

# Golden Nuggets

SACRAMENTO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JAN-FEB 2015 VOL. 5-6

**SCHS Event: Tuesday Jan. 27, 7:00 PM (Social Time, 6:30)**

**Steve Beck and Dave Freeman: NEW Discovery: John Sutter's Amazing Waterworks  
Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento**

The *New Helvetia Diary* (NHD, the daily log book kept at Sutter's Fort) makes several pre-1848 references to the construction of a dam near the Fort. However, the *NHD* does not make any specific references to the purpose of the dam or the reservoir created by a dam. This leaves the purpose and exact location of the dam open to some interesting conjecture.

Sutter's Fort Curator Steve Beck, with the help of graduate student assistant, Jared Jones, has been looking for historical references to the dam and maps that support the existence of the dam and reservoir; the location results have been interesting - if not definitive in any way.

History buff David Freeman, a docent at Ide Adobe State Historic Park, uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS, a computer program used to process location data) to unlock Global Positioning System co-ordinates from information derived from period maps. Some of his discoveries include the ghost towns of Monroeville, Placer City, and Benton City. Notable other discoveries include riverboats, the *California* and the *Plumas*. William B. Ide's ranch south of Red Bluff, and John Bidwell's ferry location. Dave is a member of the American Society for Amateur Archeology, and a columnist for his historical society publication.

Be prepared for some scholarly differences in interpretation as well as methodology. This should be a lively evening! Come early for the best parking and seating and to meet and greet.



Watercolor of Sutter's Fort and Bush's Slough, 1849-1851. Sutter's Fort State Historic Park archives

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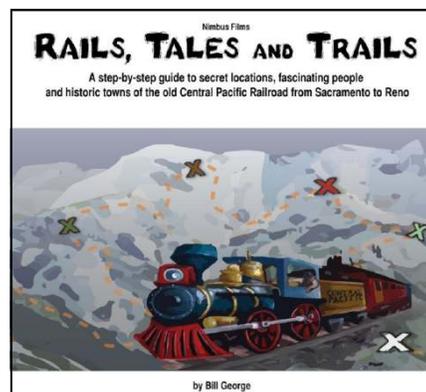
## **Bill George: *The Hidden Wonder of the World: Construction of the Transcontinental Railroad***

**Tuesday, Feb. 23, 7:00 (social time 6:30)**

**Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society Building, 5380 Elvas Ave., Sacramento**

Join members and friends of the Sacramento County Historical Society and see documentary filmmaker and author Bill George's exciting presentation on one of the greatest engineering and construction projects in the history of America, the building of the transcontinental railroad from Sacramento over the Sierra Nevada in the 1860s. Bill will show his award-winning film, *The Hidden Wonder of the World; the Transcontinental Railroad from Sacramento to Donner Summit* that explores this legendary accomplishment.

The film, which received an Award of Excellence in Media from the Sacramento County Historical Society, has aired on Public Television, showing viewers the scenic original rail bed as it climbs over the mighty Sierra Nevada. Interviews with experts and visits to the historic and scenic towns created by the railroad fill out a compelling short film that illustrates this wonder of the world as never seen before. (more; see bottom next page)



## Name This Sacramentan

By Franklin F. Armstrong

Adapted from SCHS *Golden Notes*, Vol. 7-No. 4, June 1961

She was born in Sacramento in the mid-19th century in quite respectable family circumstances. She was destined to make exciting newspaper copy, for among her varied accomplishments were five marriages, many affairs, getting tattooed, cultivating snakes, visiting a harem, and throwing 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 a sojourn in Hawaii, she became good friends with the ruler, King David Kalakaua, who presented her with an island and the name Princess Palaikalani, "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 three, she again visited the Far East. Burma was the locale; by this time she had become a legend, as a result of her earlier "invasion." The king, with the enthusiastic support of our heroine, erected an imposing shrine in her honor—complete with temple bells. In 1942, one year after Madame X died, the shrine was destroyed by a bomb dropped by a Japanese airplane.

A visit to Tibet was rather enlightening. While there, she lived the life an ascetic by fasting and meditating in a tent. During this quiet time a vision was supposed to have appeared before her. This vision, so she related, told her that in the next life she would be a man. The vision also revealed that she would be allowed 12 husbands, and that if she took a 13th, she would die. Although she still had seven husbands to go, she evidently 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 Old City Cemetery. Who is she?

Editor's Note: For some time I have been thinking of adding an interactive quiz to this newsletter. Happily, I recently stumbled across this lively piece by Franklin F. Armstrong, the editor of the Sacramento County Historical Society *Golden Notes* (booklets) in 1961, seven years after SCHS was founded. This short article was included along with various others. I think the quiz may be fairly easy for most of you history buffs, although I have edited out some of the clues I thought were a bit too helpful. Whether or not you solve it (the answer is on page 4, but NO CHEATING) I think you will enjoy reading about this remarkable woman and learn something as well. I look forward to doing more of these. If you would like to create a similar quiz (or just suggest some names) on a famous or infamous person (or someone you can show should be more famous) from Sacramento County's past, please contact me at [editor@sachistoricalsociety.org](mailto:editor@sachistoricalsociety.org).

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February 23, *Hidden Wonder*...continued from Page 1

Bill George produces and markets educational and business films, through his firm, Nimbus Marketing. He has previously held various media positions including serving as News and Special Projects Editor at KCRA-TV, Vice President of Marketing and Communications for the California Trade and Commerce Agency, and as the Global Marketing Manager for the Ford Motor Company. He will have DVDs of his video and print copies of his book available for sale and signing.



## Son of Smith

By Dan Winkelman

What is this? More rain? Take it back, I didn't order this rain. I ordered the Spring Salad with the leaf mix, blue and black berries, capers, and light balsamic vinaigrette. A spring day doesn't cloud over and rain on my canoe. No, no. I did sneak out on the lake a few days ago and managed to make a beaver sighting. Suddenly there was an upwelling in front of my canoe and I saw the beaver's tail surface as he made a quick turn and dove for cover. Amazing that any beavers survived the days of trappers and the habitat destruction that followed. Foraging on Lake Natoma is beaver heaven, when there is not rain!

What would a mountain man like Jedediah Strong Smith do in the rain? Fall back and reconnoiter a plan of action that's what he'd do. No raconteur he! A man for all seasons, a follower of streams, a trapper for the ages, a builder of boats, a modest, devout fur merchant with a penchant for humor. Now there is a distinction with a nuance.



Sketch of J. Smith, 1835, drawn by a friend after Smith died. UOP library

**Orgeat**—just what a leader of men should be. It is no wonder that they named the bike trail along the river after him. He never rode a bike, but he would have wanted one—maybe. How about: he took a boat down the river; that works.

Jedediah Smith came down the American River on April 20, 1827. He made camp for the night at what would become the town of Folsom and set about building a boat. During the ensuing rain and flood stage waters, his men took the craft down the Lower American River much to the surprise and shock of the Maidu populations along the river.

Jedediah Smith was almost scalped by a bear, and had one ear torn nearly off. His men sewed his head and ear back together and he was none the worse for wear. His long straight hair was sufficient to cover the scars.

It was Jedediah Smith who took the news of the

bevy of beavers to be found in California back to Saint Louis. So ensued a great beaver rush to California by mountain men. It was they who discovered the first routes over the Sierra Nevada. Trails later to become rutted by the wagons of gold rush argonauts. We must thank the beaver for being the original impulse for sixteen lane freeways in Los Angeles, Oracle Corporation, iPhones, Space Shuttles, the Golden Gate Bridge, and Avatar. Where would we be without ol' Jed Smith looking for beavers?

So a beaver sighting causes much joy in me today. These furry members of the rodent family are just a wonder with their small dark eyes, long broad tails, and that thick spike-like hair that caused such a commotion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I just wish that they would build a lodge on the lake some day or a dam to rival the works of man. You might say that's exactly what they have done.

**Orgeat?** It's a sweet, almond-flavored syrup used in cocktails or other drinks. Applying that term to Smith is surely a rather obscure way to describe a mountain man. Editor: As mountain men go, Jed Smith did seem to represent a sweeter version.

SCHS Treasurer Dan Winkelman is a retired California State Parks ranger, and a Son of Smith—sort of. He is an avid canoeist whose mind tends to wander to interesting places as he paddles. This essay is adapted from his 2012 book, *Lake Natoma: A Ranger in Search of Walden Pond*. You may inquire about obtaining a copy of his book at [winkdan267@yahoo.com](mailto:winkdan267@yahoo.com).

## Announcements

- ◆ **SCHS NEW message phone number** on page 4.
- ◆ Every so often we receive a surprise bequest through a will or trust from a supporter who passed away but had not told us in advance of their generous decision. While we are grateful in any case, we would love to celebrate your generosity during your lifetime. In addition to thanking you, we'll invite you to join the Sacramento History Heritage Society, the Historical Society's way of honoring you for stepping forward. Your participation encourages others to do the same! Gifts of any size are welcome. For more information, please contact SCHS President, Greg Voelm at [gvoelm@gmail.com](mailto:gvoelm@gmail.com) or [916 944 4218](tel:9169444218).
- ◆ **Board Election ballots** are enclosed, per SCHS bylaws.



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Email: [info@sachistoricalociety.org](mailto:info@sachistoricalociety.org)

*Quiz answer: Aimee Crocker*

## OUT & ABOUT

DATE	TIME	EVENT	PLACE & CONTACT
Saturday Jan. 17	10-5	<b>Sutter's Fort Hands-on History: Trappers, Trades, and Treaties.</b> Learn why trappers were considered "jacks of many trades" and experience how they lived, worked, explored, and traded with local Native Americans. See, handle, and hear about many 19th century items and how they were used.	Sutter's Fort State Historic Park 2701 L St., Sacramento 916-445-4422 <a href="http://suttersfort.org">suttersfort.org</a>
Ongoing thru Jan. 18	11 to 4 Tues-Sun	<b>Extraordinary Collections.</b> The Folsom History Museum's annual exhibit showcasing the assorted, often unique stuff ordinary folks collect. Geodes, vintage bikes, signed rock-n-roll posters, and more.	Folsom History Museum 823 Sutter Street, Folsom 916-985-2707 <a href="http://folsomhistorymuseum.org">folsomhistorymuseum.org</a>
Saturday Feb. 7th	10 to 5 Last entry at 4 PM	<b>Sacramento History Day</b> returns for the 17th year, offering free admission to about 25 local history museums and historic sites. Some sites may have to limit entries to comply with safety regulations. Pick a few sites and spend quality time there.	Sacramento Association of Museums <a href="http://sacmuseums.org/news-events/museum-day">sacmuseums.org/news-events/museum-day</a>
Ongoing thru May 1	Daily 9-5	<b>California Invites the World: 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition</b> Three-room exhibit features seldom seen items from the California State Library, photos and other items from private collections, and rare period films and slide programs.	California State Capitol Building 10th & L St., Sacramento <a href="http://sacramento365.com/event/detail/441832258">sacramento365.com/event/detail/441832258</a>