

# GOLDEN NOTES



SACRAMENTO, WINTER OF 1849. (Facsimile of an illustration from the original edition.)

Sacramento County Historical Society

Franklin F. Armstrong, Editor

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## THE SAGA OF BURNS SLOUGH

*By Stewart Mitchell*

Looking at the map of the City of Sacramento you see the American River flowing north past the State College grounds and turning around River Park to flow west along the northerly boundary of the City. Industries and homes stand close to its well regulated channel, safe from flood because of the sturdy levees that protect them. It was not always so.

A map of the City of Sacramento by John Doherty, from surveys made in October, 1859 in connection with the case of U.S. vs. Sutter, shows the levee system protecting the city on that date. It also shows the boundary of what had been designated "swamp and overflow land," and today's citizens may be surprised to learn that all of the city to the north of Sutter's Fort and to the west of 19th Street was included. The first levee system bounded this overflowed area from 31st Street (now Alhambra Boulevard) on the east to the Sacramento Valley Railroad (on R Street) on the south. East of Alhambra Boulevard, we can see from survey maps such as Goddard's MAP OF RUTTE, MULDROW AND SMITH GARDENS (1) that much of the area, including most of what is now River Park was within the flood plain of the American River or was covered by sloughs. The two main sloughs, one flowing from the American, and the other from the country to the south of it, joined in the vicinity of the site of McKinley Park. From there the slough flowed past Sutter's Fort and ended in the lake which covered the ground now occupied by the Southern Pacific Company depot and yards. When the levee

was built, Doherty's map shows it running south along Alhambra Boulevard to G Street and then along the general line of the slough past the fort. From there the water was diverted in a southeasterly direction to 16th and R Streets whence it was prevented from entering the city by the R Street levee. As already indicated, the ground to the east and south of the levee was above the flood waters.

The channel of the slough that drains the land south of the American River to the west of Mather Field is still in existence. It is shown as Sutter's Slough on the quadrangle maps of the U.S. Geodetic Survey. The other branch, which flowed from the river itself, has disappeared beneath the pavements and grounds of the modern city. Only the small lake in McKinley park remains to commemorate what was once known as Burns Slough.

In 1849, a young Irishman named Peter Burns came from New York to San Francisco via the isthmus of Panama. Such well-known men as John F. Morse, James Anthony and C. P. Huntington came on the same boat. In 1850, Burns purchased 200 acres of land in the area now known as River Park (2). The great floods in the American River that occurred during the winter of 1861-62 swept away most of his property. The construction of a better levee system to protect the city and adjacent property began immediately thereafter. The levee, later occupied by the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad left the Burns property, as well as Smith's Gardens (3) which were likewise damaged by the floods outside the protected area. Although Burns' house escaped the flood, he purchased 33 more acres within the levee system and moved the house on to it in 1867, living there until the time of his death.

Mr. Peter Lagomarsino of 3900 H Street, whose father settled on land adjacent to Burns in 1880, has seen the channel of the slough vanish beneath the streets and houses of East Sacramento and River Park. He is able, therefore, to tie the location of the old slough to the present day landmarks. He says the Burns house was moved after the flood to where the Sutter Maternity Hospital now stands, and the Lagomarsino property was just north of there, bordering Elvas Avenue. It is now commemorated by Lagomarsino Way which runs by the Hospital.

Starting from the American River on the State College grounds, the slough flowed north through the land where the fire house now stands and through the site of the new Scottish Rite Temple. It then crossed the site of River Park in a northwesterly direction and the levee (now occupied by the Southern Pacific Company tracks) at a point about 100 feet south of the intersection of Moddison and Minerva Avenues. From here it crossed what is now 52nd Street between Elvas Avenue and Lagomarsino Way and passed about a block south of the Theodore Judah School (39th Street and McKinley Boulevard). The slough then turned to the southwest through the grounds of the present Garden and Arts Center (its deepest channel) and wound on through McKinley Park (Formerly East Park).

As already stated, the slough flowed by Sutter's Fort, crossing J Street at 29th Street, and was diverted from there to 16th and R Streets. From there it crossed what is now William Land Park, and passed by the Holy Spirit School to spread out in the lowlands beyond.

The course of the slough can be checked fairly close on the old plats of the area, and it is interesting to note how the contours on the late U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey map still indicate its former location through East Sacramento.

As time went on the waters of the slough were diverted farther to the south, along Alhambra Boulevard to Broadway, where they were prevented from entering the city by the Y Street Levee. The levees along the American were extended and improved, including the levee that now protects River Park, and the flow of flood waters through Burns Slough was cut off. Apprehension that the American might still burst through its banks, and Burns Slough flow once again, remained until the Folsom Dam was completed to regulate its flood waters. Burns Slough is no more, but as the Sacramento UNION phrased it: "this historic stream, so lively and full of danger in the time of high water, and so demure and harmless during the summer season," is as worthy of commemoration as any other historic building or object connected with the history of Sacramento.

(1) Photostat of original belonging to Sacramento Abstract and Title Company in the State Library.

(2) Sacramento UNION, November 16, 1872, page 8, column 6.

(3) For a history of Smith Gardens See GOLDEN NOTES, October, 1958.

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### POPULATION HISTORY

Sacramento County Census, 1850 - 1900					
1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
9,087	24,142	26,830	34,390	40,339	45,915

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### WATER RATES . . .

#### *What Sacramentans paid in 1856*

Each family, not more than eight persons, \$2.00 per month.  
 Over eight persons and not more than twelve, \$3.00 per month.  
 Over twelve and not more than sixteen, \$4.00 per month.  
 Over sixteen and not more than twenty, \$5.00 per month.  
 For bathing tubs, in private houses, each \$1.00 per month.

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### KNOW THIS SACRAMENTAN?

In our last issue of GOLDEN NOTES, we featured an item on the career of Sybil Sanderson, the renowned soprano. This month it is our pleasure to relate the varied and exotic life of another Sacramento belle.

She was born in Sacramento in 1863 under the most respectable circumstances as the daughter of a judge. She was soon destined to make exciting newspaper copy, for, among her other accomplishments, she was to marry five times (two of her husbands professed to be princes of the blood), get tattooed as a souvenir of a trip to Hawaii, cultivate pet snakes, visit a harem

and throw fancy dress parties for her Bohemian friends in San Francisco and Paris. It is said that she won her first husband in a poker game. She quickly tired of him, however, and one year later she married his poker playing rival. Her greatest interest next to matrimony was the Orient and things exotic. She once purchased a boa constrictor from the daughter of an Indian potentate. It was said that she used to give small snakes as favors at her parties. During her sojourn in Hawaii she became good friends with the ruler, King David Kalakaua who presented her with an island and the name Princess Palai-kalani, "Bliss of Heaven."

She was not content to be merely an island princess, and so she embarked for the Far East visiting such places as Shanghai, Hong Kong, The Dutch East Indies and Borneo. After an interlude in Paris where she acquired husband number 3, she again visited the Far East. This time Burma was the locale, where by this time, she had become a legend, the result of her earlier "invasion." The king, with the enthusiastic support of our heroine, had an imposing shrine complete with temple bells erected in her honor. This shrine, a year after her death in 1942, was blasted into oblivion by a bomb dropped from a Japanese airplane.

An interesting occurrence befell her during a visit to Tibet. While in that mountain fastness she lived the life of an ascetic by fasting and concentrating in a tent. During one of her spells a vision was supposed to have appeared before her. This vision, so she related, told her that in the next incarnation she would be a man. The vision also pointed out that she would be allowed 12 husbands, and that if she took a 13th, she would die. Although she had 7 husbands to go, she felt that she had had her fill of the matrimonial merry-go-round, and in her 78th year she came home to die.

Today she rests in the family plot in the Sacramento City Cemetery.

—F.F.A.

## REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

I am privileged to report a very busy year for 1960-1961. A treasurer's report accompanies this statement showing the assets of the Society for the year. We had an increase of membership from 371 in 1960 to 504 in 1961.

In August 1960 in conjunction with the Native Sons of the Golden West and the Native Daughters of the Golden West, The El Dorado County Chamber of Commerce and the Golden Key of Greenwood, this society dedicated four markers on the Coloma Road from Sutter's Fort to Coloma. The trip was made by special busses, and a picnic luncheon was served at Coloma.

For the first time in our history the Society played host to a convention, when we entertained the Symposium of Northern California and Southern Oregon Historical Societies on September 30th and October 1st 1960 at the El Rancho Hotel. Nearly two hundred registered for the event which included a Friday evening banquet, and a luncheon and tour of Old Sacramento on Saturday. Our thanks to Stewart Mitchell who acted as general chairman, and Allan Ottley who was program chairman.

On November 6th we were invited to a fall reception at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Chris Christensen. The home is the original ranch house on Rancho Del Paso. We greatly appreciate the hospitality of the Christensens.

Monday, December 12th marked our annual Christmas Dinner, attended by one hundred and fifty members and featuring a Santa Claus who was "out of this world".

On Saturday and Sunday, February 4th and 5th, 1961 the Society participated in an exhibition of historical objects at the Garden and Art Center. Over forty five members loaned objects for display, and gave their time as hosts for the exhibition. Nearly five thousand people attended the affair.

On May 21st our Society presented its annual tour. This time we visited Auburn, Dutch Flat, Emigrant Gap, Nevada City, Rough and Ready, Smartsville and return by Marysville. Fifty five people attended this affair which included a tour of the Auburn museum, and walking tours of Dutch Flat and Nevada City.

We are deeply appreciative of the gift of a California State Flag by the Native Daughters of the Golden West.

Through the efforts of our Society and the City Landmarks Commission Twenty four Old Sacramento buildings not previously marked have been named and dated with appropriate markers. The markers have been supplied by donations from members of the Society, many of them in memory of Sacramento pioneers. A list of the donors and of the persons honored appears elsewhere in this publication. It is hoped that further money will be raised for brochures locating and describing the buildings.

Your Society has vigorously opposed the Second and Third Street Freeway through the heart of Old Sacramento. The controversy was none of our making. We could not remain true to ourselves without making an all-out effort to preserve our past and to protect the reputation of the City of Sacramento. All of the official statements of the Society are part of the secretary's records and have been preserved for future use and reference. The decision of the State Highway Commission to locate a freeway in this area is a tragedy for Sacramento and the State of California. It is hoped that the Society will not forget the responsibility of the short sighted men who allowed this mistake to occur.

I am sure that you will agree that the programs presented this year have been of outstanding quality. Our thanks must be given to our Vice-president Kenneth Donelson who acted as Chairman of the program committee, and to Irene Donelson who never failed to get publicity from the local newspapers.

We owe a debt of thanks to a devoted and hardworking executive board. Harry Armstrong, our treasurer, took on many tasks above and beyond the call of duty. Any one of our activities could have strained our modest budget. Never once did our dinners, conventions and tours fail to break even financially. I am glad to see that he is willing to remain on the board.

We are deeply indebted to Carrie Woodson, our corresponding secretary, and to Freda Godwin our recording secretary. Ted Baggelmann, our past

president and director never failed an assignment. I am personally indebted to him for his wise counsel and advice. Mrs. Evelyn Christensen as Membership and Hospitality Chairman and her committee have put countless hours on their job.

No president can surrender his chair without paying tribute to our life member Dr. C. M. Goethe. On occasions too numerous to mention he has contributed financial aid to this society. His enthusiasm, advice and his warm encouragement are very helpful to an harrassed president.

Franklin Armstrong has assumed the editorship of "Golden Notes" and I am sure that our quarterly will gain stature in his capable hands. May we also thank Tom Hammer and our incoming president Fred Johns for their handling of the annual tour.

The success of any organization is not due to one person, or to a small group. The willing participation of the membership in the society's activities is the clue to our present and future success. By any measure we have had a successful year. Let us look forward to an even more successful year in 1961-1962.

Walter C. Frame, President.

#### DO YOU KNOW . . . . .

1. California's official State Colors?
  2. State Motto?
  3. State Flag?
  4. State Animal?
  5. State Tree?
  6. State Bird?
  7. State Flower?
  8. State Fish?
  9. State Insect?
  10. State Song ?
  11. State Nickname?
1. Combination of blue and gold . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1951.
  2. "Eureka" . . . . . appears on the State Seal.
  3. Bear Flag . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1911.
  4. California Grizzly Bear . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1953.
  5. California Redwood . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1937.
  6. California Valley Quail . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1931.
  7. Golden Poppy . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1903.
  8. South Fork Golden Trout . . . . . adopted by the State Legislature in 1947.
  9. No State insect has been adopted by the State Legislature, but the California Dog-face Butterfly is supported by the California Conservation Council. This insect was selected in 1929 by a vote of entomologists in the State.
  10. "I Love You California" . . . . . officially adopted by the State legislature in 1951.
  11. None has been officially adopted by the Legislature, but *Golden State* has been popularly used for many years.

**CONTRIBUTORS TO THE MEMORIAL NAME PLATES FUND  
SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Contributor	In Memory or Honor of:
George C. Akins	<i>In memory of his parents: Guy B. and Eugene S. Akins.</i>
Mrs. Ardell Folger Armstrong	<i>In memory of her great grandfather, Hosmer P. Osborn, a '49'er, &amp; also in memory of her grandparents: Josiah Gallup, a '49'er, and wife Julia A. Gallup Barber; Benjamin Franklin Folger, Jr. and wife Juliana Folger Hancock; and also in memory of her late parents: Alfred Gilbert Folger and Ella Ardell Folger.</i>
Col. Walter G. Bryte	<i>In memory of his great-great uncle "Mike" Bryte, a Sacramento '49'er.</i>
"Buck" Davis	<i>Contribution</i>
Mrs. Esther Fitzgerald	<i>In honor of her uncle Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt, who was proclaimed "Mr. California" by Governor Knight.</i>
Mrs. Helen Giffen	<i>In memory of her late husband: Guy J. Giffen.</i>
Mrs. Frieda Godwin	<i>In memory of her late husband: Merle Haun Godwin.</i>
Dr. C. M. Goethe	<i>Contribution</i>
Mrs. Alice Madeley Matthews and Mrs. Edith Madeley Turner	<i>In memory of Francis Foster, Honorary Member of the Pioneer Society; also his daughter, Alice Foster Madeley.</i>
John C. McGirk	<i>In memory of his great grandmother, Mary Jane Duncan Shobe.</i>
Mrs. Lola Cothrin Miner	<i>In memory of Mr. &amp; Mrs. W. K. Cothrin.</i>
Mrs. George Olmstead	<i>In memory of her late husband.</i>
Miss Rosemary Sawtelle	<i>In honor of her grandfather, Capt. Wm. Eugene Sawtelle.</i>
Mrs. Gracie Elliot Sawtelle	<i>In honor of: Granduncle David Osborn Mother: Donna Elizabeth Osborn Elliot Father: Henry Elliot Aunt: Martha Rebecca Osborn Elliot</i>
Mrs. Betty Dyburg Siller	<i>In memory of her grandfather: Ludwig Anderson.</i>
Mr. Lenard Siller	<i>To honor his great grandfather: Chris Weisel.</i>
Dr. Elsa Horstmann Van Soest	<i>In memory of her late daughter, Mrs. Amelia White, a member of the Sacramento County Historical Society.</i>

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**ANSWER TO KNOW THIS SACRAMENTAN**

Aimee Crocker  
(daughter of E. B. Crocker)

SACRAMENTO COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Gadren and Arts Center  
3330 McKinley Boulevard  
Sacramento 16, Calif.

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U. S. POSTAGE  
P A I D  
Permit No. 674  
Sacramento, Calif.

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Mr. Walter C. Frame, President  
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