



## The Rio Vista Bridge – Part I

by Phil Pezzaglia

*Editor's Note: Rio Vistans have been reminded over the past few months just how critical the Rio Vista Bridge is to both vehicular and ship traffic. We thought this would be a perfect time to recount the history of the bridges spanning the Sacramento by Rio Vista. Part II of this article will run in our next issue.*

When one thinks of Rio Vista, one of the most common landmarks that will surely pop into one's head is that of the Rio Vista Bridge. It can be seen in the city's logo, on Bass Derby T-Shirts, as well as on numerous other articles depicting Rio Vista. One must remember that the Rio Vista Bridge was not constructed for more than a half century after Rio Vista relocated at its present location in 1862.

It is also important to note that the existing bridge is the second bridge to span the Sacramento River at Rio Vista.

The history of the Rio Vista Bridge can best be described in three phases. Phase one was that of the original "Strauss Trunnion Bascule" type bridge that was completed in January 1919. The second phase can be considered the era when a new bridge, the existing bridge, was constructed alongside of the old bridge. Both the old bridge and the unfinished "new" bridge existed side by side with a cross-

over section, using the west end of the old bridge with the east end of the new bridge for a period. The third phase in the history of the Rio Vista Bridge is that of the existing bridge, which was started in 1943 and completed in 1946, with the west end and the lift section construction beginning in 1957 and completed in 1959.

As far back as 1914 there had been talk of a bridge being built across the Sacramento River at Rio Vista, thereby joining the mainland with the fertile islands to the east as well as connecting Solano County with Sacramento County. At a meeting in Sacramento in January of 1915, the Solano and Sacramento Boards of Supervisors and a committee representing the Rio Vista Chamber of Commerce discussed the bridge across the Sacramento River.

According to the figures given out at that meeting, there was a little more than \$10,000 gathered in bridge funds. An estimated \$25,000 would be in the fund by July 1, 1915. At this point in time the estimated cost for a bridge would be about \$250,000, half of which was to be paid by Sacramento County. Because the funds were so far off, it was decided that the War Department, the

department that specified that the work be done, should be asked for an extension of the July 1, 1915 starting date. The War Department of the federal government granted an extension on the permits stating that construction must be started by July 1, 1919.

In 1915 Supervisors of Solano and Sacramento counties made a tax levy of 5 cents on the \$100, as would a levy be made each year for the next three years, to raise the needed funds.

After much time the money was finally appropriated by the respective counties and the bids were let. The construction of the original bridge started in 1918

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*Original Rio Vista Bridge, early 1920s*

# Artifact Spotlight

by Suzanne Goldberg

The Rio Vista Museum was founded in 1975 for the purpose of preserving the history and artifacts of Rio Vista for the people of Rio Vista and all visitors.

Instead of focusing on a specific artifact, we are going to take this opportunity to talk about some of the resources available to visitors to the museum.

One of the favorite resources is our complete set of Rio Vista High School *Netherlands* yearbooks. Here is your opportunity to find that picture of yourself or a relative or a friend as a teenager. Use your cell phone to take a picture of anything of interest. In addition to the yearbooks, the museum also has a collection of the high school's *Ram's Ear* newspapers.



*A sampling of the museum's library of Rio Vista High School Netherlands yearbooks. (above) Examples of other resources in the museum's reference area. (below)*



The museum reference room is filled with a variety of publications, collections of photographs, family genealogical research, court documents, newspaper articles, and scrapbooks. For example, there is a scrapbook filled with local pear and asparagus labels. Another celebrates 100 years of the Women's Improvement Club. A recent addition is a scrapbook recounting the history of the Boy Scouts in Rio Vista. There is the wonderful story of Muriel Hassler Bushnell's 42 years as a teacher in our town. (See the article in the January 2016 newsletter. Recent newsletters are available on the museum's website.) Another scrapbook contains information and memorabilia from St. Joseph's Military Academy. There are maps and photographs of neighboring communities, records of local obituaries, information on Rio Vista military veterans, publications from other California historical societies, and a variety of books of local Delta interest.

The Rio Vista Museum is committed to preserving these artifacts. More importantly, the museum is committed to making these materials available to anyone who is interested in looking at them. Come by and take a look for yourself.

Do you have old pictures of Rio Vista or the Delta?  
Remember that if you are not ready to donate them, you can still help the museum preserve our past by letting us scan them.  
Conversely, if you are looking for pictures for your own research, if we have it, we can scan a copy for you – if taking a picture with your phone is not good enough.

*Rio Vista Bridge continued from page 1*

and was completed in January of 1919. Solano and Sacramento counties shared the cost of \$260,000 jointly.

The new bridge linked the town of Rio Vista with the “newly” constructed River Road, on the eastern shore. At this point in time plans were being made for a future highway heading to Sacramento, following the river. Plans were also being made to better the road between Rio Vista and Suisun.

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*The Solano Republican announced the bridge’s opening as: “The Rio Vista Bridge across the Sacramento River is one of the largest structures west of the Mississippi.”*

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The Rio Vista Bridge was a Strauss Trunnion Bascule design. The structure of the bridge consisted of four bowstring arch spans, a 1,600-foot short span timber trestle and a double leaf bascule span. The bridge had a total length of 2,430 feet and a clear width of 18 feet, with the strength to sustain a fifteen-ton road roller. Only a few such bridges had been built in the United States at that time, although it was a very popular type of bridge used throughout Europe. The bascule, or balanced lever, bridge had, at that time, become an important factor in transportation

A Strauss-type bascule bridge operates by a system of counter weights, gears and motors to rotate the “leaves” of the bridge up and down. The “leaves” are the sections which rotate up and down away from the centerline of the river, providing clear passage for river traffic.

The fixed-trunnion type of bridge was gaining popularity during this era in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. This type of structure operated in a way in which the “leaf” is mounted on trunnions (axles or short shafts) in bearings rigidly fixed to the masonry. The trunnion, or fulcrum, divides the leaf into a long arm spanning the channel and a short arm extending shoreward, which is counterweighted to make the turning “moments of force” of the two portions equal and opposite.

The combination of these two styles made for a very attractive and efficient bridge.

*Look for the Part II in our next issue.*

*We are working on an exhibit about the Rio Vista gas fields. Do you have artifacts or photographs? We would love the community’s help in making this exhibit as comprehensive as possible. Please help us in documenting this important part of Rio Vista’s history.*



## **Annual Hamburger BBQ Brings Community Together**

This year’s Hamburger BBQ took place on May 21<sup>st</sup> at the Rio Vista-Isleton Club aka the Portuguese Hall. While the venue has changed throughout the years, the community spirit of this event remains strong. Several hundred people came together to enjoy burgers with all the fixin’s as well as a tantalizing array of cookies.

Thank you to the many volunteers who cook the burgers, serve the food, bake the cookies and make this event so special, year after year. Thank you to those who support this event. We send a special BIG THANKS to Lira’s for all of their support.

See you all next May!

***Come visit the museum  
during the Bass Derby!***

***Special extended hours:***

***Friday evening: 5 pm–9 pm***

***Saturday: 10 am–8 pm***

***Sunday: Noon–4:30 pm***

### **MUSEUM OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

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# Upcoming Events

## Free Film Screening at the Museum

As part of the Third Saturday event on October 20, 2018, the film, "The McCullochs," which was filmed in downtown Rio Vista, will be shown at the Rio Vista Museum. The film was produced, directed, written by and co-stars Max Baer, better known for playing Jethro on the TV series, "The Beverly Hillbillies." "The McCullochs" also stars Forrest Tucker as the patriarch J. J. "Mac" McCulloch, a self-made millionaire whose pride is as tough as his fists. The one hour and 33 minute film is set in 1949 Texas but was filmed in Rio Vista in 1975. The film will start at 11:30 am, but the museum will open at 11:00 am.

Come enjoy free popcorn and see lots of old Rio Vista in this free film.

Rio Vista Museum  
16 N. Front Street  
Rio Vista, CA 94571

Rio Vista Museum's  
10<sup>th</sup> Annual

## Old Tyme Christmas Fair 2018

|                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Photography and Artwork | Scaps & Bath Products               |
| Novelty Pillows         | Christmas Wreaths                   |
| Hand-knit originals     | Quilted Items                       |
| Greeting Cards          | Wooden Treasures                    |
| Shabby Chic décor       | Jewelry                             |
| Jars & Jellies          | Many other<br>Unique Handmade items |



**Come buy goodies from our popular BAKE SALE!**  
**RAFFLE PRIZES from our VENDORS!**

Rio Vista Museum, 16 N. Front Street

We've added an additional night!

Friday, **November 30**, 2018 from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm  
Saturday, **December 1**, 2018 from 10:00 am - 4:30 pm  
Sunday, **December 2**, 2018 from 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

