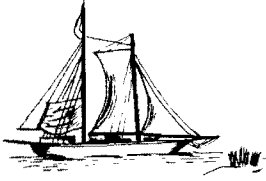


# SAN JOAQUIN HISTORIAN



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## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY

By EARLE E. WILLIAMS

[Continued from the October-December 1973 Issue]

### GROWING AND MARKETING WHEAT AND BARLEY

Grain growing along the west side of the San Joaquin started in a small way about 1853. The first seeding was done by hand. The farmer would strap half a sack of seed on his back and then walk across the field, broadcasting by hand. One sack of seed would last half a day and sow ten acres or more of the rich virgin soil. A light harrowing would complete the job.

The first wheat was grown for home consumption only, there being no way to ship it to market. The early settlers were forced to travel long distances, in fact, just to get their grain ground into flour. John A. Rathjen of Tracy tells how his father even in the late 1860's and early 1870's would load a wagon with wheat for their own use and haul it all the way to Knight's Ferry, near the eastern boundary line of Stanislaus County, where Captain Dent had a grist mill. The trip over the Stanislaus River Road would take a week or more, what with waiting for the wheat to be ground into flour.

Inauspicious as was this small beginning in the early 1850's, farmers around San Joaquin City soon realized the potential that grain farming might hold for them. The land was relatively cheap and productive. There was plenty of rainfall for dry farming and the gentle slope of the land prevented flooding in years of heavy rainfall. But the lack of a ready local market slowed the development of large-scale farming operations, and although a world market was just beginning to develop for barley for the production of German and Austrian beer, the river channels from Stockton to San Joaquin City at this time were in a deplorable condition. River barge service to the young settlement was out of the question because of a lack of levees to contain the river. At times of high flood the bottom lands were a vast lake and there was no clearly-defined deep water channel. When the river was low, on the other hand, snags and sand bars in the channels made navigation dangerous and uncertain, if not impossible.

In 1857 one solution to the dilemma was found in the establishment of a boat landing on the Old River about a half-mile from where Bethany is located today. This was Mohr's Landing, and badly needed lumber, equipment, and supplies for the ranchers began to come in through this point. It was at the same time that Edward Carrell and John O'Brien were developing their coal mines in Corral Hollow to satisfy San Francisco's growing demand for coal. A route

between the mines and the landing was developed, and some 1,800 tons of coal were actually hauled by wagon and loaded onto the barges between 1857 and 1861. This early landing facility had the distinction of being the first river shipping point to be established on any of the inland waterways which fed into San Francisco Bay. Because the landing and the waterways leading to it were always on tidewater there was no uncertainty in making shipments at any time of the year, a condition that would have been impossible at that time at San Joaquin City.

The first grain was hauled from San Joaquin City to the Landing by ox-team and wagon. Soon the oxen became too few and too slow to handle the growing tonnage of grain being produced on the San Joaquin Plains, and horses and mules came to be used instead. In time when harvest season began each year the wagon road between San Joaquin City and Mohr's Landing was choked with eight-horse teams drawing double wagons loaded with barley or wheat. This was before the establishment of Bantas, and the Elk Horn Inn served as the "half-way" house along the old River Road to Mohr's Landing.

### SNAGBOATS AND THE MOSQUITO FLEET

Coincident to and concurrent with the early development of Stockton as a hub city supplying the needs of the Sierra Nevada mining region by mule and horse-drawn freighting wagons was the creation and development of the famous "Mosquito Fleet" of paddlewheel river steamers. In the winters, after the heavy rains came, the roads leading out of Stockton became impassable bogs and all traffic stopped, while goods brought in by the Stockton Channel boats piled up on the docks and in the warehouses. During this time few of the boats made their way up the San Joaquin River as far as San Joaquin City for oak wood to feed the hungry fires of the cold and muddy city of Stockton. Only the most daring captain or river boat pilot would chance the trip because of the many obstructions in the upper river channels.

A paternalistic federal government finally came to the rescue with the assignment of the United States snagboat Marion to the upper river channels. She went to work clearing out the sunken stumps and tree trunks and plotting out the deep water channels for the river pilots.

## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)

It was a great day when she got the channel cleared as far upriver as San Joaquin City. Her arrival had been anticipated and many hundreds of tons of grain and many hundreds of cords of oak wood were piled high on the river bank at the landing, and wagons were busy hauling in more from the West Side Plains. The Mosquito Fleet of little river boats had followed closely in the wake of *Marion*, and they went to work. After unloading supplies for San Joaquin City they loaded the grain and the wood, and soon the little paddlewheelers were on their way down the river to Stockton where their arrival was to be the signal for flag waving, whistle blowing, and joyous civic oratory.

The *Marion* continued her good work up the river channel, pulling up snags and depositing them on the river bank, and when she came to the Stanislaus she cleared out the lower channels. She did the same when she came to the Tuolumne and then continued her work up the San Joaquin as far as Firebaugh.

Landings and docks were established at all the river towns, and places in between, and the residents went to work cutting and cording oak wood for the Mosquito Fleet. Because the oaks out on the plains along River Road west of the San Joaquin were of the best and soundest quality, and more accessible, they were the first to fall to the strokes of the woodcutter's axe.

It was not long before this great belt of gnarled oak trees that once extended far into the West Side Plains was no more. Today we have only the descriptions of this great grove from the accounts of pathfinders and trailblazers like Joseph R. Walker, Rev. Walter Colton, William H. Brewer and others who delightedly marveled at this pleasing feature of an otherwise drab and dreary landscape. Future generations will be eternally grateful that they took the trouble to describe their feelings on seeing these trees.

So it was that years before the coming of the railroads the great fertile plains of the West Side were opened up to the wood cutter, the dry farmer, the cattleman, and the businessman of the river towns. The Stockton Mosquito Fleet—paddlewheelers, sidewheelers, sternwheelers, sailing schooners, sloops and barges—made this possible in the wake of the *Marion*.

The heavy river traffic continued for years even after the coming of the railroads, just as the teaming continued after the coming of the river boats. Every spring, on the ebb of the winter floods, the *Marion* would start up the river clearing out and plotting the new river channels, for the floods would change them every year; and the Mosquito Fleet would go to work on the commerce of the rivers and the delta. Thousands of tons of grain and thousands of cords of oak wood were hauled down the river each year to Stockton and the Bay Area.

Many of the boats of the Mosquito Fleet were built and launched in Stockton. For the most part they were little steamers, about seventy-five feet long, shallow draft, round bottoms, sidewheelers and sternwheelers, with a laden capacity of forty to fifty tons.

The heavy flood of 1911 proved to be the final blow to the hopes and aspirations of San Joaquin City. Rains (and Sierra snows) were unusually heavy during the winter season of 1910-11, and when spring came the San Joaquin simply could not carry the run-off. An unusually high-tide, combined with the heavy flow in all the rivers feeding into the San Joaquin, caused a number of breaks along its lower course, as well as along the Stanislaus and the Tuolumne. The end result was the creation of new channels and hence new flow patterns along all three rivers. It was then no longer practical to try to keep the original channels navigable except in times of heavy water flow. This virtually brought an end to the

colorful era of the Mosquito Fleet serving San Joaquin City and her sister communities up the river; shipping from these river-bank "landings" gradually dropped off to nothing although an occasional steamer continued to appear in San Joaquin City until as late as 1922 when the river ran unusually high.

### THE GREAT SHEEP DRIVES

Beginning in 1870 Edward B. Carrell of Corral Hollow mentioned in his diaries the great sheep drives of the Bailey and Carpenter partnership between Corral Hollow and Linden, where their horses, cattle, and sheep ranches were located. These drives were by way of the Durham Ferry Road to Kasson Lake, where they made camp and watered the sheep before crossing them over on the Durham Ferry.

In the late fall sheep would be driven over from Linden to take advantage of Corral Hollow's high ground for lambing, and the tender, green feed of early spring. In the late spring, after the lambing and the first shearing of wool, and when the green grass was getting scarce, the great sheep drives would begin from Corral Hollow to the East Side, by way of the Durham Ferry Road and the ferry crossing.

The firm of Bailey and Carpenter was only one of the many sheep companies that participated in these drives. They were the largest, though, and were well financed. They even had special agreements with the railroad which gave them exclusive control over every odd-numbered section of the sheep range in Corral Hollow. They had their own armed men riding these railroad sections, with full authority to guard against the encroachment of other sheep men on their feeding grounds.

Every spring before leaving Corral Hollow the firm would buy flocks of sheep from the numerous small sheepmen in the area and add these to their own so that there were some times more than twenty thousand sheep in a single annual drive. Each herder, with his dogs and sheep wagon, had charge of fifteen to eighteen hundred sheep and a few goats for leaders, as this was the largest number that the ferry at San Joaquin City could handle in a day. Every season a bargain would be made with the owner of the ferry, a charge of 4 to 5 cents per head of sheep being the price generally agreed upon.

Of special interest to the writer of these *Tales of Old San Joaquin City* is the fact that Charles Kimball Bailey (of Bailey and Carpenter) was married to Mary E. Belknap at Mokelumne Hill on January 8, 1863. She was an aunt of the writer. She was born near St. Louis, Missouri, on March 4, 1846, the daughter of James D. and Rachel (Rhoads) Belknap, and four years later they came to California by the overland trail.

### THE NEW JERUSALEM SCHOOL

The New Jerusalem School, opened about 1877 on a one-acre plot of ground on the northeast corner of the intersection of Durham Ferry and Koster roads, served the Vernalis-San Joaquin City area. Henry Ebe, pioneer settler and large landholder, had donated the land in 1874, and served as one of its first trustees. The Ebes, natives of Germany, had brought the Dunkard faith with them from the old country, and at the first meeting of the school board he gave the name New Jerusalem to the school. Some say this was to please his wife, who was very religious and God-fearing.

According to the county superintendent's annual report for June 30, 1878, the school had an enrollment at that time of thirty-eight students: twenty-one boys and seventeen girls. The average cost per student for the school year was given as

## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)



**MR. HENRY EBE**, pioneer rancher along Durham Ferry Road. Mr. Ebe donated approximately an acre on the corner of Durham Ferry Road and Koster Road for use as a school site. All eleven of the Ebe children attended the New Jerusalem School which was opened on this site in 1877.

*Courtesy of the author.*

\$17.51. There were also in the district at that time fourteen children under the school age of five. Mrs. Edward Reynolds was the first and only teacher employed by the district at that time, received a salary of \$75.00 per month, and boarded with the Ebe family.

Through the years, following the tenure of Mrs. Reynolds,



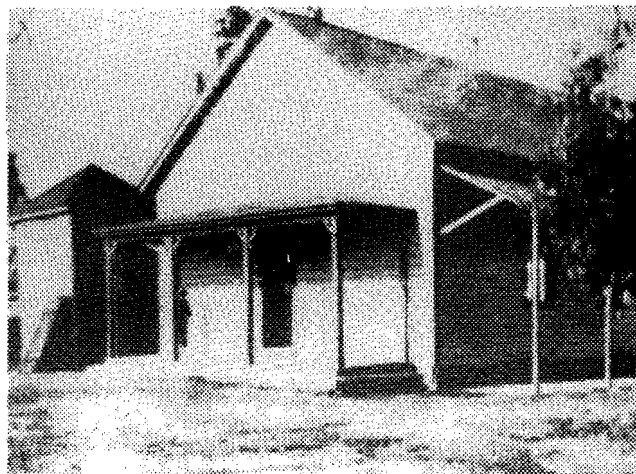
**FIRST TEACHER** at New Jerusalem School, Mrs. Edward Reynolds.

*Courtesy of the author.*

female teachers generally lived and boarded with families near the school. Male teachers drove to school each day in horse and cart, or rode horseback. There was a small shed on the school grounds for the horse, with hay and barley provided.

In 1910, when the writer went to school there, the enrollment was still about the same as it had been in 1878. The teacher was Miss Elsie Smith. One thing she taught was that when one was writing in the third person he should never revert to the first person singular. How to avoid this must have been one of her lessons for the seventh grade and this writer never did acquire this knowledge—because when he finished the sixth grade he was promoted directly to the eighth grade, there being no other pupils for the seventh grade that school term! So if the writer reverts to the first person now and then the reader can blame Miss Elsie Smith!

I remember her name because of the shotgun I owned when I was her pupil. It was an L. C. Smith shotgun, a double-barreled, twelve-gauge, hammerless model that I used in hunting ducks and geese at San Joaquin City and out on the plains west of there with the other boys of the New Jerusalem School. The stock of the shotgun had been broken and I had fashioned another from a block of eucalyptus wood, sawing and drawing it into shape and then polishing it with broken glass to a mirror-like finish. I was very proud of that shotgun, loading my own shotgun shells for it, using smokeless powder. There were few amusements on the school grounds and, during recess, I learned from the other children much of the history and lore of old San Joaquin City—just as they got it from their parents and grandparents. With other boys during these three school years, 1910-1913, when school was not in session, I netted shad at the boat landing down at San Joaquin City, fished for catfish in Sturgeon Bend, and speared salmon at the fence George Williams had built across the river bar in front of his old camp below Sturgeon Bend. Looking back over sixty years I realize now that the things I remember most are those things which I learned outside—rather than inside—the classroom.



**THE NEW JERUSALEM SCHOOL** on Durham Ferry Road just as it was in the fall of 1910 when the author entered school there. At that time Mr. Williams lived on the Jake Ebe ranch a half-mile south of the school site. Jake was one of Henry Ebe's sons.

*Courtesy of the author.*

The quarter section of land where the school stood was "hog wallow and alkali sink" back in those days, which probably was the reason why old Henry Ebe donated the corner acre of it to the people as a school site. The winter rains would fill up the "wallow" and stay there until the

## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)



**ANOTHER EARLY VIEW** of the first New Jerusalem School. Note the letters missing from the word **District** on the front of the building above the porch. Date and occasion of the photograph unknown.

Courtesy of the author.

water evaporated in the spring, leaving heavy coatings of alkali so that nothing much would grow there. In the fall, after the first rains came, the boys from school would dig holes there and set out decoys and the ducks (and geese) would come in there literally by the thousands. Often we would take our shotguns to school and hide them in the barn until after school let out, when we would go hunting. The Henke Ranch, a half-mile east of the school, had a pen with as many as 200 ducks per season in it. These were the ones we had "winged" but not killed.

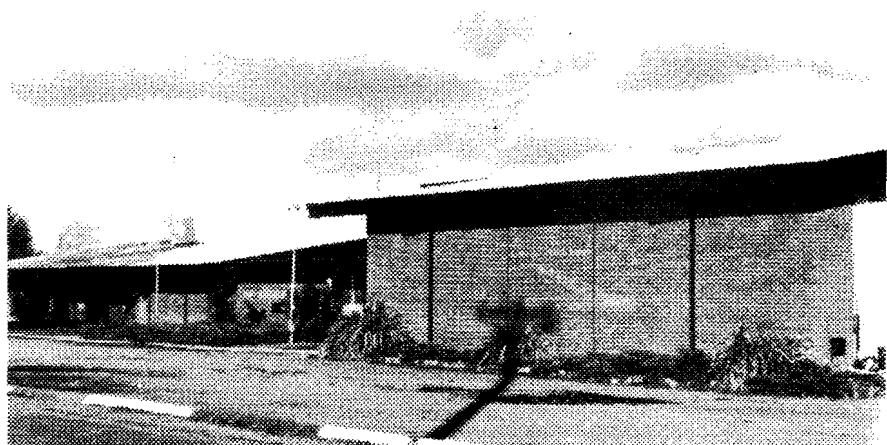
The original wooden school building was moved west on Durham Ferry Road, across (west of) Highway 33 onto the William Riecks ranch in 1927 and a new brick building was constructed on the same site. William Riecks, sheriff of San Joaquin County from 1911 to 1930 (more about this later) used the abandoned school as a ranch house. Later the property

changed hands, and the structure was dismantled just last year.

The new brick schoolhouse served well for many years, but due to the continued growth and development in the New Jerusalem School District after World War II a separate wing, facing Durham Ferry Road and lying east of the existing school, was constructed in 1957. This included two classrooms and restrooms. Then again four years later more space was needed, and two additional classrooms were added to this wing.

In 1966 the brick building was torn down to make way for the construction of a new building. This section of the total school plant, housing four classrooms, offices, library and an auditorium, was dedicated on Feb. 24, 1968, by the Native Sons of the Golden West. The auditorium was appropriately

**VIEW FROM KOSTER ROAD** of the latest addition to the New Jerusalem School, consisting of several classrooms, an administration section, a library, and the Ekenberg Auditorium. This addition replaced the brick building that had been constructed in 1927 when the original wooden structure was moved to the Riecks ranch.



## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)

named for one of the "old-timers" of the area, Alfred Ekenberg, in recognition of the many years of loyal service he has given to the students and staff of the New Jerusalem School District.<sup>1</sup>

### DRY FARMING ON THE JAKE EBE PLACE ....

When I moved to San Joaquin County in 1910 I went to live with my brother-in-law, George Gerlach, and his wife, my sister Elsie. George farmed the Jake Ebe place, half a mile south of the school on Koster Road, plus some other parcels in that general area.<sup>2</sup> In those days of dry farming, all of the acreage was summer-fallowed, that is, after the crop of barley was harvested the stubble was fed off and the field, generally eighty acres or half a quarter section, was winter plowed and then allowed to lie fallow for a year. Besides the regular work involved in planting and harvesting I remember as a boy how we used to cut and cord oak wood for use on our ranch. We did the cutting down on the river bottoms near San Joaquin City; these river oaks were generally pulpy and porous—not solid like the oaks growing out on the high plains. But the solid oak wood was long gone, the early pioneers having cut it all down first, leaving the less desirable trees for later woodcutters.

I remember also an incident that occurred in early summer of 1914 when we had the quarter section north of the Ebe place planted to barley; it was a bumper crop that year and the grain had grown tall—a thirty-sack-to-the-acre crop. We started to harvest it that year with a horse-drawn harvester, drawn by twenty-six horses and mules, and had made but two rounds of the field when the scourge of the dry-farmer, fire, broke out on the northwest corner of the field, about a mile away. The standing grain was tinder dry and the wind dry and strong. A forty-foot wall of flame raced across the grain field so quickly that we just had time to pull the harvester into the adjoining summer-fallowed field.

The fire had whipped through the stand of barley so quickly that it had actually sheared off the grain stalks just under the three-inch-long heads, dropping them to the ground only slightly scorched. The crop was insured for a part of its value, and after the insurance company had paid off we bought some two hundred young pigs to feed and fatten on the scorched grain. It was my job to look after these pigs, and I herded them with my two little white Spitz dogs. Running wild most of the time, they were hard to control. But they gorged themselves on the scorched grain and quickly fattened themselves into hogs of two hundred pounds or more.

Ernest C. Schnabel, one of our neighbors at that time, had always enjoyed telling a story connected with my hog-herding experience that summer. It was inevitable that some of the hogs should make their way one night into a neighbor's chicken house and do damage there. The fact that the neighbor's chicken house was over a mile away did not seem to make any difference to these hogs. . . . They just liked chicken, I guess.

And it was also inevitable that the next night the neighbor should be prepared with barrels of hot water, wood ashes, sticking knives and bristle scrapers, and that one of my brother-in-law's fat hogs should be caught and slid into the barrel.

Well, the upshot of it was that a few days later the neighbors had a big pork dinner and invited all the other neighbors, George Gerlach among them. My brother-in-law really enjoyed the free dinner until they told him he was eating his own pork! Well, as I mentioned earlier, Ernest Schnabel had been telling this story over fifty years, and it got funnier every time he told it, but he never did know the

whole story.

A few nights later George said to me, "Well, come on Bub (he always called me Bub), bring the dogs and come along." We went out into our burned barley field in the dark and caught one of the neighbor's hogs that had strayed into it, and two hours later it was nicely dressed and hanging in our tankhouse. George had the last laugh on the neighbors, but it was a secret known only to my brother-in-law and me. We certainly were not about to tell our neighbor. He was William H. Riecks, then sheriff of San Joaquin County!

That fall the wild ducks went crazy over the scorched barley that still lay scattered after the hogs had been through the field. We dug a shooting hole out in the field near the house and set out a few decoys and the ducks came by the thousands. We would shoot until the barrels of our shotguns got red hot, and still they came. We slaughtered hundreds in a night. The next day we would peddle them around the farming community and in Tracy for twenty-five cents apiece or five for a dollar.

While I was working on the Ebe ranch and attending the New Jerusalem School the old West Side Hotel and Saloon in San Joaquin City closed down, the proprietor, Charlie Dreyer, having moved to Bantas. Jim Finch, whose son Harold had graduated from the New Jerusalem School in 1909 (the year before I enrolled there), moved into the hotel building and revived the business. Harold had been one of the boys who hunted and fished with me at Sturgeon Bend and so I knew the family.

Harold's father, asleep in the living quarters to the rear of the saloon, was awakened one night by a noise in front of the building, as if someone were trying to break in. Arming himself with his double-barrelled shotgun he crept into the darkened bar and, seeing a dark shadow at the window and thinking it a robber, fired at it with both barrels. Anyone who has seen what a shotgun can do at close range can imagine the result. When Jim Finch lighted the lamp he was horrified to find that he had shot down his own brother.

Tragedy struck the Finch family again a few years later. This time it was the harvest season and Harold Finch and Herman Henke (another neighbor boy with whom I used to play) were working with us on a grain harvester drawn by a steam tractor. We were harvesting a heavy barley crop from our 160-acre field that lay on the right-hand side of Koster Road just south of the railroad crossing. A very strong wind had come up late in the afternoon, blowing almost a hurricane from the northwest, and we quit for the day because of the great danger of fire.

The two boys got into the covered cook wagon and started on across the Koster Road railroad crossing, heading for the Henke ranch which was a half-mile to the east over the Durham Ferry Road. It was wartime (World War I) and two sections of a troop train loaded with soldiers had just crossed Koster Road. They were about a mile apart, steaming into the wind at high speed. Unknown to the boys in the shelter of the covered wagon a third section of the train was pacing the first two, a mile behind the second one, and it caught the cook wagon on the crossing, strewing wreckage for a half-mile along the right-of-way. Both boys died in the accident, but strangely enough, one horse was torn away from the harness of the off horse by the impact. It trotted home to its stall in the barn of the Theodore Henke ranch, calmly starting to feed as if it were the most important thing to do at the moment.

### JOHNNIE RATHJEN REMEMBERS . . . .

John A. Rathjen was another of the boys who grew up in San Joaquin City at the turn of the century. His father, John, Sr., had come to San Joaquin City in 1872 and for years



## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)

served as ferry tender on the Durham Ferry. He married in 1879 and for years the family lived in the ferry tender's house on the north side of the west approach to the ferry. It was here that John, Jr., the first of six children, was born.

Johnnie graduated from the Banta School in 1901 but much of his early life was spent in San Joaquin City. In 1963 he retired as an operating engineer working with the author, being 77 years of age at the time. He remembers San Joaquin City when it was a lively place, when the hotel was operated by Charlie Dreyer and the saloon by Jim Finch. The hotel had a bar and dining room, and all the usual facilities for the comfort of its guests. And he remembered the livery stable down along the River Road, and how the stages would pull up before it in a cloud of dust or a sea of mud, according to the season of the year. This would always attract the youngsters who would come running to watch the driver throw down the mail sacks, and to see who would be the City's guests that night.

He remembers the river boats of the Mosquito Fleet—the river boats which gave life to the City. They did not get their names from their shape, he said, but from the fact that in coming up the narrow river channel their paddlewheels would churn up the water, causing clouds of mosquitoes to rise from the brush on the river banks, only to settle again after the boats had passed. (Common at that time were blackberry vines that grew up to the water's edge along the San Joaquin.)

Some of those early paddlewheelers towed long, narrow barges, some of which had raised platforms amidships or forward on which the barge pilot stood. A tiller wheel on the platform was connected by two ropes or cables to a large rudder on the stern of the barge, enabling the barge pilot to guide the barge along the deeper channels of the river to keep it from being stuck on a sandbar. The barge pilot had no protection from the mosquitoes and he was constantly waving his arms and slapping at them.

Johnnie remembers the U. S. snagboat *Marion* which was a sidewheeler. She was a steamer and burned coal which most of the privately owned boats had to burn wood due to the cost. Most of the coal the riverboats burned, when coal was available, came from the Diablo or Corral Hollow mines.

Then there were the *Ellen*, the *Mary Garrett*, the *J. R.*

*McDonald* and the *Leader*—all sidewheelers of forty to fifty tons burden. And the *Clara Crow* was the pride of San Joaquin City because she had been named for the wife of W. H. Crow, a resident and businessman in the City in the 1870's. He served for a time as the district clerk for the San Joaquin School which was located east of the river in Castoria Township and about eight miles northeast of San Joaquin City. In 1878 this school had about the same attendance as the New Jerusalem School. It served all the farm families living across the river from San Joaquin City.

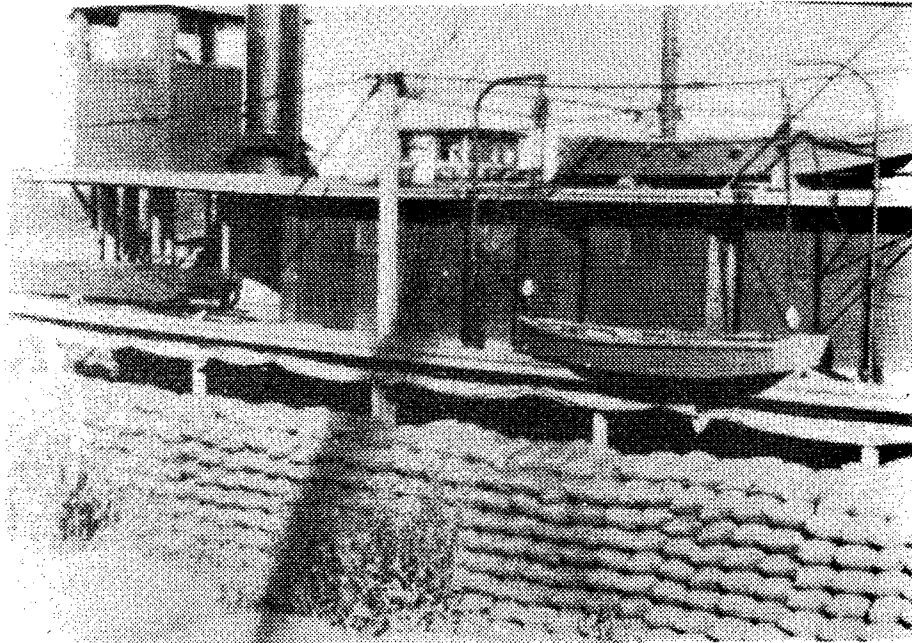
The *Clara Crow*, of forty-five tons burden, had been built in Stockton in 1868 at the shipyard of S. H. Davis on Lindsay Point. The *H. E. Wright* was a steam barge belonging to the Island Transportation Company. This firm had the largest fleet and did most of the business on the rivers and in the Delta. Some of the sidewheelers and paddlewheelers had three-cylinder distillate engines that made almost as much smoke as the steamers. The *Fanny Ann* (Captain John Haggerty) made frequent trips to San Joaquin City and the other river ports. She was 110 feet long.

Then there was *The Dude*, a very small but luxuriantly-appointed and bedecked paddlewheeler owned by Miller and Lux. She made routine trips from San Francisco up the San Joaquin River to Grayson, Hill's Ferry, White Slough, and on up the river as far as Firebaugh—all points where Miller and Lux had ranching interests.

There were some sailing schooners, but very few. They would tow barges. All of the boats would bring up supplies for the river towns, and would haul out grain and wood until the river got too low for navigation—usually sometime in September each year.

In the year 1878 alone these little boats hauled 120,000 tons of grain into Stockton. This tonnage increased annually until by the turn of the century several hundreds of thousands of tons of grain were being delivered in Stockton and the Bay Area for export each year.

At all of the river towns Chinese laborers did the heavy work of loading the boats and barges. As a rule their children did not go to school. The river dock was generally higher than the boat deck so that the gang plank sloped downward, making for easier loading. The barges were equipped with small steam or distillate-powered winches and haulback



THE STEAM BARGE *H. E. WRIGHT* is shown in this early photograph at the San Joaquin City landing loaded with 1,100 tons of sacked barley from the West Side Plains.

Courtesy of the author.

## TALES OF OLD SAN JOAQUIN CITY (con't)

cables. In Stockton small wheel-carts were loaded on the barge and the winch pulled them up the gang plank onto the dock, thus saving time and labor. Some mechanization was certainly needed, considering that as early as 1860 some 912,500 bushels of barley had been produced in San Joaquin County, and by 1870 this had increased to almost a million and a quarter bushels of barley and wheat combined.

Residents of San Joaquin City and the other river towns made money cutting and cording oak wood which they would haul and pile on the landings for the river boats. The small paddlewheelers would haul the wood into Stockton—to the woodyard on Banner Island—where it was much in demand.

Another long-time acquaintance of the writer was Captain James L. Isbell. When he first got his master's license he skippered boats for Ed Gross, a small operator in Stockton. Gross and other small operators sold out to Captain Benjamin Walters and Captain Jack Curry at the time these two men organized the Island Transportation Company, and Isbell then went to work for the new firm as its senior ship captain. He came to know well all the intricate waterways of the Delta and of the San Joaquin River as far south as Grayson. Two of the boats he piloted for years were the *Islander* and the *Blossom*, both sidewheelers powered with three-cylinder distillate engines. He skippered these river boats in the Delta and up the San Joaquin River between the years 1890 and 1911. In the early spring of 1911 he picked up a load of river oak wood at San Joaquin City and hauled it to the dock in Stockton. It was the last load of cordwood ever to leave by river boat.

### THE WILD IRISHMAN AND THE GREEN DUTCHMAN . . .

One of the incidents recalled by John A. Rathjen involved a fist fight between two young men whom John nicknamed the "Wild Irishman" and the "Green Dutchman." It happened in San Joaquin City along about the turn of the century.

Johnnie Gaffery was the "Wild Irishman." He had a violent temper, especially when he had a few drinks. He was known as a bully in all of the river towns, a "bad egg." He visited San Joaquin City frequently and whenever he was in town there was almost bound to be a fight. The biggest trouble with Johnnie was that he had an indulgent father, and brothers who would not admit that he could do wrong. A Saturday night in Tracy would always end up with Johnnie in jail. Then on Sunday his father and brothers would make the trip to town to get him released in any way they could. The river town of Grayson was a tough enough place, second only to Hill's Ferry many believed, but the law-and-order citizens there were hard put for a while as to how to handle Johnnie Gaffery. Finally they solved the problem by building a little jail just for him.

There were many citizens of German nationality in San Joaquin City and the nearby ranches. In the fall of the year, after the major farm work for the year had been completed, they would give dances in town. Generally these dances and celebrations were preceded by receptions and dinners such as only a pioneer German-American community could give. The young men would bring their girls and everything would be fine until Johnnie Gaffery arrived with some of his roughneck pals. Then it was only a matter of time until trouble started. He took special delight in showing off before the girls, and their escorts either had to take his insults and insolent remarks in silence or suffer a bad beating at his hands. Worse still, some of the girls thought it "smart" to be seen in his company.

For a long time Gaffery had been riding high with his tactics—until one Saturday night at a San Joaquin City dance when he tackled a little "Green Dutchman"<sup>3</sup> by the name

of John Kahlke. This John was a shy young man just over from Germany and was the escort to a very pretty young lady from one of the neighboring ranches. She was pretty "green" herself. The inevitable happened, and when John Kahlke was invited outside he went willingly enough. The fight took place in the middle of the River Road in front of Jim Finch's Saloon.

To make a long and painful story short it was the fight of the century as far as San Joaquin City was concerned. It lasted a long time, the tide of battle going back and forth; for a time it looked like Johnnie Gaffery would win as usual, but the little Green Dutchman just would not give up. The end finally came, though, and when the dust had settled there lay John Gaffery in the middle of the River Road, exhausted and badly cut up. The heavy-set bully had finally more than met his match in the little Green Dutchman of San Joaquin City.

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### EDITOR'S NOTES:

1. Our thanks to Al Ekenberg, long-time employee and ardent supporter of the New Jerusalem School, for his cooperation in obtaining much of the information included in this section of Earle Williams' narrative.
2. At the time (1910) that the author came to the Valley to live with his sister and brother-in-law, George Gerlach was dry-farming the 320-acre Jake Ebe ranch plus an additional 1,080 acres scattered in that general area. He did not own any of the land then, but farmed it on a share basis.
3. "Green" was one of a number of words and expressions used through the years to denote someone who had recently arrived from Europe—an immigrant who still did not know his way around. "Greenhorn" was another form of the word used widely along the West Side to describe such a person. "Dutchman" referred to a person of German background.

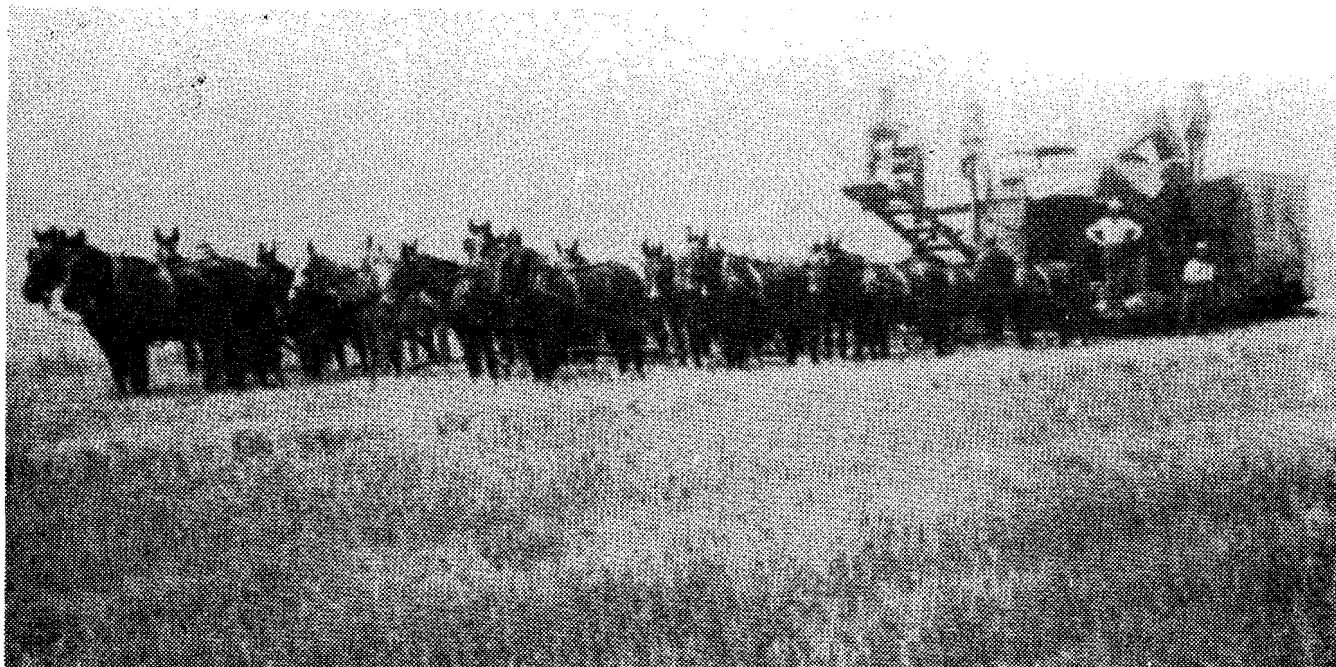
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### CORRECTION NOTE:

Our thanks to Mrs. Wilma Frydendahl of Tracy for correcting us on our identification of William Riecks in the photograph on page 17 of the July-September, 1973, issue of the *Historian*. Young Riecks is actually the last man on the right in the middle row, not the "third man from the left (sitting)" as we stated. Mrs. Frydendahl also provided the following additional identifications: top row, left to right—Frank Huck (father to Frances Huck), Dora Nicholaysen, Ed. Dryer, unknown, unknown, Herman Hilken (father to Bertha Rhodes and Josie Hilken); middle row (seated), left to right—Theodore Nicholaysen, Anna Schleuter Hansen, John Frerichs and wife Anna from Byron, Henry Frerichs and wife Susie, William Riecks, Anna Collins Linne (wife of Adolph Linne and mother of Wilma Frydendahl); bottom row, left to right—Julia Huck Pope (mother of Nola Vogt), unknown, Bertha (Dollie) McGee.

Please also note that the family name **Trahern** was inadvertently spelled with a "j" instead of an "h" in Volume IX, Number 4 (October-December, 1973), pages 23 and 24. Trahern Road in southern Castoria Township is a reminder of the part Wash Trahern played in the development of the area across the river (east) from San Joaquin City. The road runs east-west between Airport Way (the old Durham Ferry Road) and Manteca Road approximately two miles south of the West Ripon Road.

The Editor



**HARVESTING GRAIN ON THE RHODES RANCH NORTH OF SAN JOAQUIN CITY.** This is one of the earliest combine harvesters manufactured in Stockton, shown here being drawn by twenty-six horses. The two horses in the lead were referred to as the "jerkline leaders." A four-cylinder distillate engine operated the machinery for gathering the grain,

whipping it, and blowing out the chaff. On these early machines the sacksewer sat low and placed the filled sacks of grain on a platform which was tripped when it was filled with five or six sacks. Photo by Charlie Dreyer of San Joaquin City.

Courtesy of the author.

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