

# DELTA VOICE

The voice of those who live, work  
and play in the Delta

Summer 2016

printed on recycled paper 

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Motorcycles...and more!

Swathing alfalfa in the south Delta,  
with Mt. Diablo on the horizon.



## CENTENNIAL! Walnut Grove's Bridge Turns 100

*By Kathleen Graham Hutchinson for the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society -  
text and photos reprinted by permission.*

The Walnut Grove Bridge, the first counterweight bascule bridge built west of the Mississippi, opened for the first time on July 17, 1916, uniting the east and west sides of

the only town  
bisected by the  
Sacramento River.

The bridge was  
designed by Strauss  
Engineering of  
Chicago, which also  
designed the Golden  
Gate Bridge.

Governor Hiram Johnson in his motor  
yacht cruised down to the opening  
ceremony, where he cut the ribbon.

(continued on page 2)

Upper: The crowd assembled for the  
opening of the bridge.

Lower: The governor's yacht.



Continued from page 1

The photos of the day (donated to the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society by Murmie Graham Lawson) show a windy day, a huge crowd, the new bridge and the ferry slip. Another photo shows the governor's yacht and someone of significance in a car, perhaps John Stanford Brown, president of the Bank of Alex Brown.

Heretofore the only bridge in the Delta to span the river was the Grand Island pivot bridge on upper Grand Island near Steamboat Slough. The new span at Walnut Grove allowed river traffic to use the center of the river to pass the bridge instead of either side where the channel could be shallower. Prior to the bridge, the east and west portions of Walnut Grove were serviced by a ferry.

Many bets were placed prior to the opening as to whether the two cantilever spans would meet when lowered for the first time.

The deck was wooden, and became heavy when sodden with rainwater. To counterbalance this weight, extra concrete blocks were seasonably added to the huge concrete counterweights. A sidewalk on the downstream side was added after several vehicle-pedestrian accidents occurred on the bridge. Funds to add the walkway were raised by the Delta Progress Club and the Walnut Grove Boy Scouts.

About the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society:

The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society is a non-profit with a three-prong mission: preserving the history and cultural heritage of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, promoting public awareness of the Delta's history, and educating the public about the importance of the Delta in California and national history.

The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society Resource Center is located in the Jean Harvie Community Center in Walnut Grove and is open Tuesday mornings by appointment. The Center contains oral histories from the community, resource books, DVDs and many collections donated by Delta residents.

The Society hosts presentations bimonthly, welcoming authors, researchers and historians of the Delta Region. See their website at [www.srdhs.org](http://www.srdhs.org) for membership information and a schedule of events.



Above Top: The final moments as the two spans were lowered into place - the old ferry slip is visible in the background.

Above Center: The spans beginning to lower - many bets were placed as to whether the two would meet at all!

Above: Dig those wheels - a VIP enjoys the event from his car. The occupant is not identified, but could be John Stanford Brown, president of the Bank of Alex Brown.

# Improving Delta Life

## Community Action Planning Focuses On Creating Positive Change

Are you ready to take action and make your community a better place to live? You're definitely not alone.

Recently, community members in Clarksburg, Courtland, and Walnut Grove took steps to stimulate economic development and improve quality of life, historic preservation, public safety, and transportation in their communities by participating in the Delta Community Action Planning project.

Community Action Planning seeks to increase the civic vitality and preserve the rich history and distinctive character of Delta towns through the creation of action plans focused on the issues and priorities identified by the citizens and business owners in each locality.

The current project began with interviews of long-time residents and business representatives, while surveys collected ideas and opinions. Then in each community, residents met to discuss issues and generate potential actions during multiple public workshops, each town concluding its workshops by refining the ideas for improvements into community action plans.



For example, Walnut Grove is developing a list of traffic management projects – like lowered speed limits and traffic stops at the Walnut Grove Bridge – to submit for potential County and State transportation funding.

Courtland's residents are brainstorming plans to transform the land owned by the school district – now open space in the center of town – into something more park-like and usable by the community.

The Delta Protection Commission, Sacramento and Yolo counties and Sacramento State's Center for Collaborative Policy are supporting the Delta communities in this effort – as the Clarksburg, Courtland, and Walnut Grove communities finalize the actions plans, community members are now working with Commission and county staff to find ways to make the changes happen.

The goal is to prioritize activities, find funding, get help from State or County agencies and make the dreams reality.



Top: The tallest Walnut Grove communications tower is the third tallest structure in the United States.  
Center: The Courtland Bank was an art gallery last spring...now what?  
Bottom: Clarksburg's historic Delta High.

Soon, other historic Delta communities will have a chance to participate in a similar process.

Visit [www.delta.ca.gov/dcap.htm](http://www.delta.ca.gov/dcap.htm) for more information on the Community Action Planning project.



Potato King #1 - Chin Lung in 1903



A Chinese laborer with sacks of Delta potatoes



Potato King #2 - George Shima (center)

# Wealth! Parties! Jealousy! Spuds!

## The history of the lowly tuber - California Delta style

Potatoes are one of the top ten agricultural commodities grown in San Joaquin County, with a little less than 4,000 acres producing a crop worth over 40 million dollars a year, and there are enough potatoes grown in Sacramento County to warrant a mention in the crop reports. Potatoes are native to South America, with 99% of all cultivars worldwide traceable back to a single genetic origin in Peru. They are related to the deadly nightshade, a poisonous plant, and the green leaves of a potato plant are toxic to humans. Introduced to the rest of the world only four centuries ago, the lowly tuber with the poisonous accessories has become an incredibly popular vegetable all over the world, but nowhere is its history so fascinating as in the California Delta. *The following is adapted from the San Joaquin Historical Society Blog, March 20, 2013, by David Stuart; text and photos used by permission. Visit the SJHS blog at [www.sanjoaquinhistory.org/blog/](http://www.sanjoaquinhistory.org/blog/)*

### FROM MUD TO SPUD

At the turn of the 20th century, Los Angeles investors, wealthy from citrus, real estate and oil, and others from the East and Europe began reclaiming the “swampland” of the Delta. These investors were soon leasing Delta peat lands to energetic farmers, many of them Asian immigrants. A major crop planted on these rich peat farmlands was potatoes, and Stockton became known throughout the United States as the “great western potato mart.”

### THE RISE OF THE “POTATO KINGS”

Japanese immigrant Ushijima Kinji, later known as George Shima, arrived in San Joaquin County in 1889 and worked his way from migrant laborer to farmer in the Delta. The soft, rich soil was ideal for growing smooth-skinned, high-quality potatoes, and Shima perfected the sub-irrigation of the crop using narrow trenches, or “spud ditches,” every thirty rows of plants. Shima was a moderately successful farmer when he struck up an important friendship with Lee Allen Phillips, a Delta reclamation agent. Phillips would purchase Delta land, arrange for reclamation and draining, then lease the land to Shima, who moved in crews of Asian workers to clear the tules and plant potatoes.

By 1906, Shima was growing more potatoes than any other farmer in the world, leasing over 14,000 acres from Phillips. He became famous nationally when the Stockton Record published a widely reprinted story on “the Potato King.” His lavish yearly entertainments for bankers, produce merchants, and journalists became legendary. He and Lee Phillips, among others, financed the construction of the luxurious Stockton Hotel, which still stands in downtown Stockton.



## Why We Love Spuds

- **Vitamin B6.** Potatoes are a good source of vitamin B6, a nutrient that plays an important role in metabolizing carbohydrate and protein.
- **Vitamin C.** Potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin C (45% of daily value), which plays a key role in the synthesis of collagen (important for healthy skin and gums) and may help support the body's immune system.
- **Fiber.** One potato with skin contributes 2 grams of fiber - 8% of the recommended daily value. Dietary fiber has been shown to have numerous health benefits, including improving blood lipid levels and regulating blood glucose.
- **Gluten-Free.** Potatoes are naturally gluten-free. As a substitute for bread, grain and pasta-based dishes, potatoes add nutritional benefits too.
- **Just 110 Calories.** A medium potato with skin has just 110 calories. Don't ask what happens when you load on the butter, bacon and sour cream.

Nutrition infographic courtesy of [idahopotato.com](http://idahopotato.com).

Continued from page 4

Shima first purchased—rather than leased—Delta farmland in 1910: 800 acres on what is now known as the Shima Tract. A year later, he bought another 800 acres on McDonald Island, west of Stockton. These land buys, combined with his high profile and lavish lifestyle, apparently contributed to the statewide agitation for California's Alien Land Law of 1913, which forbade Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Korean immigrant farmers from purchasing land and severely restricted land leasing.

In the 1920s, Shima had to dismantle his "potato empire" due to the Alien Land Laws (in California, both the 1913 Act and an additional Act passed in 1920), and he became a leader in the fight against these discriminatory laws. He was president of the national Japanese Association of America from 1908 through 1925, the most important leader for Japanese in the United States. He also left a generous legacy of supporting students at the University of California, Berkeley and Stanford University. He is memorialized in San Joaquin County by the Shima Center at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton.

But did you know there was a slightly earlier Chinese immigrant also known as a "Potato King?" Here's the story of Chin Lung.

## POTATO KINGS – THE PREQUEL

Chin Lung was one of the first Chinese farmers to lease Delta farmland. In September 1901, he planted a crop of potatoes on his 1,100 acre lease just west of Stockton. Chin's potato crop hit the Eastern markets almost two months ahead of competitors from other areas and he suddenly became wealthy.

Delta potatoes not only reached the market first, they could also be grown in the rich peat soil with little or no fertilizer, and they had a pale skin that Eastern customers found attractive. Yields in the Delta were significantly higher than elsewhere in California or the United States. The 1910 Agricultural Census reported the average potato yield in other regions of California to be 147 bushels per acre, whereas the San Joaquin County yield was between 300 and 800 bushels per acre!

In spite of racist editorials and exclusionary laws, Caucasians in the Delta region generally liked the Chinese. The Stockton city attorney, for example, spoke in favor of further Chinese immigration and he and his law partner helped Asians ineligible for citizenship form corporations so they could continue farming. Census records show that in 1910 Chinese farmers were leasing 5,381 acres of San Joaquin County farmland, and by 1920, the acreage leased by Chinese had increased to about 13,500 acres.

Between 1901 and 1925, Chin Lung farmed at least 1,000 acres each season and was the principal employer of Chinese laborers in San Joaquin County. In 1910, Chin purchased 2,200 acres of Delta farmland of his own, northwest of Stockton near White Slough—the first agricultural property in San Joaquin County purchased by a Chinese man. Two years later, Chin purchased another tract, but by 1923 Chin, just like George Shima, lost all his holdings in California and Oregon as a result of the discriminatory Alien Land Law Acts of 1913 and 1920 in California (Oregon passed a similar Act in 1923). Considering Caucasians had been in the area less than a hundred years, the rush to exclude later immigrants was rank hypocrisy, fueled by racism, greed and envy on the part of the settlers of European descent.

# A TICKET TO RIDE

The Western Railway Museum offers a glimpse of Delta transportation history

As I purchased my ticket for the Western Railway Museum's Scenic Limited Wildflower Interurban Streetcar I wasn't actually humming the Beatles song; I was Judy Garland singing the Trolley Song from the 1944 movie classic "Meet Me in St. Louis":

"Clang, Clang, Clang went the trolley, Ding, Ding, Ding went the bell."

And we were off, pulling out of the Museum station which began life as "Rio Vista Junction", an actual stop on the former main line of the Sacramento Northern Railway. The SNR formed after the merger of two electric interurban lines, the Northern Electric Company and the Oakland & Antioch Railway, and operated passenger service between San Francisco and Chico via Sacramento from 1928 to 1941. The SF to Sacramento trip, a total of 183 miles, took a mere two hours and forty-seven minutes, including the ferry that carried trains across Suisun Bay. Beginning in 1939, the SNR operated on the bottom deck of the San Francisco Bay Bridge.

"Chug, Chug, Chug went the motor, Bump, Bump, Bump went the brake."

We continued on to Garfield Station where local farmers and farm workers



would catch the train to go to Contra Costa County or Sacramento. We passed the old Shiloh Church, built in 1870, destroyed by fire in 1875 and rebuilt in 1876 with funds obtained from the selling of cemetery plots in the churchyard.

"Buzz, Buzz, Buzz went the buzzer, Plop, Plop, Plop went the wheels."

Onward we traveled, past Gum Grove, where the Museum holds an annual Pumpkin Patch Festival in October. No pumpkins during spring wildflower season, but we did see dozens of lambs frolicking after their mothers as we "plopped" by. The line ends at Pantano Station near Birds Landing Road, so we reversed direction and began our journey back to Rio Vista Junction. Back in the day, Rio Vista Junction was where passengers could transfer to motor coaches to go to Rio Vista and Isleton.

"The day was bright. The air was sweet. The smell of honeysuckle charmed you off your feet."

Above Left: Sky Lupine graced the fields on the Wildflower "Scenic Limited."  
Center: The tracks heading south.  
Right: The ticket to ride.

Okay, there wasn't honeysuckle. But the day was bright and the air was indeed sweet. The wildflowers of the Montezuma Hills are best viewed in large groupings where their small flowers result in masses of color – typical of California wildflowers, which make the most of a brief rainy season. Large Vetch, Wild Radish, Purple Owl's Clover, Sky Lupine and Pale Meadowfoam created a scene like an artist's palette.

If you weary of the flowers, the vintage advertising signs which line the upper sides of each car are also fun to read; the Museum maintains a collection of these transit advertisements in its archives. The trip also offers up-close views of the wind turbines which dot the Montezuma Hills. Old

The electric streetcar revolutionized travel, making it possible for people to move out of the cities to the suburbs. However, electric streetcars gradually declined with the advent of bus service, and the last SNR passenger train ran in 1941. The SNR became freight only until diesel locomotives eventually replaced electric trains.

The Western Railway Museum offers not only streetcar and train rides for wildflowers and pumpkins, but has recently added a "Vintage Wine Tasting" trip. The Exhibit Hall is also home to the Traction Lab, where visitors can explore how vintage streetcars run, and the F.M. Smith Memorial Library. Add that to the historic cars, large shady picnic grounds, Museum store and Depot Café, and you've got a must-do excursion for the whole family.

Get your Judy Garland on and visit the Western Railway Museum – summer hours run Memorial Day through Labor Day and the park will be open Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM. The museum is located at 5848 Highway 12, just over 11 miles west of Rio Vista, and you can log on to [www.wrm.org](http://www.wrm.org) to get train times, find the various rides offered with each season and more information to plan your visit.

Adele Lagomarsino is a Senior Environmental Planner at the Delta Protection Commission, leading Recreation projects like the Great California Delta Trail and Abandoned Vessel Abatement. Apparently she is also a fan of old show tunes - who knew?



Left: Old ads decorate the streetcar interiors. (Imagine that nowadays - using doctors to sell cigarettes.)

# SAVE the DATE

Join the Delta Protection Commission at five Delta locations this September.

see [www.delta.ca.gov/cleanup.htm](http://www.delta.ca.gov/cleanup.htm) for more details.



Our waterways could use a pick-me-up.

JOIN OVER 60,000 CALIFORNIANS AS WE COME TOGETHER TO CLEAN UP OUR STATE'S BEACHES AND WATERWAYS

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From 9AM to NOON | For more information visit [COASTALCLEANUPDAY.ORG](http://COASTALCLEANUPDAY.ORG) or call (800) COAST-4U



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# DELTA EVENTS

## July

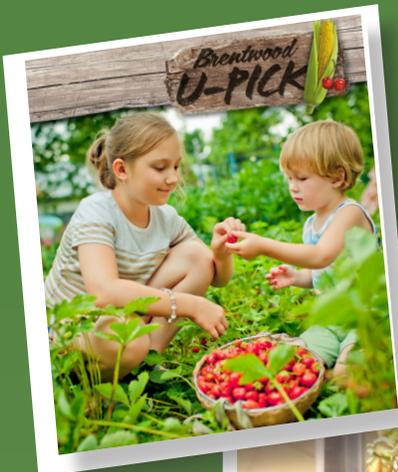
- 1<sup>st</sup>: First Friday Gallery Walk, Walnut Grove  
[www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/](http://www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/)
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>: Buddhist Church Bazaar, Walnut Grove  
[www.walnutgrovebc.org](http://www.walnutgrovebc.org)
- 4<sup>th</sup>: Uncle Sam Birthday Bash, Hood Supply Co., Hood  
[www.hoodsupplycompany.com](http://www.hoodsupplycompany.com)
- 4<sup>th</sup>: Barron Hilton Fireworks, Mandeville Tip
- 9<sup>th</sup>: Second Saturday Delta Art Walk, Old Sugar Mill,  
 Clarksburg [www.oldsugarmill.com](http://www.oldsugarmill.com)
- 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>: Brentwood Harvest Time Festival, Brentwood  
[www.harvest4you.com](http://www.harvest4you.com)
- 21<sup>st</sup>: Delta Protection Commission Meeting, Walnut  
 Grove [www.delta.ca.gov](http://www.delta.ca.gov)
- 30<sup>th</sup>: Taste of the Delta, Tower Park Resort  
[www.tasteofthedelta.com](http://www.tasteofthedelta.com)
- 31<sup>st</sup>: 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Pear Fair, Courtland  
[www.pearfair.com](http://www.pearfair.com)

## August

- 5<sup>th</sup>: First Friday Gallery Walk, Walnut Grove  
[www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/](http://www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/)
- 13<sup>th</sup>: Second Saturday Delta Art Walk, Old Sugar Mill,  
 Clarksburg [www.oldsugarmill.com](http://www.oldsugarmill.com)
- 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>: Sacramento River Delta Grown Passport  
 Weekend [www.sacrivertagrown.org](http://www.sacrivertagrown.org)

## September

- 2<sup>nd</sup>: First Friday Gallery Walk, Walnut Grove  
[www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/](http://www.facebook.com/events/721593197962722/)
- 10<sup>th</sup>: Second Saturday Delta Art Walk, Old Sugar Mill,  
 Clarksburg [www.oldsugarmill.com](http://www.oldsugarmill.com)
- 15<sup>th</sup>: Delta Protection Commission Meeting, Stockton  
[www.delta.ca.gov](http://www.delta.ca.gov)
- 17<sup>th</sup>: Coastal Cleanup - Delta Wide  
[www.delta.ca.gov/cleanup.htm](http://www.delta.ca.gov/cleanup.htm)
- 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>: Bethel Island Annual 50's Bash, Bethel Island  
[www.bethelisland-chamber.com](http://www.bethelisland-chamber.com)
- 18<sup>th</sup>: Friends of the Library Annual Fundraiser,  
 Clarksburg [www.clarksburglibraryfriends.org](http://www.clarksburglibraryfriends.org)



Festival photos courtesy of the Courtland Pear Fair and Streets of Brentwood