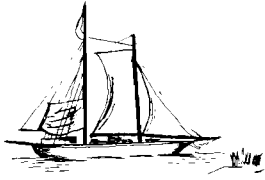
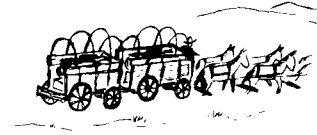


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TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY

BY EARLE E. WILLIAMS

[Continued from the July - September 1973 Issue]

JOHNNIE COX, WASH TRAJERN, JOHN McMULLIN AND OTHERS

Up to a few years ago the authority on the early history of San Joaquin City was William Cox. Until recently he lived on the large family ranch on William Cox Road, just south of Vernalis in Stanislaus County. Now his son, William, Jr., tells the story of his grandfather, Johnnie Cox, a true pioneer of San Joaquin City. For years he drove the stagecoach between Bantas and the Pacheco Pass. From one end of the stage line to the other he knew everything that transpired along the route, and this was where the early history was made on the West Side.

This route, for years simply called the River Road, developed along the west side of the San Joaquin River, keeping to the high ground out (southeast) of Bantas and skirting the tule bottoms. It intersected with the Stockton-San Jose stage route at a point a little less than a half mile north of the present Banta school. At this intersection the Elkhorn Inn and stage station was established, the first structure at the settlement of Bantas. At the time the land between there and the river was heavily wooded, as was most of the land along the west bank of the river through which the road passed, all the way to Hill's Ferry down near the mouth of the Merced River. Between the two points it passed through San Joaquin City and Graysonville. From Hill's Ferry it turned away from the river, toward the southwest, entering the Pacheco Pass where the San Luis Dam is today. The portion of the old road lying in San Joaquin County was renamed Kasson Road, but in Stanislaus County it is still called the River Road.

Down this old road one day in 1849 rode two Mexican War veterans recently discharged from the service, and with their arrival at Imus's Casa Blanca we once more pick up the story of San Joaquin City. These two men were Captain John McMullin and George Washington Trajern, and with them were about a half-dozen other veterans. At Casa Blanca they forded the San Joaquin and headed east along the Stanislaus, bound for the Southern Mines. Their brief visit at, and passage through, the site was destined to change the history of that area.

After a brief try at mining the two men turned their thoughts toward other money-making schemes and the result was their decision to go into the cattle business, buying them in Los Angeles and driving them to the mines where they would be butchered. The men returned to Casa Blanca and from there proceeded south to Los Angeles. In due time the men were back, having driven their herd north over the

Tehachapis and down the valley to the ford at Casa Blanca. Once in the mines the cattle were quickly sold at a handsome profit as the miners were short of meat and long on gold to pay for it.

Back once more at the crossing of the San Joaquin, where the two men had become acquainted with Charles Imus and his family, they realized that this river ford would be essential to their continued operations. Captain McMullin concluded that this would be a good location for their headquarters, so they bought the 640 acres that the Imus family held along the river at Casa Blanca. As the lucrative cattle business continued to grow Captain McMullin and Wash Trajern invested their profits in more land to add to their Casa Blanca acreage, until their holdings approximated 30,000 acres of land lying between the Stanislaus (north side) and San Joaquin (east side) rivers in Castoria Township. Here they engaged in the raising of livestock, even extending their horse-breeding operations to the Diablan range of mountains between Corral Hollow and Del Puerto Canyon (west of Patterson) where the horses seemed to thrive better than down on the plains.

Captain McMullin in particular had had an interesting background before his arrival in California. He had been born in Baltimore, Maryland, in June of 1824, and at the ripe old age of 15 he left home and made his way alone out to Texas where he caught up to and joined a detachment of troops under the command of a military hero of the day, Colonel Jack Hays. For nine years he served under Colonel Hays, fighting Indians, making raids into Mexico, and suffering the usual hardships of army duty on the western frontier. He was captured by Mexican troops during the Mexican-American War and spent two years in Mexico City. He gained his freedom through a prisoner exchange in early 1848, about the same time that gold was discovered at Coloma on the American River.

He had already decided to establish himself in California when news of the gold strike reached Mexico and he proceeded northward via the Mexican overland route through Vera Cruz. A companion on his journey from Mexico was G. W. Trajern, a half-breed Cherokee Indian who had fought with him through the Mexican War. He had been christened George Washington Trajern but was simply known as Wash Trajern.

On a trip to Washington, D.C., Captain McMullin met Miss Eliza Fleming Morgan, a native of Kentucky. The

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CAPTAIN JOHN McMULLIN, pioneer resident of San Joaquin City and large landowner in southern San Joaquin County.

acquaintance culminated in their marriage in her home in Kentucky on June 18, 1857. After a honeymoon trip to White Chapel Springs, Virginia, they came back to San Francisco where he bought a home. After a time she expressed a wish to be where her husband's business interests were, however, so he had Casa Blanca fitted up for her reception. They lived there until the Captain's death in 1868, when she moved back to Kentucky. In the last years before his death McMullin enlarged his holdings along with his partner, Trajern, in the south central part of San Joaquin County, and they also increased their control of the open lands in the coast range hills. This latter area was vast, and it was used primarily as spring and summer pasturage for their ever-increasing numbers of cattle, sheep, and horses. Establishment of this great stock ranch predated those of the Miller and Lux corporation by many years. In addition to his ranching interests, he helped organize the first San Joaquin County fair association and served as its first president. In addition to his real estate holdings around San Joaquin City, he also personally owned the first theatre in Stockton as well as some acreage back in Texas.

Less is known of Trajern's early life, but there is no doubt about his ability as a businessman. Along with the partnership holdings he also acquired thousands of acres of fertile lands north of the Stanislaus on his own. He was a great sportsman, always doing his hunting on horseback with the help of his ever-present pack of great hound-dogs. He took special delight in hunting the wild hogs which then inhabited the river bottom lands. Although described as a hard-liver with a devil-may-care attitude, he was a lovable person who was always actively interested in the general welfare of his friends. The diaries of Edward B. Carrell confirm this analysis of his character. Trajern had charge of the sheep operation for the partnership, and came into frequent contact with Carrell up at Corral Hollow. The McMullin and Trajern roads in southern Castoria Township today serve as a reminder of that particular period of the history of San

Joaquin County and of the successful farming partnership engaged in by these two pioneer settlers.

Upon McMullin's death in 1868 ownership of the Casa Blanca passed to a certain Larry B. Holt who had come to San Joaquin City three years earlier. Then Henry Fiske, a farmer, stock raiser, and ferry operator who had come in 1850, acquired it. Later it became the property of John Ohm, and the Ohms have built two homes in succession since then, the last of which was constructed in 1907. During the time that the family resided in the second home the original home building (Casa Blanca) was used as a bunkhouse for the farm hands.

AN EARLY BURIAL

The riverbanks and sloughs between Casa Blanca and Graysonville near the mouth of the Tuolumne River were prolific breeding grounds for fur-bearing animals. From the time of the Walker expedition in 1833 there had always been trappers working along the river bottom lands. Indeed, the clerk of the expedition (as chronicled earlier) had noted signs of previous white visitors in the area. Certainly the camping place of the Walker expedition was "the end of the Far South" to the Hudson Bay trappers, and the Russians from Fort Ross may have visited it in 1834 or before. At the time McMullin and Trajern settled there ten or twelve trappers had already established their separate camps between Casa Blanca and Grayson's Ferry. Most of these trappers were (as far as trappers are concerned) relatively late comers, a number of them being Mexican War acquaintances of the two men.

On a visit to the cabin of one of these trapper friends one summer day, Trajern found his unfortunate acquaintance dead. Having no relatives or anyone else to make the arrangements for his funeral and disposal of the remains, Trajern notified his partner McMullin and Edward Carrell (both fellow-veterans of the deceased), as well as Nathaniel Greene Patterson (whose name is remembered by Patterson Pass southwest of Tracy and for his services as a wagon train guide during the 1840's). There were some twelve in number, all told, who met and together they decided to give the trapper a full military funeral befitting a veteran of the Mexican War.

The trouble was that there was no church or minister, no undertaker or cemetery in San Joaquin City. The decision was made to transport the deceased to Graysonville, where sufficient facilities were available. They made a coffin of rough boards and loaded it on a wagon drawn by two mules and driven by an old teamster. Driving to the trapper's cabin they performed the sad duties of the undertaker, closing the coffin and loading it on the wagon for the trip to Graysonville.

At that time River Road was of course nothing more than two wagon wheel tracks following closely along the riverbank and running through the majestic oaks. Being a summer day the road was dusty and the air hot and uncomfortable, smoke-filled from the perennial fires which burned among the tules to the north and northwest. The cavalcade of mounted mourners, following behind, traveled two by two, their bandana handkerchiefs covering their mouths and noses for protection from the swirling dust. In spite of the discomfort all was going well until a lone coyote blundered out of the brush and onto the roadway ahead of the wagon. Immediately Wash Trajern's hounds took off after the coyote, chasing him into the underbrush along the edge of the water. Moments later the frightened coyote, closely pursued by the hounds, elected to come out into the open again and tried to find sanctuary from his pursuers by running in under the wagon. This caused the frightened mules to suddenly jolt forward, off and running down the roadway. The runaway team and wagon kept to the road but a short time, veering off to the left and down into the

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bottomland on the edge of the road at this point. Here the wagon overturned, wedging itself between two trees as the terrified mules broke loose and took off into the brush. The mounted veterans, regaining their composure, took after the mules and eventually caught up to them and lassoed them. By the time the wagon had been righted and repaired and the damaged coffin reloaded the sun was down so the men decided to camp on the spot for the night. The entourage proceeded to its destination the following morning and the interment took place at Graysonville as planned.

This was one of the many stories that Johnnie Cox, the pioneer stagecoach driver, liked to recount in his later years at San Joaquin City. Other stories that have come down to us through his family also help give us some insight into the daily life and activities of these riverbank pioneers. He told of the loading of the first boats and barges with cordwood and grain; of how the contractor would sit on the edge of the river dock when the task was done, paying each laborer for his hire out of a sack of gold there on the dock beside him. He told how the wild oats and the filaree grew waist-high out on the plains before the introduction of the farmers' plow, and how great bands of sheep (the "mortgage lifters" of these pioneer settlers) from the Corral Hollow area would move in and cut it down with one pass over the fields.

Another tale concerned a sheepman and meat dealer, a certain Tom Evans by name, who had his principal place of business over at El Nido (The Nest) on the high road -- the French Camp toll road to Stockton. There he maintained corrals for the cattle, pens for the sheep with facilities for dipping them, and his slaughter-house for the supply of fresh meat for Stockton. Tom was a frequent visitor in old San Joaquin City, making the trip on horseback for the purpose of buying sheep and cattle. He had a tent in the tent settlement that had developed down near Durham's Ferry; this he had set up for his convenience and that of his men whenever any had to stay overnight.

On one sheep-buying trip to San Joaquin City Evans had spent most of the day out on the plains with the sheepmen. Tired at the end of the hot summer day, he had stopped at the West Side Saloon for a while. The result was that, when he finally left the establishment last that night, he was a little "the worse for the weather" -- if not thoroughly inebriated. Other patrons helped him to mount his horse, and with a little effort, he was able to stay on until the horse delivered him to the entrance of his tent down by the ferry. Before dismounting to put the horse up for the night he had unfastened the leather pouch of gold that he was in the habit of carrying on the saddle girth and, as he had on previous occasions, gave it a good hefty sling in through the front entrance of the tent.

After he had unsaddled, fed, and put up his horse in a shed he had there for that purpose, Tom Evans repaired to his tent and went right to sleep. When he awoke the next morning he could not find his pouch of gold any place in the tent. It had been heavy with gold and in his frantic search he practically tore the tent to pieces. He then went up to San Joaquin City and accused the saloon keeper and everyone who had been in the place the previous night of robbery, threatening them all with legal action, or worse, if the leather pouch were not returned to him intact.

A few days later some boys playing in the tall grass behind the tent found the pouch of gold. In his drunken condition Evans had evidently slung it with such force that it had gone clear through the tent. It was a pretty chastened and penitent Tom Evans who received his pouch of gold from the citizens of old San Joaquin City on his next buying trip.

FERRY CROSSINGS ALONG THE SAN JOAQUIN

The Doak and Bonsall Ferry (Mossdale "Y") was established in November, 1848, the first one in San Joaquin County. Because it was the first ferry crossing to be



HOME AND FAMILY OF GEORGE W. SUTHERLAND, first bridge tender at Mossdale "Y." Note bridge in the background. The house was located on the east bank of the

San Joaquin River, between the road crossing and the Central Pacific (now Southern Pacific) Railroad crossing.

Courtesy of the Pioneer Museum and Haggin Galleries.

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established along the San Joaquin River it enjoyed a complete monopoly for a time, charging outrageous rates for the service: \$2.00 per person, \$1.00 per head for cattle, and \$8.00 for a wagon, team, and driver. For a time the owners took in several thousand dollars per day. It was not long before competition came along however, with the establishment of three other ferries along the San Joaquin. These were Slocum's, Johnson's (mentioned previously), and the Titus-Manly Ferry at San Joaquin City. Of the three, only Johnson's Ferry was ever any real threat to the Doak and Bonsall operation due to its use by the Stockton-San Jose stagecoach lines.

Grayson's Ferry on the San Joaquin was founded by A. J. Grayson in 1850, approximately eight miles above (south of) the mouth of the Tuolumne River. Following the relatively short-lived gold rush period little growth occurred at Grayson's but the ferry remained in operation until the development of grain farming created a "boom" for the settlement. The building of the Southern Pacific Railroad along the West Side in the middle 1880's brought an end to Grayson's prosperity once more, but the settlement has survived down to the present time. In 1893 a bridge replaced the ferry. In turn the first bridge was replaced by a second one, as noted in the following article in the *Stockton Record* of December 26, 1961:

This bridge [first one] was replaced in 1961 at the age of 68 years -- it having been built and completed April 10, 1893. It was one of the last remaining structures which flourished when the San Joaquin River was the scene of riverboat traffic. This old bridge was on the old San Joaquin river channel near Grayson. Heavy floods in the 1890's and again in 1911 caused a break-through of Laird Slough to the east, and the new bridge will be constructed

there. A smaller bridge will replace the San Joaquin river bridge, as there is some flow in the old channel at times of high floods.

At the time the first bridge was opened river traffic was still very heavy on the San Joaquin, extending as far south as Firebaugh. Many thousands of tons of grain were hauled by river steamers and barges each year down the San Joaquin. Coming up the river these boats brought supplies to the settlers and scattered farm families on the plains.

Durham Ferry (originally Titus and Manly's Ferry) was established in the fall of 1849 to accommodate the traffic coming down out of Corral Hollow and heading for the Sierra Nevada. Although some preferred crossing at the Doak and Bonsall Ferry nine miles downriver, the majority of argonauts heading for the Southern Mines took the wagon road which turned sharply southeast out of Corral Hollow and followed the old Spanish road (El Camino Viejo) as far as Hospital Creek. At this point they turned east and headed for Durham Ferry. This was the favored route in winter particularly because it followed high ground with a gravel base the whole way.

This ferry was located about a quarter mile from San Joaquin City, at the site of the present Airport Way bridge over the San Joaquin. The Doak and Bonsall Ferry and the Weston and Staples' Ferry, on the Mokelumne between Stockton and Sacramento, were the first and second established in the county, and Durham Ferry was the third. If the yearly license fees assessed to the river ferries in June of 1850 can be taken as criteria, these three were first, third, and fourth in importance in San Joaquin County. Knight's Ferry on the Stanislaus River, which was in San Joaquin County at that time, was second in importance:

Doak and Bonsall's Ferry	\$500.00
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SITE OF THE DURHAM FERRY CROSSING on the San Joaquin River at San Joaquin City. This

view looks eastward alongside the present Airport Way bridge.

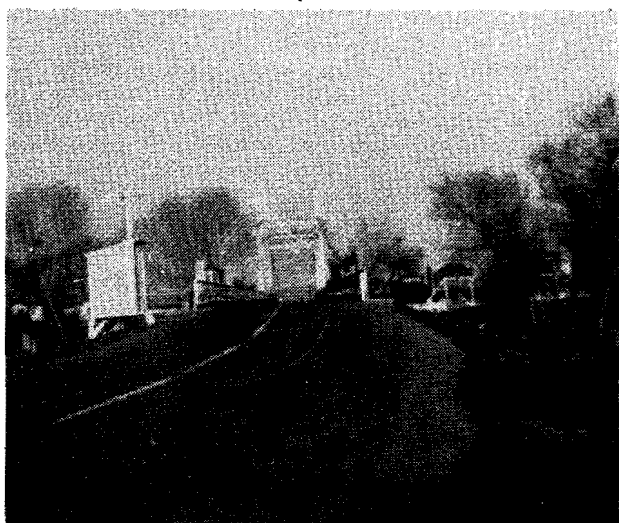
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Knights Ferry (Dent, Vantine & Co.) on the Stanislaus River	300.00
Ferry at San Joaquin City, San Joaquin River	250.00
Weston and Staples' Ferry, Mokelumne River	250.00 ¹

There were twelve ferries operating in the county at that time and a thirteenth, that of James Boland at Stanislaus City (on the Stanislaus River), was authorized in the same month.

The first operators of Durham's Ferry were two men named Titus and Manly. A little tent, and later a house and store, were erected on the north side of the west approach to the ferry, at the intersection of River Road (now Kasson Road) and Durham Ferry (now Airport Way) Road. These served as living quarters for the ferry tender and his family and sleeping quarters for travelers. The ferry tender also carried a small stock of groceries, liquors, tobacco, and some mining implements. The latter items were often received in trade for ferry rides from luckless miners returning from the Mother Lode. These were then re-sold to those going to the mines. The ferry and the road it served took their name from the second operator of the facilities. Years later the ferry came into the possession of one of the largest landholders of the area, Henry Fisk, Sr., who owned it until the County replaced it with a steel bridge in 1902. The last ferry operator was John A. Rathjen, Sr., who farmed for many years between Bantas and San Joaquin City after his arrival from Germany in 1869.

This first bridge was built by the Clarke and Henry Construction Company of Stockton and John Ohm, who came to San Joaquin City in 1896, took charge of opening and



ORIGINAL DURHAM FERRY BRIDGE, constructed in 1902 and replaced by the present bridge in 1966. Note the steel super-structure which made it possible to open the bridge for passing boats.

Courtesy of the author.

closing the bridge whenever river boats passed. In 1966 this narrow steel structure was replaced by the present, modern structure which was constructed just a few feet to the north of the original one. The approaches on both sides were consequently re-aligned slightly, and widened. The year before the name of the road had been changed to Airport Way east of the bridge to match the name given to Sharpes Lane and Ophir Street in Stockton. From Kasson Road westward the road continues to bear its original name.

THE RISE AND FALL OF SAN JOAQUIN CITY

San Joaquin City actually developed pretty much all along the west bank of the San Joaquin River from Durham's Ferry

south to where Greenwood Road runs into Kasson (River) Road just above the Stanislaus County line. It was at this lowest point that Captain Imus had located his original log cabin. The earliest maps of San Joaquin County show Greenwood Road extending east beyond Kasson Road, right up to the river bank, with the location of the Imus structure marked. The *Stockton Weekly Times* began publication on March 16, 1850, and from time to time reported the news of San Joaquin City. On April 6, 1850, it published the returns for the first election held in the new settlement; J. Van Camp was elected Justice of the Peace. The April 27, 1850 issue of the *Times* noted the visit of a steamer, the *Georgina*, to San Joaquin City, and about a week later (May 4) it mentioned that the settlement then consisted of about six wooden houses plus a number of tents.²

Following John McMullin's death in 1868 Imus's Casa Blanca home was bought, along with a large acreage, by Larry B. Holt. He had come to California in 1859 and to San Joaquin City in 1865. At one time he owned a block of land extending all the way from the Gumtree Ranch to Blewett Road in Stanislaus County (the intake canal of the Banta-Carbona Irrigation District is on the Gumtree Ranch). He sold much of this land to George M. Kasson and Louie Gerlach,³ but in 1879 he still owned 1825 acres. It was during the time that Holt owned the land, in 1869, that streets were actually laid out and lots were offered for sale in San Joaquin City. More about this later.

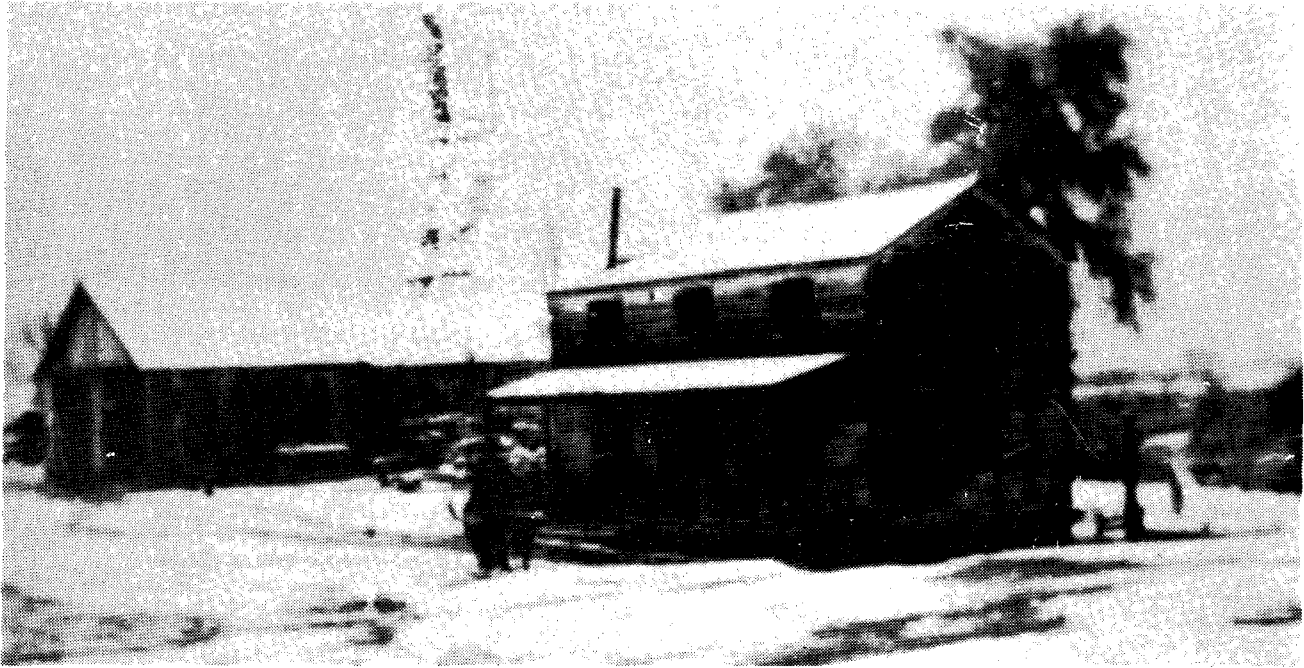
Holt and his wife tore down Imus's Casa Blanca and used the timbers and siding, along with other lumber brought around the Horn and delivered to San Joaquin City in a sailing schooner, in building a new home under the large oaks close to the river. This house was put together with wooden pegs and square nails made of wrought iron. Later it was acquired by H. Fiske,⁴ and still later by the John Ohm family. Ohm built a new home after living in Holt's Casa Blanca for a while, and at that time the latter was converted into living quarters for the ranch hands working on the Ohm ranch. The structure was finally torn down, along with a number of other ranch buildings originally built by Holt, as well as some of the later business buildings, and much of the lumber was used to build barns and sheds on the Ohm property.

John Ohm and his brother Jacob had purchased approximately 1,200 acres of the Holt property about the turn of the century. This block of land lies south of the section line that passes through the site of San Joaquin City, and it is presently owned by the descendants of these two brothers.

The Holt property lying north of the section line, and extending north as far as the Durham Ferry Road, was purchased by Henry C. Fisk, Sr., in the 1890's. A native of Hamburg, Germany, Fisk came to the United States in 1868 with his sister Cecelia and to San Joaquin City in 1891. Fisk married Rebecca Von Bremen, a native of Bremen, Germany, and his sister Cecelia married Larry B. Holt. Fisk worked for his sister's husband for some time, finally acquiring 1100 acres of the Holt property.⁵ Their first child was Henry C. Fisk, Jr., who with his son Harry are the present owners of the Fisk ranch. Barns and sheds on this ranch were constructed with timbers as well as one-inch thick redwood siding also taken from pioneer San Joaquin City buildings.

The establishment of a post office in July, 1851, helped assure the continued development of the new settlement, and by this time several stage coach lines were running daily coaches through the bustling little city. Ernest C. Schnabel was born on his father's ranch in the mouth of Hospital Canyon (southwest of Vernalis) and like his father spent a life-time in and around the San Joaquin City area. Both knew much of the early history of the area. According to his father, at the height of its development in the late 1860's and early

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ORIGINAL LARRY B. HOLT HOME near the west bank of the San Joaquin River. At the time of its construction (about 1870) Holt dismantled the Casa Blanca which Captain Imus had built and he used that lumber in building the new

1870's. San Joaquin City had between 1,000 and 1,400 inhabitants. It had almost a dozen saloons, a half-dozen stores, a stage station, several livery stables, blacksmith shops and barber shops, a bakery and a laundry, three hotels, and a church. The latter was the San Joaquin Plains Baptist Church, organized in 1869 by the Reverend H. M. Hamilton. A

structure. Later the two-story building saw service as a bunkhouse for the men employed on the Ohm ranch. This photograph was probably taken in the early 1930's. Note the snow on the ground.

Courtesy of the author.

cemetery was established adjacent to the church at the same time. The church and cemetery were situated on the east side of River (Kasson) Road, some distance south of the Ohm ranch home and buildings, and close to the river. Years later high waters of the river cut away the back portion of the cemetery. After its abandonment vandals began the



THE DREYER HOTEL AND SALOON at San Joaquin City. Seated at the far right on the steps of the porch (in white) is Ana Dreyer, sister to Charlie Dreyer who operated the business. Ana married Herman Hilken in 1894 in San Francisco. In keeping with tradition they came back to their home town for the wedding reception and dance - both of

which were held in the dance hall above the livery stable. Ana was the mother of Bertha and Josie Hilken. Bertha married A. J. (Tom) Rhodes. Their two children are Earl Rhodes and Mrs. Jean Niblett. The man with his right hand on his hip is John Ohm, another pioneer settler at San Joaquin City.

Courtesy of the author.

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A 1962 PHOTOGRAPH of all that remained of the San Joaquin City cemetery at that time. Note the river channel immediately behind the post and broken headstone. The river washed away the back portion of the cemetery years ago, burying a number of headstones under tons of soil.

Courtesy of the author.



ONE DECADE LATER. A 1973 photograph of the same site, but from a different angle. All traces of the cemetery are now gone. Only the solitary post remains to mark the general area.

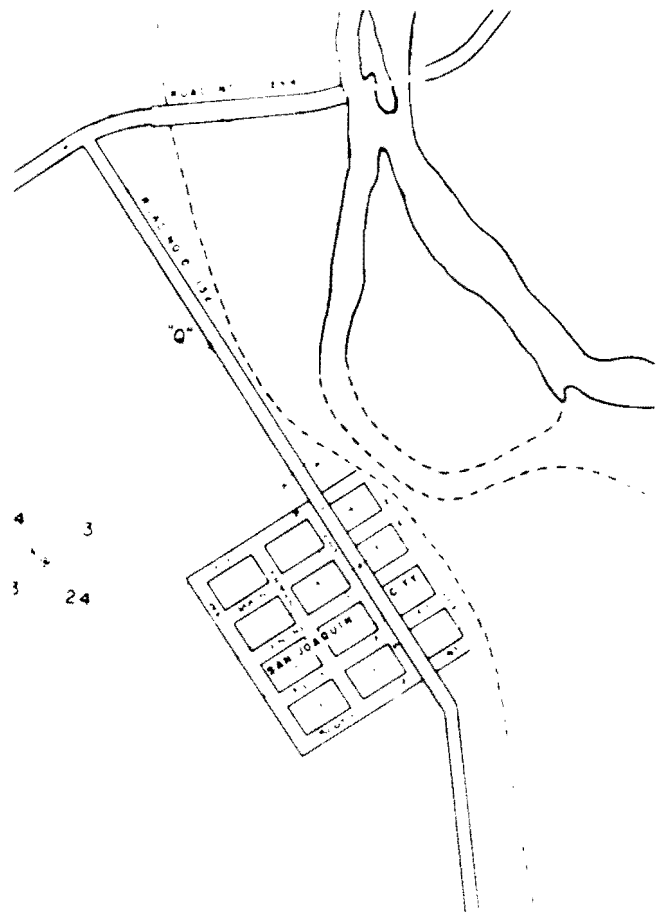
systematic destruction of the remaining markers. Today nothing remains to mark the final resting place of many of the community's earliest residents.

Schnabel's description of San Joaquin City has been substantially corroborated by the descendents of other pioneer residents of the area, including Henry C. Fisk, Jr., Mrs. A. J. (Tom) Rhodes, daughter of Anna Dreyer Hilken who grew up in San Joaquin City, and the late Mrs. Henry C. (Lillian) Ohm.

In 1869 the bustling city was laid out in a perfect square of twelve hundred feet. (Of course by this time many people had already built homes and business buildings outside of this area.) Within the square were twelve city blocks, each 200 by 300 feet. "Durham's Levee," along the San Joaquin river, served as the east boundary as well as the boat docking area. The streets were all eighty feet wide, and all parallel or at right angles to each other. It is interesting to note, however, that although the Mount Diablo base line had already been established by the Whitney Geological Survey team, the city seems to have been laid out in relation to the old Greenwood Road instead.

The streets running parallel to Greenwood Road were, from north to south, North, Main, Centre, Ellis, and South streets. The streets parallel to Kasson Road, from west to east, were West, Sherman, and Front (then River Road and now Kasson Road) streets. To the east of Front Street lay Durham's Levee with its row of oak trees that served as anchors for the mooring lines of the river boats.

Sherman Street was named for William Tecumseh Sherman of Civil War fame and one of the most famous military leaders in American history. Ellis Street was named after the new town of Ellis Station on the Central Pacific Railroad line three miles west of the present city of Tracy. Ellis received a sudden boost soon after its founding when most of the residents of Wickland on the Old River moved to the new railroad town, taking many of their buildings with them. By November of 1870 this new town contained some forty-five or fifty buildings (not counting the outhouses!) of all descriptions, including two hotels, two stores, an Odd Fellows Hall, stables, a blacksmith shop, warehouses, saloons, and a large teaming company. For a while it looked as though Ellis might become the largest city in the area, but when the Tracy site was made the junction point of several rail lines by the Central Pacific in 1878 the inhabitants of Ellis picked up their buildings and moved to Tracy.



MAP OF SAN JOAQUIN CITY AREA showing the streets as laid out in 1869. This is a relatively modern county road map. Note the changes that have occurred in the San Joaquin River channel. For years barges and steamboats docked all along Durham's Levee - thanks to the work of the government dredges. Army engineers state that Ulysses S. Grant once operated one of these dredges on the San Joaquin, and it is interesting to note that an existing San Joaquin City Hotel register does contain his signature. Courtesy of the author.

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Near the intersection of Greenwood and River roads, on the south end of San Joaquin City, there was in the early days a huge wooden sign in the shape of an inverted horseshoe, its points stuck in the ground, and arched across its top in black letters three feet high, the greeting: "WELCOME TO SAN JOAQUIN CITY." The sign faced the southwest and remained there until about 1918.

San Joaquin City was an important shipping point for the thousands of tons of grain that made its way to Stockton and San Francisco from the big grain farms of the area, but with the coming of the Southern Pacific Railroad down the West Side (from Tracy to Fresno) in 1887 the city was destined never to play a leading role in the further development of the West Side Plains. As in other parts of California, having the railroad bypass a settlement was the same as the kiss of death. The next year the postoffice was transferred from San Joaquin City to a new settlement along the railroad just a few miles to the west: Vernalis.

The name Vernalis was coined from the given names of two San Joaquin City belles of that day -- daughters, incidentally, of two ranchers "progressive" enough to give the Southern Pacific the right-of-way through their lands. They were

Verna Carpenter and Alice Hamilton.

Coupled with the coming of the railroad down the West Side of the valley was the growing navigation problem on the San Joaquin. Changes in the river channel as well as the diminishing amount of water (due to the introduction of irrigation) made it more and more difficult for boats to make their way up to San Joaquin City. In time its reason for being gradually disappeared: no longer were miners rushing through on their way to the Mother Lode; no longer were the boats able to come up to pick up their cargoes of grain; no longer was the old River Road essential for transportation and communication as it had been for nearly 50 years.

When Henry Fisk took title to the north half of the San Joaquin City site in the 1890's he began the process of clearing the land titles on many of the empty lots. The Ohms did the same thing with their south half of the site. Gradually the buildings all disappeared and the land once more was farmed. The West Side Hotel and Saloon and a few other scattered buildings stood deserted until after World War I, when they finally fell prey to the ravages of time and the wreckers.

(To Be Continued in Next Issue)

EDITOR'S NOTES:

1 Frank T. Gilbert, **History of San Joaquin County, California** (Oakland: Thompson and West, 1879), p. 28.

2 The **Georgina** (also spelled **Georgiana**) visited San Joaquin City, Grayson, and Tuolumne City (spelled **Toalome** and **Toualome**) for the first time about the twenty-fifth of April, 1850, judging from the news article dated the 27th. On the 24th the **Times** ran an advertisement for the **Georgina**, noting that it was a "new and fine passenger steamer" and that it "will run regularly during the season of high water" on a semiweekly schedule. The May 4th issue of the **Times** described the **Georgina's** maiden trip up the San Joaquin and the Tuolumne rivers and its stops at San Joaquin City, Grayson, and Tuolumne City.

3 George M. Kasson, for whom Kasson Road (formerly River Road) was named, had come to California during the Gold Rush. After spending approximately 18 months in the Placerville area he returned to his Connecticut home. Soon after he came back to California and began ranching along the Merced River. From there he moved south to Fresno County, where he engaged in the sheep business for a number of years. In 1868 he came to San Joaquin City, finally buying some 5,200 acres of land north of San Joaquin City and west of the river that Holt had recently purchased as part of a bigger parcel.

Louis Gerlach, the other purchaser of Holt property, also acquired a sizable parcel west of the river about this time, and he became one of the wealthiest men in San Joaquin County. He eventually sold this property in

order to be able to devote more time to his banking business in Stockton and his 30,000-acre cattle ranching operation in Nevada. Gerlach, Nevada, on the route of the Western Pacific Railroad, was founded by him and later named for him. The San Joaquin River Club subdivision (west of the river and immediately north of Airport Way) is now located on the southeastern corner of the old Gerlach ranch.

4 See footnote number 5.

5 An H. Fiske (not to be confused with Henry C. Fisk, Sr., whose sister Cecelia was married to Larry B. Holt) appears in the story of San Joaquin City, but rather elusively. According to Thompson and West (**History of San Joaquin County, California**) he arrived in San Joaquin County in 1850 and in 1879 gave his address as San Joaquin City and listed ownership of 2,000 acres of land in Tulare Township. It is not clear whether this was originally a part of the Holt property or not, but according to Earle Williams Fiske had married Larry Holt's sister. He was apparently connected with Durham at one time in the operation of the ferry at San Joaquin City. Larry Holt died in May of 1889, and evidently left all of his property to his widow, Cecelia. (Note the 1895 county map in the previous issue [Vol. IX, No. 2, April-June, 1973] of the **Historian**. Mrs. Holt is listed as the owner of a huge block of land extending from the Durham Ferry crossing south to Greenwood Road, and southwestward almost to the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The 1905 county map - same issue of the **Historian** - reflects the change in ownership from Holt to Fisk and Ohm.) Mrs. Holt died in 1901.

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