



# RIO VISTA MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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## The Flood of 1907

by Phil Pezzaglia

During the early morning hours of Friday, March 22, 1907, the people of Rio Vista were anxiously awaiting news from the surrounding islands regarding the conditions being brought on by high waters. For several days the men of the area had been busy preparing for approaching high water by filling and stacking bags of earth at the various points being threatened on Ryer, Andrus, Brannan and Twitchell Islands.

Just a few days prior, one of the most severe rainstorms of the season had passed over the northern and central portions of the state. Due to heavy precipitation the streams and rivers of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys had swollen. The melting of the snow by the warm rains resulted in even more water.

Rio Vista had received word of floods in the northern regions of the Sacramento Valley as well as reports of bridges and railroad tracks being washed away. Unfortunately, the extent of those high waters in the Rio Vista and surrounding areas was hard to predict.

Between the hours of 8 o'clock Wednesday evening and Thursday noon, the Sacramento River rose by three feet. Early reports from upriver were unfortunately not very encouraging. Some of the farmers felt that the levees on the islands would hold, while others had fearful doubts.

Ryer Island was the first of the islands to report disaster. Workers continued to sandbag the levees until about 11 o'clock Friday morning, when they had to finally give up. The waters broke the levee at a point near J. Rush's place on Cache Slough. This was almost the same place at which the levee had given way five years prior. Every available local launch and steamer was dispatched to the island to assist those who were in danger. As much stock and household goods were quickly removed from the island as possible. The California Transportation Company was instrumental in their assistance, having all eleven of their steamers helping at the islands.

The river continued to rise that Friday afternoon, eventually passing the highest watermark known at Rio Vista. The townsfolk worried as to where it might finally stop, and just how the various districts might hold up. Front Street was covered with the exception of the high southern end. The water was over all the wharves and approaches. The waters covered the floor of Chase's Store, located on the southeastern corner of Main and Front Streets. The lower floor of the Hotel River View, located on the west side of South Front Street, (where the old Citizens office presently in use by the Bank of Rio Vista sits), had a few inches of water covering its floors.

Other homes in that area to have water inside at this point were the homes of J.B. Fiscus and D.H. Collins. The planing mill and hay warehouses of Sullivan & Larsen as well as the warehouses of the California Transportation Company and J.H. Gardiner, and Rio Vista's Chinatown at the other end of the street, also felt the effects of the floodwaters.

By the later part of Friday afternoon, the waters had dropped a little, and it was thought that any danger had passed. These thoughts were a little premature, as the worst was yet to come. Late Friday evening and early Saturday morning, fierce winds from the southeast attacked the area. The levees managed to withstand the storm. However, the heavy rains of the preceding days contributed to the even higher waters of Saturday morning. Before long the water passed the high mark of



*The Hotel River View on Front Street during the flood of 1907*

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## Remembering Muriel Hassler Bushnell – Beloved Teacher

*by Peter Hamilton*

Rio Vista schools have been fortunate to have had many excellent teachers over the years. Talk to anyone who has gone through the Rio Vista School system, and they will tell you about memorable teachers. Some, such as Doc Simpson and Norma Rosel, are only fond memories. Others, such as Harvey Felt and Mary Jane Charamuga, are still part of our community. One teacher who taught generations of Rio Vistans was Muriel Hassler Bushnell. Mrs. Bushnell taught in the Rio Vista schools for 42 years, from 1926 to 1968.

Muriel Hassler Bushnell was born in the Santa Clara Valley and attended San Jose State University. She received her teaching credential in 1926, and briefly taught in a children's ward at the Santa Clara County Hospital before coming to Rio Vista. At the time of her retirement, Mrs. Bushnell recalled that her first trip from San Jose to Rio Vista took seven hours. The trip included a bus trip to Oakland, a train ride to the Rio Vista Junction, followed by another bus ride into town.

Mrs. Bushnell began teaching in Rio Vista in the fall of 1926. She taught first grade at Rio Vista Grammar

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*by Judith Mori*

I was approximately three years old when my family moved to a small town in the Delta. My father was transferred from Sacramento due to work and was told he would be working in Rio Vista. My parents thought "Rio Vista"? Where is that? Never heard of it! Like many who first hear about this very quaint town, we had no idea what to expect. We soon learned of the magic of the little river town and that knowing almost everyone who lives here is like being part of one huge family.

I look back on my childhood with very fond memories. Those memories include close friendships, some of which persist today. I learned how to hula hoop, to ride a bicycle, and to skate board. I was taught how to play piano. I enjoyed going to movies (yes there was a movie theater), oh, and to have only paid 25 cents! I enjoyed bowling (yes, there was a bowling alley) and playing saxophone in the Marching Band and Jazz Band. I was one of the first to become a DJ for the Rio Vista High School radio station. The Catholic Church

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*Mrs. Bushnell's third grade class makes presentation to the Solano County Board of Education, June 1965*

## *From the President's Desk...*

As my term as president comes to an end, I wish to take this opportunity to thank our members for their continued support. With the unrelenting hard work of our Board of Directors and volunteers, as well as the donations and dues of the members of the Museum Association, our museum continues to grow.

I have had the unique opportunity to hold the positions of both president and curator at the same time, a situation which has not occurred since the early days of the museum when Krug Dunbar held the same dual positions.

I wish to express my deepest thanks to every individual who served on the board, chaired an event, or volunteered at the museum during my tenure as president.

I look forward to the years to come, and I will continue my service to the museum in my capacity as museum curator, and as a member of the board of directors.

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School, now called Riverview Middle School. At the time, this was the only elementary school in Rio Vista. One of the activities her class did that first year was a play of the *Three Bears* for the PTA. Throughout the years, Mrs. Bushnell's classes did many plays and performances.

Although her first teaching assignments in Rio Vista were first grade, Muriel Bushnell spent many years teaching second and third grade as well. She taught at the Rio Vista Primary School, better known as the Bruning School. She finished her career in 1968, teaching third grade at the relatively new Dan H. White School. Throughout her career, Mrs. Bushnell served as both an administrator and a teacher. Her first administrative position was in 1929, as vice-principal at the newly built Bruning School.

Besides teaching, Mrs. Bushnell was active in the Rio Vista community. She served as president of the Rio Vista Soroptimist Club, was a 40-year member of the Women's Improvement Club, and was an active member of the Union Baptist Church.

Mrs. Bushnell passed away in December 2001. She was 96 years old. After her passing, Muriel's sisters gave the Rio Vista Museum a scrapbook that Mrs. Bushnell had put together. The scrapbook contains group photographs of all of her classes, as well as pictures of activities in which her students participated. The scrapbook is on display at the museum.

## ***Annual Membership Meeting***

***Monday, January 25, 2016***

***6:30 p.m.***

Come to the museum to enjoy a program of historical interest and to elect the 2016 officers and board members.

*Judith Mori continued from page 2*

was also a large part of my youth. My first job was at the A&W, which was where the medical building is now. Education was always an important part of my life. I remember being very sick and asking my mother if I could go to school, never wanting to miss a day. That must say a lot for the teachers' abilities to instill such interest in their students. I loved to study and my favorite subject was math.

I had many wonderful teachers. One of my most beloved school memories was in my third grade class with Mrs. Bushnell. She was staunch and looked very stern, and, as a little girl, I thought to myself, "I don't want to mess with her." But after the first initial meeting, I soon learned she was a very kind and caring person. Her smile let you know that. More importantly, she cared about her students.

One year, Mrs. Bushnell wanted her class to create a special presentation for Public Schools Week. The study was to be about the Seven Wonders of the World, Modern and Ancient. Each student was to select which of the Wonders they wanted to study. I chose the Colossus of Rhodes, not only for its beauty and how it resembled the Statue of Liberty, but also because of what it symbolized to the Island of Rhodes. The statue was commissioned to commemorate the defeat of the invading army of Demetrius in 304 BC. It stood there until an earthquake took it down.

The presentation was so well liked, we were asked to give the presentation to the Solano County Board of Education. I remember that my classmates and I had such a great time on this field trip. We were all a bit nervous, especially us shy ones. It was such a confidence booster and proved to be a very valuable experience in many ways; a brief moment for students not only to learn, but to educate others.

I moved to Sacramento, lived there many years, and had some wonderful experiences, but I am back now and have a huge appreciation for this city. Thank you, Rio Vista, for being such a great place for me to have had my childhood.

the previous day and was still continuing to climb.

By Saturday afternoon the water was high enough to enter the saloons of J.C. Nunes and Pedro & Wilson as well as J.T. Brown & Co.'s storeroom and the store of W.H. Butler. Luckily each place of business had had enough time to remove items, so no goods were damaged by the water.

On Saturday evening word was sent from Brannan Island that they needed all available men to assist in fighting the floodwaters. The men worked hard, but around 11 o'clock in the evening the levee gave way near the Kuhn Ranch. At almost the same time Twitchell Island was also inundated.

With the flooding of Ryer, Brannan and Twitchell Islands, the Sacramento River slowly went back to its normal height.

The events of these few days were described in a news article of the day thusly: "the flood throughout the valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers had been one of the most disastrous in the state, and from all accounts the 'flood of '62' has been surpassed, although there are still some old timers who will tell you we had more water in '62, but the marks that they used to show were covered so deep with water this time that they could not be located."

As accurate a measurement as could be ascertained was that the river stood seventeen and eight-tenths inches above tidewater at its peak on Sunday March 24, 1907. This was a full three feet higher than the previous record that had been set on March 23, 1904.

When the water was at its highest point, many townsfolk made their way down South Second Street to the Perry Addition to witness a



*River's edge in Rio Vista during the 1907 flood*

rather unusual sight. It was that of a steamer unloading stock and household goods, picked up from the various islands, just below Drouin's property (approximately where the Riverview School gymnasium presently sits).

At the far north end of Second Street, launches were also unloading. The water was all the way up into the pond known as Holdersback Lake. While looking out over the water, while at its highest point, both barns and houses could be seen floating past. In fact, the tule factory, located at Newtown Landing, as well as Miss W. Peter's home near that point were washed down stream. The warehouses at the landing were badly damaged as were the warehouses of Mr. Gardiner, just south of that point. Luckily the majority of Rio Vista was on high enough ground that it escaped more serious damage.

Once again the town of Rio Vista survived a natural disaster. The townspeople worked side by side to protect and save as much as was humanly possible, in the face of adversity. And once again the town and people of Rio Vista just grew stronger.



*The Hart Fellows Smith home in Isleton during the 1907 flood*

**Thanks** to all who helped to make this year's **Old Tyme Christmas Faire** a huge success. Big thanks to Nora Crane for again coordinating the event; to the vendors who showed up with their creative wares and who donated to the raffle; to the many contributors to the popular bake sale; to the museum members who helped with decorating and publicity; and, of course, to all of you who visited and made purchases.