

Golden Nuggets

January 2009

SCHS Presents

Then and Now: Sacramento
 Historian/Writer William "Bill" Burg

Tuesday, Jan. 27, 7 PM

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



Somewhere in Sacramento, 1931

SAMCC



Sacramento location, circa 1915

SAMCC

Do you recognize where these two photos were taken? You'll find out—and see how these locations look today—if you attend the upcoming member meeting featuring SCHS member and occasional *Golden Nuggets* contributor, Bill Burg. A graduate student in Sacramento State University's Public History program, Burg is the author of *Sacramento's Streetcars*, *Sacramento's Southside Park*, and *Then and Now: Sacramento*, all by Arcadia Publishing, and a regular contributor to *Midtown Monthly Magazine*, writing mostly on local history. Here is Burg's description of his program.

Any good book tells a story, and any good history book needs a thesis. In *Then and Now* I wanted to show how the city grew over time, and the effects of this growth on buildings, neighborhoods and communities. In addition, I wanted the book to serve as a brief introduction to Sacramento history.

How would you select 80 historic photos from a collection of four million? How would you pick the most historically significant sites from a city of nearly 100 square miles? How would you photograph the site of a historic building where no trace of the original building remained? How can you explain

a photo meaningfully in 80 words or less? How can you recreate an aerial photograph without having to rent a plane? In order to create *Then and Now: Sacramento*, questions like these needed answers. At its simplest, the book is a collection of historic photographs compared with what stood on the site in 2008, but my intent was to present the photos within a context. At this month's presentation, I will discuss methods, share primary and secondary source materials, and present some of the history behind *Then and Now: Sacramento* that wouldn't fit into the book.

Bring your *Then and Now* books for signing, or purchase a signed copy at the meeting. Ample free parking is available behind the SSVMS building, located off H St., 1/2 mile north of the intersection of 56th St., which becomes Elvas. Come on out- and bring a friend!

Inside: nomination information and form for the SCHS Annual Awards of Excellence, coming soon.

Member renewals and proposed bylaws revision approval coming to your mailbox this month.

Adventures in the 1853 Sacramento Floods

By Frank A. Leach, excerpted from

Recollections of a Newspaper Man: A Record of Life and Events in California

Contributed by Pat Turse



Rain or shine, January is a time when history-minded Sacramentans occasionally think about those epic nineteenth-century city floods. I happened across the following charming account of a young lad's 1853 flood memories and thought it was worth sharing.

Frank A. Leach, 1846-1929, was born in New York, and at age five was off for California on a steamer with his mother. He lived in Sacramento and attended its earliest schools until the family moved to Napa around 1864. Leach published the Vallejo Chronicle, and then moved to Oakland, where he published the Enquirer newspapers. After 30 years in journalism, he was appointed superintendent of the San Francisco Mint, which he helped save from the fires after the 1906 earthquake. He later went to Washington, D.C., to direct the United States mints for a few years before returning to the East Bay. Now back to the Sacramento rains of 155 years ago.-PT

...My father, who had preceded us [to California] by two years, met us [in San Francisco] and immediately took us to Sacramento, where he was engaged in the business of making and bottling soda water, the pioneer plant of that city. We were soon established in a home of our own. Father had bought a lot on the south side of P Street between Third and Fourth streets and erected a small dwelling, doing a good part of the work himself. That winter the city was visited by a flood which put nearly every part of it under water, and where our house stood the flood was several feet deep. In fact, our house was floated off its foundation.

The rain had fallen in torrents for so many days continuously that a flood seemed inevitable, so father wisely found quarters for us in the loft of a barn, where with our furniture, and hanging of sail cloths around the walls to keep out the wind that otherwise would have come through the cracks, we lived quite comfortably. When the flood was the highest, the water came within two feet of the loft floor. Father had a boat, and boy-like, I certainly enjoyed the situation. The barn was our domicile for the entire winter...As I recollect, the water subsided finally so that father was enabled to get our house upon its foundation again, but we were barely installed when the city was again overflowed. But the water did not come high enough to drive us out of the house this time...

The flood water around our house afforded me more entertainment than I could possibly have got out of the freedom of dry land in its place. We had a boat, and as the water was shallow about the house I was allowed to get into it with the understanding that I was not to loosen it from the moorings. At first it was fine sport, and the length of the play of the "painter" [rope for tying a boat] was a matter of indifference, but after a while I longed for a wider scope of movement...Concluding a little more rope would increase the length of my voyages, I let it out little by little, still keeping my compact not to cast off, until finally and literally I came to the "end of my rope."

I now knew how to paddle to make the boat go in any direction. I had not fallen overboard, as had been expected, so what harm could there be if that painter accidentally became untied? I wouldn't be scared if I drifted away beyond the limits of my past sailing privileges! Why, I would just row back and tie the old boat up according to contact, and no one would be the wiser! I will not take the space to preach the sermon that would be imperative at this point in a Sunday-school book, but give the sequel, which is what you would expect in stories where a moral is the predominating feature.

Just prior to the recurrence of the flood, father had had the lot, about 100 by 150 feet in size, plowed up. When the boat slipped from its moorings, I managed to influence its drifting to the farthest corner of the lot, where the water was deepest, and things unknown to me were supposed to exist. Here in my awkwardness I dropped one of the paddles overboard. The fear of losing the oar, and the loss becoming glaring evidence of violation of my privileges, gave me a moment of agonized



J STREET, SACRAMENTO, ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1853. □

[Published at the UNION Office.]

excitement in which I grabbed for the paddle floating away from the boat and, losing my balance, overboard I went. Now the question in my mind was a graver one: Was death to be the punishment for my offense?

Fortunately, when my feet touched the bottom I stood on top of one of the plowed furrows and was able to keep my mouth out of the water, though scarcely above the surface. Along the west side of the yard was a picket fence. This was the only place of refuge and safety, so I decided to reach the fence, if possible. At the very first step I made, my foot landed in the bottom of the furrow, and down went my head under the water. I had enough presence of mind to know that if I ever expected to reach the fence I should have to do it by stepping from the ridge of one furrow to the other, as they were parallel to the fence. This I succeeded in doing fairly well. Occasionally the lumpy earth crumbled under my weight, and sometimes I would miss the ridge, so I was completely immersed several times before the fence was gained.

Somehow in the mix-up I got hold of the painter and dragged [the boat] along with me. In due course of time I reached the house in as penitent a mood as could be imagined, feeling though that I had [already] received full measure of punishment for my escapade. I guess from my looks and general appearance, my folks thought so too, for I was simply put to bed, and in a few days I was fully recovered, but it was some time before I was privileged to do any more boating.... - Published by Samuel Levinson, San Francisco, 1917

US Geology Survey Scientist Seeks Data

1861-62 rainfall data & anecdotes

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Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
JANUARY 17-18	9 AM to 5 PM	Antique and Die Cast Toy Show Buy, sell or trade. Proceeds go to support the Ag Museum, a 501 (c) 3 organization. Tickets are \$5 for age 13 or older; \$2.50, kids 5-12; under 5, free, and include museum admission	Heidrick Ag Center 1962 Hays Lane Woodland, CA 530-666-9700 www.aghistory.org
FEBRUARY 7 Sat	10 AM to 4 PM All museums open to 5 PM	Eleventh Annual Museum Day Twenty-five Sacramento Area museums will be open free of charge. Special programs and exhibits. Free shuttle busses begin and end at the California Museum, 10th & O, Sacramento.	Sacramento Area museums www.sacmuseums.org (when updated to 2009) or www.sacramento365.com/event/
9 Mon	Mon thru Sat 9 AM to 5 PM Sunday 10 AM to 5 PM	Space: A Journey to Our Future An extraordinary exhibit, which will tour major science centers around the country over four years, gives us a chance to experience our past explorations and future destiny in space.	Aerospace Museum of California 3200 Freedom Park Drive McClellan, CA 916-643-3192 www.aerospacemuseumofcalifornia.org
24 Tues	7 PM	A Very Interesting Talk (confirmation pending) Try the Historical Society message phone line, 916-443-6265, after January 15 (or next month's newsletter) for the Feb. program title.	Sac Sierra Valley Medical Society building 5380 Elvas Avenue Sacramento, CA