriate to form a part of our group history. The Museum will accept the story in any form that you submit to us.

The Museum welcomes another Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service exhibit opening on July 10. *I Want the Wide American Earth: An Asian Pacific American Story* celebrates the multitude of diverse cultures that make up America and explores how Asian Pacific Americans have shaped and been shaped by our nation's history. Watch for more information coming your way about this informative exhibit that will be at our museum during July and August.

Please remember that, as the Museum heads toward its fourth fiscal year of 20% budget cuts, it still needs your support in every way. When you pay your membership dues, shop in the Museum Store, make a memorial or honorary donation or an outright gift, all of these ways help support the work of the Museum and help it to continue serving our community. Let it be known publicly, to friends and county officials that the Museum plays an important role in our lives and needs the support of all of us. We invite you to visit your Museum often.

Julie Stark, Director

## Memorials

In memory of **Herb Crowhurst**  
Bud Doty

In memory of **Alice M. Dewey**  
Dorothy Jang

In memory of **Grace Ettl**  
Debrah & Mike Reid

In memory of **Traci Foss**  
Rose & Robert Wood

In memory of **Dennis Green**  
Merlyn K. Rudge

In memory of **Ellen Halcomb**  
Bob & Lee Jones

In memory of **Bruce Harter**  
Phyllis Smith

In memory of **Hal Wayne (Moe)  
Haughey**  
David & Ann Rai

In memory of **Lillian Inman**  
Cynthia Struckmeyer  
John & Marie Zeiter

In memory of **Deane Knapp**  
Bob & Lee Jones

In memory of **Eleanor Lowe**  
Bud Doty

In memory of **Kermit Moe**  
Robert & Rose Wood

In memory of **Dorothea Reische**  
Phyllis & Terry Bullard  
Delores Giffin  
Bob & Pat Smith  
Julie Stark  
Carol Ray Trexler  
Karen Young & family

In memory of **Katherine Schmidl**  
Heidi & Karl Erickson  
Virginia Filter & family  
Janna, Julianne & Jennifer  
Ullrey

In memory of **Marilyn Winship Smith**  
Janna, Julianne & Jennifer  
Ullrey

In memory of **Marian Steffy**  
George & Shyrlie Emery

In memory of **Audrey Stricker**  
Joni Adams

In memory of **Robert K. Thompson**  
Norman & Loadel Piner

In memory of **Fred Yager**  
Marnee Crowhurst

In memory of **Russell Young**  
Marnee Crowhurst  
Bud Doty

Outright Gift  
Carmen Frye  
Robert Mackensen

# Marcus DeWitt Recalls Stagecoach Days at Butte Pass Visiting with the Old Timer

*Originally printed in the Independent Herald, October 20, 1960*

Living on the South Butte Pass Road since the time of the stage coach, Marcus DeWitt vividly recalls how the stage would pass his house on the way from Marysville to Colusa.

DeWitt also remembers the Butte House, where the stage would stop, and still has an old stamp from the South Butte Post Office, located at the Butte House, which also had a dining room, a barn and a bar. DeWitt's second cousin, Mr. Buchanan, owned the Butte House at one time, he remembers.

The telegraph line from Marysville to Colusa also ran by DeWitt's house. This was in the days before the telephone, and the telegraph and the stage were the only forms of communication between the two areas.

DeWitt was born in May, 1876, in a house located where his son's home is now, and next door to his grandfather's house, in which he resides today. His present home is a three-generation house, being built by his grandfather, Clinton Jacob DeWitt, added to by his father William Golder DeWitt, and remodeled by himself. The farm on which it is located was bought in 1872 from John Bruce, and William Golder DeWitt later got 160 acres of land in the hills behind the farm from the government, to use as pasture land. Water for the farm and for the family's personal use came from springs in the hills.

When DeWitt attended the Brittan School, it was located where the county trucks are kept now, for

Sutter was then only a wheat field. The school was in the same building in which DeWitt's mother, Florence Welthy DeWitt, attended school, though in her school days it was located at the present site of the Sutter Cemetery. The building still stands, DeWitt says. When the town of Sutter was built, the school house was purchased by a preacher named Hamilton, and is now located one block from the Briggs Garage.

There was one teacher in the Brittan School when DeWitt was a student, and there were about 75 pupils. All the children walked to school, including him. He walked a mile and a half each day.

DeWitt and his three brothers helped their father on the farm when they were not in school. He and his next oldest brother had two steers which they raised from calves and which they used as oxen to pull the plow. Their grandfather made a yoke for them, which DeWitt still has. The boys also had a wagon to which they could hitch the two oxen, and their friends from school would often come out to ride in the wagon.

The two steers were named Billy and Duke, and DeWitt remembers that Billy, when he would be tired of pulling, would get down on his knees and stick his tongue out. The oxen were a lot of fun, but for most of the work around the farm they used teams of horses, for they walked faster.

DeWitt recalls the days when Sutter was a boom town, started by P. T. Gardemeyer and an associate named

Lyons around 1887. There was a brickyard in Sutter and several brick buildings were erected, including one which was designed to be a bank. The corner stone was laid for this bank at a big dedication service, but the bank never opened. The building is now the Native Daughters Hall. Another brick building erected at that time was Felth Hall, which was built for a store but was later converted into a dance hall. It is now a store again. Sutter even had a hotel once, across from the pool hall, but it burned down.

Gardermeyer and Lyons built quite a number of homes when they started their boom town, but they had trouble selling them, and about eight of them were moved to Yuba City. Ben Manford was hired to move the houses, and he did it with the use of Bill Stoker's steam tractor and a big logging truck with wooden wheels, made out of sawed logs with tires on them.

"I can see it now," DeWitt says of this event. "As the houses started to move down the road all the rats would jump out the windows and run away."

Sutter High School had been built by the time DeWitt had completed the eighth grade of grammar school, and he attended it for a while, but soon had to quit to help on the farm, for his father was in poor health and he was the oldest son. His father raised wheat and cattle, and DeWitt recalls that he used to get Indians from Colusa to come and clean up the harvester machine in return for the wheat they could get from it. Most of these Indians died off, but some of them still live on a reservation near Colusa, and four or five years ago DeWitt hired a couple of them to work for him.

DeWitt's father used to tell him about the Modoc War, which occurred

around the time he was born. The elder DeWitt met "Aunt Kitty," the old Indian woman who saved the lives of a company of soldiers during a massacre at that time.

DeWitt remembers good times when he was a teen-ager, going to dances at different homes or in Sutter. There were many parties in the evenings with ten or fifteen guests, who played games and danced. There were usually two good-sized rooms in the homes, and the boys and girls would dance in both of them, with the music-makers in between. Henry Field played the violin for these events, DeWitt recalls, and Billy Hill dances were square dances and he played the horn. His favorites were the quadrilles. Felth Hall was another location for some fine dances. "The horse and buggy days were wonderful," says DeWitt. "Nowadays, the kids think they have to travel 100 miles to have fun."

DeWitt met his wife, the former Jessie Foss, at one of these house parties. They were married in 1908, and DeWitt kept right on farming on the family homestead. He raised almonds for a while, but took them out about six years ago. He still raises beans. The pasture land in the hills, where he raised hogs for some time, was rented out during World War II, and he sold the hogs. The land is presently rented to a sheep raiser.

One of DeWitt's sons, Carl, still lives next door to him, in a new house on the site of the little house where Marcus DeWitt was born. His other son, Elmer, lives in Sutter. Mrs. DeWitt is no longer living.

# EARLY DAYS OF SUTTER AND SUTTER COUNTY

by  
Irwin E. Farington

1. *Where and when was the first post office at Sutter? What other names has the post office at Sutter had?*

The first Post Office, under the name South Butte, was established at the Butte House in 1871. First named South Butte, it was changed to Sutter City when the town of that name was founded. Much confusion was caused by getting the mail mixed with that of Sutter Creek, Amador County, so the Postal Department finally settled on Sutter.

2. *What and where was the Butte House? What was the origin of the Butte House Road?*

The Butte House was a hotel and stage relay station, established in 1855, on the Butte House Road, just east of Sutter, near the old concrete horse trough on property now owned by Gerald Raub. The hotel burned down before my time but I remember that part of the stage barn and some outsheds were still standing in the early 1900s. There used to be a lot of China trees on both sides of the road.

Butte House Road was a former Indian trail between an Indian tribe at the mouth of the Yuba River, through the Pass, to a tribe called the Colusas who lived near the mouth of Butte Creek on the Sacramento River.

3. *From whom did Brittan Grammar school receive its name? Where was the school originally located?*

The school was named for the George E. Brittan family. Brittan, one of the early settlers around the Buttes,

homesteaded land on both sides of the Pass Road and built the stone house now occupied by Bertha DeWitt. To start a school Britton donated land where the Matt Phillips residence now stands.

4. *Who were the Butte Mountain Rangers? What did they do? Who commanded them and when?*

The Butte Mountain Rangers were a group of some 65 Northern sympathizers organized 30 December 1863 to protect and hold the community against Southern sympathizers.

Around New Year's of 1864 some 20 of them carried a 60-foot pole to the top of South Butte and erected it there as a flag pole. About ten feet of it was still wedged in the rocks when I was a high school lad.

Thomas Dean was the first captain of the Rangers and Eli Davis was his 1st lieutenant. During 1864 W. D. Wadsworth was elected captain and in 1865 Eli Davis took over as captain. The Rangers were disbanded on 3 September 1866.

5. *What is the Pass and where is it? The Pass is where the Pass Road crosses the saddle just south of South Butte, 3.6 miles northwest of the intersection of Butte House Road and Acacia Street in Sutter.*

6. *How high is South Butte? What is the origin of the Buttes? What is the shortest way around the Buttes by county road?*



The elevation of South Butte is 2132 feet above sea level.

The Buttes are of volcanic origin, and sea shells, fossils and other evidence of sea life show that they were thrust up through an inland sea.

Via South Butte Road, West Butte Road, Pennington Road, Township Road, East Butte Road and Butte House Road is 40.4 miles. There used to be a road from Pennington, via Dow Grove, Sexton's and the Round Barn that came out where the Cockerill Road now connects with East Butte Road which cut the distance by about eight miles.

7. *What evidence is there of early Indian life in the Buttes?*

Many rocks with circular depressions drilled in them for grinding seeds, grasshoppers, acorns, etc., are scattered throughout the Buttes. Arrowheads and stones shaped for pestles and hammers have been found.

8. *Where are the stone corral and the big spring of Fremont's time?*

They are approximately one mile northeast of the Kellogg home. Fremont and his party camped at the Big Spring while he was stirring up the California revolt against Mexico. It was supposed to have been quite a hangout for banditos and rustlers in the early days.

9. *Where was coal mined near Sutter?*

A poor grade of lignite was mined in 1879 on the present Kellogg property in a draw just north of the Hawley home.

10. *Where was natural gas first discovered near Sutter?*

Approximately a mile north of the Pass Road, 5.3 miles from Sutter. This canyon used to be a favorite picnic area in the Spring. Someone discovered gas coming out of the ground near a spring and drove down a piece of water pipe. We used to light the gas at the mouth of the pipe and it would burn until the next strong wind or until someone capped it off.

11. *What and where are the Twin Sisters?*

The two peaks just northeast of South Butte.

12. *Where is the Pinch Gut Ranch?*

That name was dubbed on the place at the head of the draw two miles west of Sutter on the north side of South Butte Road, northwest of the Roy Meyers place, now owned by the Frye Estate.

An old Frenchman homesteaded it, raised goats and sold the milk at what was then called the community of South Butte. One day when times were bad someone asked Pierre how things were. Tightening his belt he replied, "Peench guttee, peench guttee," and the name stuck.

13. *What and where is Lovers Leap? Where is Sheep Herder's Rock?*

They are one and the same, a cliff about a half mile north of the Pass Road, 6.4 miles from Sutter.

The story was told that an Indian girl was atop the cliff and looking down and saw her boyfriend playing around with another woman. She jumped down on them, killing all three.

During hard north winds in the Spring sheepherders used to shelter their bands in the lee of the cliff to protect the lambs. After one norther, a

herder was found dead at the base of the cliff with his dog still huddled up against him.

*14. Where is Court House Square in Sutter?*

The block bounded by Washington, Elm, Barrow, and Maple Streets was set aside by the founder of Sutter City for the Court House. The town lost by only a few votes being the County Seat of Sutter County. I can remember when there were pairs of palm trees at each corner of the block.

*15. Where is the bank building?*

The present Native Daughters Hall, southeast corner of Nelson and California Streets. It was originally erected for a bank and the oldtimers always referred to it as the bank building. It has been a butcher shop, library, store and general meeting place before the Women's Improvement Club hall was erected on Walnut Street between Marshall and Colusa Streets. There used to be an outside stairway on the east side of the building, and the upper story was used for magic lantern shows, wandering players, dog and bird shows, and what have you. The first movies were shown there, using an old carbon arc light machine.

*16. Where were the early churches located? What denominations?*

The Methodist South was at the northwest corner of Acacia and Nelson, facing south; the Christian Church was at the southwest corner of Acacia and Lyon, facing east; and the Methodist North was where the present Methodist Church is, facing west. In fact the present Methodist Church is built from both Methodist Churches.

*17. Where and what was the mansion?*

The Mansion, built by Gardemeyer, the founder of Sutter, was at the west end of Nelson Street on the west side of Walnut Street, facing east. It was a very elaborate building, with turrets and balconies, set in beautifully landscaped grounds. Oldtimers told of silver door knobs, gold plates on the room doors and marble fireplaces. My early knowledge of it was not so good because my dad took me there when I was five or six years old to have a doctor sew up some barbwire cuts on my throat and face. As I remember, the doctor's name was Devore.

*18. What were early railroad plans for Sutter? Where was the depot to be located?*

From the 1870s through the 1890s various plans and franchises were dreamed up for a narrow-gauge railroad from near Willows, via Colusa, Sutter and Marysville to Grass Valley. The only portion built was from Sites to the Southern Pacific to haul stones to build the Ferry Building in San Francisco. However, the roadway was graded from Marysville toward Browns Valley and for a short ways from Sutter toward Marysville. Bob Schellenger may remember an east and west grade just north of where he was raised, the present Yuill Joaquin home. It was originally planned to run on Nelson Street with a depot about where the drive-in is near Maple Street.

*19. Where was the first restaurant in Sutter? Where was the first newspaper printed in Sutter?*

Both were at the present Beecroft place on California Street.

The wood to cook the first meal was hauled by my dad from the Billy Hoke place near West Butte and the cook roundly bawled out dad because most of the wood was green cottonwood.

20. *Where was the hotel located?*

The hotel was a two-story building at the northeast corner of Nelson and California Streets. When I first remember it, D. J. Mclean lived there and had the post office in the lobby while the floor to the old brick building now occupied by Sutter Cash Market was being repaired. I believe the Huffmasters were the last to run the hotel.

21. *Where was Fichter's Blacksmith Shop and Hardware? Where was the livery stable and stage yard?*

Fichter's was located on the northwest corner of Acacia and Colusa Streets, the present location of West Side Market. Dick Fichter was probably the best blacksmith in the county. He could do about everything with iron, and people brought their horses from miles around to have him shoe them. Mike Ganoudi took over as his horseshoer after the First World War.

The livery stable was the large building just south of the present Leo Wadsworth home, with openings to the east and west so that stages could be driven through and the teams changed under cover from the weather.

22. *What important landmark is near the intersection of Acacia and Colusa Streets?*

A few yards west of the intersection is a large oak tree in the middle of the street. It is the reference point for many surveys in Sutter and vicinity. During the summer

of 1916, when William "Babe" Ellington was County Surveyor, working as a chairman, I helped him run several lines, using the tree as a starting point.

23. *Where and by whom was the Thompson Seedless Grape first propagated? What influence did it have on Sutter county?*

The Thompson Seedless is a hybrid from English, eastern United States, and native wild grapes, crossed by George Thompson on his ranch just south of the Sacramento Northern tracks on the east side of Girdner Road. He experimented for years and was about to give up when some trimmings he had thrown in a fence corner took root and produced the present grape on two-year-old runners.

He gave cuttings to many of his friends, and put out some himself. He told me of his many experiments when I was visiting him one time.

The Thompson Seedless Grape started the raisin industry in Sutter County and it was at one time the county's largest paying crop.

It was told of George Thompson that he didn't like the way the Marysville mills ground flour, so he would put 60 pounds of wheat in his pack, walk to Sacramento, crossing the Feather at Nicolaus, get the wheat bolted and walk home again, carrying the flour, all inside two nights and a day.

I believe it was 1920 when Mr. Thompson cast his last election vote, and since he was totally blind Ray Dean and I helped him mark his ballot.

24. *What is DeWitt dirt and where was it used?*

If you go to the Fremont Monument on the Pass Road, 1.6 miles

from Sutter, and look to the north you will see where a reddish decayed volcanic rock which used to be quarried on the Marcus DeWitt ranch. DeWitt dirt made a very good water macadam roadway, and at one time all of the good roads around Sutter were covered with it. Most of the roads around Sutter today have that dirt as a sub-base. Ranchers of the community used to cover their corrals and driveways with the dirt.

25. *Where is the Hock Farm? Who first owned it and what industry did it*

*start in Sutter County?*

The Hock Farm is seven miles south of Yuba City on the old River Road. Captain John A. Sutter obtained it through a Mexican grant and there started and brought to production various kinds of fruit trees and experimented with drying fruit so it could be transported to the mines. From his plantings, especially peaches, began the great fruit industry of California. 1850 was the date of the first commercial handling of fresh and dried fruits.

## Calendar of Events

### April

- 9 Spring Vacation Children's Program at the Museum, 10 a.m.
- 11 **Membership Meeting at the Museum, 2 p.m.**  
**Program: Judith Barr Fairbanks Essay Contest Winners, Century Farms - All are welcome, dessert after the meeting**
- 11 YCHS Art exhibit closes
- 16 *German POW Art* photos from Camp Beale opens at the Museum
- 18 Bike Around the Buttes
- 25 **Picnic in the Buttes - meet at the Museum by 9:45 a.m.**  
**See details on back cover**
- 25 *German POW Art* photos closes

### May

- 8 Smithsonian's *Journey Stories* opening reception 6-8 p.m. at the Museum
- 9 Sunset Serenade in the Buttes - Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust

### June

- 20 Membership Picnic at Ettl Hall, 11:30 a.m.

### August

Pig Roast at Ettl Hall

# What History is Hidden under the Levee?

by  
Sharyl Simmons

At the Historical Society's January meeting, Dr. Greg White presented a great program at the Community Memorial Museum. Greg is a former archaeology professor at CSU, Chico and now has his own archaeology and paleontology consulting firm (Subterra Consulting) which evaluates and excavates archaeological sites for both private and public entities.

His focus this day was on the archaeological history of the levees themselves. As odd as it seems, the levees cover the only place in the region that hasn't been drastically changed by over a century of agriculture and development. That strip of land under the levee can offer up a vision of life along the Feather River that can't be found anywhere else.

By peeling off the layers, they've determined that the major builds of the levee in the Live Oak area can be traced back to improvements made in 1965, 1952, and 1942-47.

There are three earlier builds that are identified as Build 3, Build 2 and Build 1. Build 3 occurred in the mid-1920s just before the Depression. Build 2 is documented, among other ways, in two 1907 photographs that show the removal of vegetation and the

use of horse-drawn chisel plows and Fresno scrapers.

Build 1 is dated to between 1871 and 1884 when the railroads entered the region. These are the first engineered levees near Live Oak and under this layer the archaeologists found deep grooves from wagon tracks as well as actual boot prints in the very compacted sand layer. As early as 1849, this road showed up on the Derby map and was used to connect Sutter's land grant to Lassen's claim and was known as the Sutter-Lassen Road.

Among the finds that help date the various strata are horse shoes, pop bottles, beer cans, and crockery beer bottles. Obviously, levee building is thirsty work. Items like beer cans can help date a level by how you open them. Are they modern pop tops, pull-tabs or do you need a can opener to get to the good stuff? Cans don't show up in the older layers, but crockery beer bottles do. Chinese commonware has also been found, indicating the involvement of Chinese laborers as well.

Work is still being done as the levee improvements continue and we hope that Mr. White can pay the Society another visit in the future to update us on what they are finding along the Feather River.

# The Diary of an Average Housewife

by  
Estelle Crowhurst

*Estelle Crowhurst wrote a weekly column about her life for the Independent Herald from 1948 until 1969. The Crowhurst family donated a bound copy of these columns to the Museum. The following are excerpts from some early columns.*

September 27, 1951

*Household gadgets and baking in a cabin*

How quickly we accustom ourselves to each new luxury and labor-saving device. When we first see or hear of some new invention, it seems incredible to us. How wonderful it would be to have such a thing. Imagine how easy it would be to do our work with such a help. I remember feeling that way about every new labor-saving household gadget that has come on the market, since I have been keeping house. And yet, as soon as I have had such a convenience for any length of time, I find myself accepting it, and taking it for granted. The first electric mixer that I saw, for instance, seemed to me nothing short of a wizard, and something far beyond my reach. When I acquired mine, one birthday, it seemed a wonderful gift and I have always appreciated its help. But I do take it very much for granted.

Our vacation this year was spent in an isolated spot in the mountains, in a beautifully equipped cabin. There was a beautiful, practically-new electric range, any house wife's dream of perfect cooking equipment. It was a challenge to me. I simply had to try out the oven. So the first morning, after the beds and dishes were done, while the family were hiking and swimming, I made a cake. I felt like a pioneer. I had no sifter, no electric

mixer, no rubber spatula, no measuring cup. And it was fun. Of course, it did take time. I had forgotten how long it takes to cream butter and sugar with a spoon. At home my beater does that, while I sift dry ingredients and prepare pans. There were no such short-cuts. It took me over a half hour to do what I would in 15 minutes at home. My measurements were very vague. At home I always follow instructions carefully, even though sometimes they seem a little silly to me. When a recipe calls for two cups, less 1 tablespoon that is what I use. In the cabin I had only the thick, restaurant type cup, which was part of the cabin equipment. I measured flour and sugar in that. And as for sifting the flour three times — something that any self-respecting cake-maker always does — I had no sifter, and so just stirred the flour and baking powder around in a bowl with a fork. After I had added it alternately with the milk to the other ingredients, the batter seemed a little thin, so I threw all discretion to the winds and just dumped in enough flour from the sack to make what seemed to me a good consistency, and baked it. The cake was delicious. I could not believe my eyes.

Can it be that we are such perfectionists about our cooking that we have become slaves to our methods and our expensive tools? Or could the solution be that the fresh mountain air

and the hiking and swimming had produced appetites that would have made any food seem wonderful?

November 15, 1951  
*Christmas holiday*

Well, once more Christmas has arrived in Marysville before we are even over Halloween. If ever anything seemed in poor taste to me, it is the display of Christmas decorations on the streets, and Christmas stocks in the stores in early October. Goodness knows, we live a fast enough pace already, without hustling into every season months before that season has begun. After all, the punctual, forehanded people do their Christmas shopping early without such reminders as Christmas ornaments on the streets overhead. And the other kind of shoppers who are rushing around the week before Christmas, tearing their hair trying to get everything done at the last moment, are not going to get at it any sooner because the streets are decorated. They just get harried and hurried a little sooner. They are not the kind who can start early, and Christmas bells and wreaths are not going to make them do so. Being forehanded goes a lot deeper than that.

If we could find some way of keeping the spirit of Christmas in our hearts the whole year around - the kindly feeling of brotherly love that seems to envelop us during the Christmas season - then we would all know real happiness. In fact, if everyone had that spirit through the whole year, we would not be worrying about wars. But Christmas decorations are not going to put that feeling in our hearts even if they are displayed through the entire year. It takes more

than tinsel to accomplish that wonderful feat.

So, why can't we have the commercial side of Christmas, which backs all of our Christmas decorations, just during the two or three weeks immediately preceding Christmas? If we keep on the way we are going now, we are soon going to have wreaths and bells swinging on the streets for the Fourth of July. We are mixed up enough already without that.

January 18, 1952  
*A cold, wet winter*

Sunday afternoon we took a short ride in the foothills to see the snow. It seemed silly on such a threatening day, but we felt sure we would not have to go far and there is something so inspiring to me to see the countryside so still and white and lovely. Yards that are cluttered and sad in the fall of the year, are graciously covered with a beautiful white blanket and the houses look cozy and snug and warm in the shining whiteness.

This year I had an inspiration. It suddenly occurred to me that I did not have to get out of the car in the snow. Always before it seemed to me that I was being a pretty poor sport if I didn't get out, throw a few snowballs and be pelted with three times as many as I could throw and finally stumble back into the car with feet and hands feeling like chunks of cold dead wood. This year I just decided that I might as well capitalize on being a grandmother.

I took my knitting along and when everyone else, from the 20-year-olds to the three-year-old, piled out of the car, I just sat snug and warm and watched. It was fun to watch them, all clumsily clad in galoshes, gloves and

warm sweaters and jackets, stumbling, throwing snowballs and generally wallowing around in the snow. It was fun and it was comfortable, besides. When they finally came back to the car with jeans soaked to the knees, sodden gloves and chattering teeth I felt as if I had been really smart. It was a successful outing and the warmth and comfort of home and a hot dinner offset all the nuisance of wet clothes, which had to be hung on the clothes rack over the floor furnace to dry.

But it does seem to me as if we had had stormy weather all winter long and I do mean long. The cloudy, rainy, cold days are bad enough, but to have them climaxed as we did Sunday night and Monday with a howling wind, seem too much. Sometime Sunday night the fire siren awakened me and the wind whistling around the house, banging a neighboring garage door and rattling the windows kept me awake. I lay there thinking of the people who were at that moment battling the storm so that we could have all the comforts at home. Of course that was not conducive to sleep.

Finally, I talked myself into getting up and making sure that the children were covered. Naturally, everyone was snug and sound asleep - undisturbed by howling winds and sirens. As I went silently back to my own bed without benefit of lights, I managed to brush against the clothes rack which I had entirely forgotten. It crashed to the floor, with a noise that would wake the dead. This morning I was informed by the young men in the family that whatever I knocked over in the night sure did wake them up. That's just what you get for over-solicitousness, no thanks whatever. I was glad when it was morning. Things

don't seem so disturbing, even in the cold grey sort of daylight that it was.

Speaking of sleepless nights, our nine-year-old was trying to tell me the other morning of a terrible dream he had had the night before. It had been just blood curdling and he was having a hard time to make me understand how terrifying it had seemed. Finally he said, "You can't tell it as bad as it was."

April 3, 1952

### *The labeling of products*

Many of our commercial products of today have most descriptive names and no doubt the names do help sell the product. There are, for instance, dish-washing products called Cheer and Joy. Maybe we are happier doing tiresome tasks with soap that has such a happy name. Maybe Duz does make us a little more alert about our work.

But the name that really gets me is a stocking called "No Mend." To use a phrase that our youngsters do, "they can say that again." I have not found a nylon stocking in the last year, no matter what the brand name, that lasted long enough for mending. "No-Mend" is right. But "No Wear" would be even more right.

I remember when nylon first came on the market, in 1939 or 1940 I think it was, and I thought all our stocking worries were over. I wondered how we would manage not to grow tired of the one or two pairs of hose which were going to last us the rest of our lives.

Hah! Little did I know!

Stockings and my hair are my two greatest bugbears in the constant battle that I wage to be well-groomed. And of the two, stockings are the great worry. A little extra care, and quite a



bit of time, applied to my hair will bring fair results, but no matter how careful I am in the selection of my stockings or how gently I launder them, I am never sure when I put on a pair of nylons that they will last out the afternoon or evening. It seems to me that I could have had a new a new coat this spring, if I had now what I have spent for stockings the last few months.

No wonder so many people have learned to go bare legged all summer. The sad thing is that most middle-aged “girls” feel, and quite rightly, that their legs are much more glamorous covered with nylon than they are bare. They are the ones who find stockings such a worry these days. And to think that I once believed what the advertisers claimed – that Nylon would solve our hosiery problems. It only goes to show how wrong one can be.

April 10, 1952

*Cigarette ads and car ads*

Advertising in this country is really BIG BUSINESS, definitely spelled with capital letters, and no doubt it provides a living for many people, not the least among them being the clever people who write the copy. It takes brains and lots of inventiveness to be able constantly to think up new ideas and phrases that will catch the public eye. And not only must they catch the attention, but they must hold it long enough to put over a specific point. And that point, in particular, must be one that will stimulate reader- or listener-interest sufficiently that said reader or listener will go out and buy the superior product in question.

It seems to me that the cigarette companies, especially, work harder on this phase of advertising than do any

other big advertisers. In the past few years we have been bombarded with catch phrases that are supposed to impress us with the superiority of each brand.

But the one that really cooks me is the current phrase that one of the major cigarette companies is now blasting forth from the radio to all who will or must listen. Here it is: “Now you can stop worrying.”

The announcer first goes into a little song and dance about how bad it is for you to worry. Then he says that if you have been worrying, you can now stop worrying, because his brand of cigarettes will not give you cigarette hangover, or a cough or anything else objectionable - which, by the way, all other brands will do.

The first thing that causes me to wonder concerning this health-taking admonition is whether that is the major worry of most of his listeners - whether or not they are about to contract “cigarette hangover.” Suddenly I wonder if he thinks that many people believe that his cigarette will not cause throat irritation, if other reliable brands do. And thirdly, I can’t help but think that if a smoker was as worried over the bad effects of smoking as the announcer seems to be the logical thing for the smoker to do, in order to stop worrying, would be to stop smoking. That seems never to have occurred to the cigarette manufacturer or his advertiser in radio or press.

Along the line of advertising copy, I was quite impressed with the claims one of the higher priced cars made for its new model this year. They advertised having several inches of extra hip room in the rear seat. That is a pretty good idea, because so often those who have accumulated enough

worldly goods to be able to afford the higher priced cars have also accumulated quite a little padding which makes extra hip room a necessity in a car.

May 1, 1952

*Public Schools Week*

Here we are in Public Schools Week once more. Though there are a few misguided individuals in our midst who do nothing but find fault with our Public School system, I have nothing but the greatest admiration and respect for the people who, in one capacity or another, devote their lives to the furtherance of public education of our youngsters. After all, I received my education in our public schools, and because of that education I have had a much fuller and richer life than I would ever have had without it. And if we don't all reap equal benefits from our education, that is strictly because of our individual limitations. But we all do have equal chances in school. There are just endless opportunities for the young boy or girl who wants to apply himself to his school work.

Monday evening we attended Open House at the three grammar schools in our community, grammar school being where our interests are centered at the present time. We chatted with the teachers, visited with other fond parents, inspected the children's work placed neatly on each desk, and admired the art work displayed on the walls of each room. When I think of the work that has gone into all those various projects, the careful, painstaking guidance given to all the children, the extra, individual attention given to the more backward youngsters, the search for hidden talents in the child who perhaps does

not do so well in certain academic work, I am overcome with admiration for the teacher.

Tuesday morning, as the boys were scurrying around, getting off to school, one of them said, "We've worked all year, getting stuff ready for Open House, and people only looked at it for a little while last night, and now it's all over."

Of course I pointed out to him the fact that he had been doing much more than just displaying what work they had been doing, that what he had learned during that time could never be taken from him. But I thought to myself, that if Public Schools Week did nothing more than to awaken parents to the debt that we owe our children's teachers, it would be worth all the trouble it must be.

May 29, 1952

*Males telling females how to do their work*

The tendency of the average male to tell the woman in his life how to do whatever she is doing is pretty well recognized, at least by us women. And he often is at his best with his advice while standing idly by. A couple of instances of that interesting little masculine trait have come to my attention recently.

A week or so ago I hung my string mop on the clothesline to dry. When I did so I decided I needed a new one but neglected to put the old one in the garbage that day. The next morning an industrious little linnet discovered the mop and really went to work on it.

She perched on the clothesline and pulled and tugged away at the mop until she had three or four strings loosened and then flew away with them

in her bill. In a very short time she was back again, this time accompanied by the brightly colored linnet who no doubt was her mate.

The clothesline is just outside the kitchen window which is over my sink, and I have really enjoyed my work at the sink lately. Just the way we, her human counterparts, eagerly tell each other when we have found a good place to buy berries or stockings or curtains, she must have rushed home and told her neighbors of this wonderful building material which is so plentiful and easy to get. Every day since I hung my mop there the linnets have been busy at it. I can't bear to put it in the garbage until I am sure they have all completed their homes.

But what amuses me and illustrates my point is the male linnet. Every time the little female, who is a drab, unassuming little person, lights on the clothesline, her husband in all his beautiful plumage arrives and perches himself a few feet away on the clothesline and proceeds to tell her just exactly how to go about her work. She goes on about her business and when they both decide she has about the right amount for a load, she flies away and he buzzes right along beside her no doubt to show her just where and how to place it in the nest.

There are at least a dozen linnets utilizing that mop and for every hard-working little female there is a beautiful red-breasted male telling her just how to get her work done to the best advantage. They all remind me of the many men who insist that housework would be no chore at all if women would just use a little system about it.

That particular trait of telling a woman how she could do work better

than she is doing it even crops up in boys, I notice. One warm late afternoon recently I needed something from the grocery store. All three little boys were avidly listening to the radio and when I asked if anyone would care to go to the store for me I received a chorus of injured negatives.

Of course I am not one to take such answers seriously but since the thing I needed required a little careful selection, I decided I had better go myself. As usual I went to the store intending to buy one item and came home with a very heavy bag of groceries. Trudging along the hot street with my burden I regretted very much not having snatched a young man from the radio to go on the errand.

When I staggered into the kitchen with my load I said in an injured tone, "It's pretty tough when I have three big boys and have to carry home a big load of groceries myself."

They all looked up from the exciting adventures of Sergeant Preston or the Green Hornet with a hazy, uncomprehending expression, and then the youngest one said, "You should have taken the wagon."

As I say, the masculine mind can always think of a way for you to do your work.

June 12, 1952

#### *Home magazine articles*

One of the most interesting magazines to me is the type of magazine devoted exclusively to the home. There are dozens of them and to a home-lover they offer endless amusement. There are articles on gardening, on planting and the care of plants, on landscaping, flower arrangements, lawns and vegetable gardens. For the interior of the home

there are countless articles and pictures on the painting and decorating of every room in the house. And then there are the remodeling articles which I find absolutely fascinating.

First you see pictures of the house or the room, whichever the ambitious homemaker has remodeled, as it was BEFORE. Then there will be many pictures of the complete room, AFTER. Quite often it is a kitchen or bathroom and sometimes it was a pretty dismal-looking room originally.

Once in a while, however, the BEFORE version suits me better than the fabulous AFTER one. Lots of the ultra-modern functional furniture and décor leaves me pretty cold.

Sometimes too, the remodeled room has a painfully neat empty look that plainly shows it has not yet been occupied.

Last week I was particularly interested in an article in the small trade magazine that features home-building and home-improvement. I always enjoy it and read it from cover to cover with avid interest. This particular issue contained an article on how to utilize wasted space in your home. It says you can have an extra room, just as well as not.

You probably, it glibly says, have a garage, a basement or an attic that is just going to waste which you can remodel into a lovely extra room or apartment. The colored pictures of the finished done-over basement in this article are simply beautiful.

The walls, of course, are knotty pine, and there are special built-in window flower boxes in which are growing bright and cheery flowers. There are built-in bookcases on one wall, a built-in desk on another and a nook for radio and record player. The

furniture is colorful and attractive. It is really a dream of a room. And to think it was just a catch-all or junk spot before.

In fact, the picture at the top of the page shows with cruel clarity just what a glory-hole that basement was before the remodeling was begun. And that is where doubt began to creep into my mind. The BEFORE picture shows just one small corner of the basement and here are just a few of the items that that small corner contained: an old, broken lawn chair with the canvas hanging, torn and limp, a discarded large rug rolled up (and a wonderful hazard if you try to walk through the place), a couple of lamps, picnic baskets, a dining room chair, several large bottles and jugs, an old occasional table, a baby buggy, a fireplace screen. This is just a small part of the articles.

That basement, with its motley assortment of junk, is almost a dead ringer for the shed which adjoins our garage. Except that I could go on listing stuff for pages here, which we have in our shed that the BEFORE basement people did not picture in their article. What I would dearly love to know is, what those clever remodeling, space-saving people did with all the junk that was in their basement, when they began to remodel. If they can give me a good workable answer to that question, I am sure that they will have solved one of the greatest problems of today's homemaker. And it should be good picture material.

November 13, 1952

*Rainy days*

The first rainy day of fall always seems lovely to me, especially if I know

that most of the fall crops are in. The rice and beans are all just about harvested and we won't need to worry with those crops. And the stockmen no doubt are really welcoming this rain. If it lasts a little while there will be new, green feed soon.

This house seems so cozy on the first rainy day, particularly if it is a school day and it is quiet at home. The view out my kitchen window is so peaceful and wintry-looking with the big walnut trees shedding leaves with every gust of wind. I know it is not going to be too easy, raking leaves from now on for the next few weeks, but we don't need to think about that on such a wet day.

In the early morning today (Wednesday) there was a great deal of running to the shed to haul out all the raincoats and boots, mostly outgrown and useless, but it is fun to try them all on while being urged steadily to hurry or they will be late for school. When everything has been tried on and found wanting, on one score or another, there is a mad scurry for jackets, clarinets, report cards, lunch money and spelling books and everyone is off for school, happy that there is a little drizzle to ride through. And I am left with a pile of raincoats, boots and galoshes to dispose of, not to mention countless muddy footprints on the back porch and kitchen linoleum.

And this year we have a problem that we did not have last. Our little dog, Rags, turns out to be one that loves to run in the rain and wallow in the mud. And of course she expects to come in the house just as she always has done. We both assured each other, that just as soon as the rainy weather began, Miss Rags had to spend her time outdoors. She has a good warm coat,

we both said, and the shed is warm and dry, and there is no reason why she should not spend her time there. We simply could not have that muddy, wet little creature tracking in and out of the house. That's what we said.

Rags has slept in the house ever since we brought her home last summer. She can go out when she wants to, which usually is around five in the morning. Then whoever arises first always lets Rags back into the house. This morning we all agreed that such a muddy little thing as she was, would just have to stay outdoors. But when we saw the pleading little face at the back screen door this morning everyone was just sick to think that she could not come in and we finally hit upon the compromise of having one boy carefully wipe her dry with a discarded old bath towel.

There was a big argument over who should have the privilege of performing this wonderful task and we had to settle that by assigning turns for it. Rags was dried and came in perfectly delighted with the world. So now added to muddy footprints of boys, I will have a dog to keep dry.

Did I say that the first rainy days were wonderful, I wonder how the last ones will seem.

November 27, 1952

### *Dogs and children*

Dogs are wonderful pets and it has always seemed to me that a child who does not have a dog to love and take care of has missed something very important in life. But three or four years ago when our big old dog who had become a part of our family died, we agreed that town was no place for dogs and that we would have no more.

The children periodically had wonderful offers of dogs but we were able to resist all pressure and managed to stay clear of any dog entanglements. We have gone through many phases of kittens, chickens and rats for pets but they were all outdoor pets and did not cause me too much inconvenience. And then last summer we succumbed to a poor little deserted, homeless mother dog and of course she has moved right in.

And I do mean moved in. Other people seem able to have dogs that spend their lives in the yard, but not us. And not only in the house, but up on the furniture.

Fortunately, Rags is a small dog. Tarzan, our last beloved dog, was a very large animal but that made no difference. He was in the house whenever he wanted to be. At least it does not seem so much like a horse lying on the couch when Rags gets up there. But Rags has other drawbacks, which are very real. She has long hair and she dearly loves to run around in wet grass or mud and then come in the house. Although I firmly stated that when wet weather came Miss Rags would have to sleep in the shed, who can resist a shivering little bundle of wet fur sitting on the back steps? We have just made a rule that on wet days the boys must dry Rags as well as possible with special drying rags that belong to her before she comes in the house.

But this vacation week, when the boys have been home from school all day, Rags found a new trick that really made trouble for us. The boys built a fort one day down in the river bottoms somewhere near the city sewer farm. Rags was nearly wild with pleasure to be able to spend all day out

with five or six boys. She seemed to feel that dog heaven could offer no greater joys. And in her excitement she rolled in something terrible. Terrible smell – awful trick. I'll never know what, but it was really awful. It was that awful northwindy day and if you got on the windward side of Rags it was just more than human nostrils could stand. Of course that did it, Rags simply had to stay out-of-doors then.

So one boy took warm suds in a tub out on the south side of the house where the sun was warm and bathed her. But all to no avail. The soaping seemed to just stir up the smell. In the evening the boys and their Dad repaired to the bathroom with Rags and spent a good half hour in there, bathing and scrubbing and soaking her. She came out of that session as fluffy as a new stuffed toy and sweet-smelling as a bouquet of roses. The bath tub, needless to say, was scrubbed vigorously by every member of the family and especially by me, who happened to take the first bath in it after Rags. But sometimes I wonder why we felt that we had to adopt Rags. We keep paying for it over and over.



# Puzzling

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I T Y R B H T R A G O Q A Y C E A F O K  
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BRIGGS	MARCUS
BRITTAN	METHODIST
BUCHANAN	PICNIC
BUTTES	RAGS
CROWHURST	SHEEP
DAUGHTERS	STAGECOACH
DEWITT	SUBTERRA
GARDEMEYER	SUTTER
LASSEN	THOMPSON
LEVEE	VOLCANIC

**Membership Meeting**  
**Saturday, April 11, 2015, 2:00 p.m.**

**At the Museum**

**1333 Butte House Road, Yuba City**

**822-7141 or 671-3261**

**Program: Fairbanks Essay Contest Winners**  
**Sutter County Century Farms**

**Picnic in the Buttes**

**Saturday, April 25**

**Meet at the Museum by 9:45 a.m.**

**Potluck \$15 per person, \$30 per family**

**For information, call Joe at 530-695-2430**

**Chairs, tables, utensils, plates, drinks provided**

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