Steamboat Slough and Sacramento River

1848 to 2011
West Fork  Middle Fork  Sacramento River

Marks for entering the Sacramento and its Forks at their confluence
Priest and Sutter Islands became Ryer Island, Hogback Shoals noted on a more detailed map by Commander Ringgold.
Mark for entering the second section of the Middle Fork of the Sacramento River
STEAMBOAT SLough.

A short distance above the Hog's Back we arrived at the junction of Sutter Slough with Steamboat Slough, and there enter the narrowest part of the stream. As this slough is deep and navigable, and moreover is about nine miles nearer for sailing through than by the main, or "old river," nearly all vessels upward bound take this route; while those on the downward trip (excepting steamboats) generally take the main river, inasmuch as the wind is more favorable for their return to San Francisco.

As we pass through Steamboat Slough, we are impressed with the narrowness of the channel for such large vessels, the luxuriant foliage of the trees that adorn its banks, and the snug little cabins, nearly shut out from sight by wild vines and trees, that are seen at intervals on its margin. Indeed the scenery, as you steam up or down the river, is picturesque in no slight degree. Here and there, as you turn with the sudden windings of the stream, you room upon the little boats of fishermen, and sloops, with their sails furled like the folded wings of a sea-bird, waiting for the wind. The improvements of the husbandman are everywhere seen along the shore-cottages half hidden among the dropping branches of the sycamores, outhouses, haystacks, orchards, and gardens with their product of squashes and cabbages piled in huge heaps; and here and there a school-house or church gives a cheerful domestic character to the scene. The landscape is diversified by the gnarled oaks, with vines clinging about them for support, and their branches covered with dark masses of mistletoe.
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Shipwrecks along Steamboat Slough from 1848 to about 1880 show it was a well-traveled waterway. As silting from hydraulic mining debris started to fill the river beds, steamboating became more difficult.
Steamboat. The word is found in the names of no fewer than ten physical features in the State. It is interesting to observe that there were at least three different reasons for giving the name. *Steamboat Spring* [Sonoma]. "An opening in the rocks...through which is constantly ejected, with the noise of a number of steamers, a body of steam sufficient, could it be controlled, to propel a large amount of machinery" (Cronise, 1868, pp. 172 f.). *Steamboat Slough* [Yolo]. "When the Sacramento was first navigated fewer obstructions to navigation were encountered in Steamboat Slough than in old Sacramento River, as the other branch is called. For many years the slough was therefore the channel preferred by navigators..." (Wood’s Gazetteer.) *Steamboat Rock* [Humboldt]. The name was given by the Coast Survey: "The upper part is white and the lower black, somewhat resembling a steamer with a low black hull and white upper works" (Coast Pilot, 1903, p. 95).
In 1860-1861 Rio Vista was located 1.7 miles north of here. The Pony Express mail was usually carried both ways between the cities of San Francisco and Sacramento via steamboat slough by the California Steam Navigation Company's river steamers. They would make stops at Benicia and Rio Vista.

The first eastbound river steamer to California was the "New World."
Bancroft's New Map Of Central California Compiled by Wm. Henry Knight, San Francisco

Notes:
The title of the map on the cover calls it "revised and enlarged" which means larger than the 1869 issue of the map (see our #4106) that showed the San Francisco Bay area and the country west to Sacramento, north to southern Lake County and south to Santa Cruz. The 1871 map extends west to Virginia City in Nevada, north to Fort Bragg and south to Santa Cruz, adding Yosemitie Valley and the Sierra Nevada gold country. Lake Tahoe, the Central Pacific Railroad, and a large part of the Central Valley, at a scale of 12 miles to one inch. This map is here the scale of the Bancroft/Knight Map of the Pacific States and the various spin off maps from it, thus showing more detail. Not listed by Vepedes or Wheat or in any references. Full color by county, map is folded into tan and red card board covers 16 x 11 printed with title, "Bancroft's New Map Of Central California. Revised And Enlarged. San Francisco A.L. Bancroft & Company, 1871." References:
1873-1879
Mr. G. W. Blake, one of the listed builders of the State Capitol, has the island located off Ryer Island surveyed and then purchases the property. Purchase recorded 1877. The Blake family used the island for camping and fishing until it was sold to the Martin Family. The Martins worked with USACE when Steamboat Slough was being dredged, using dredge spoils to convert the island into a peninsula connected to Ryer Island. Families from the SF Bay area and Sacramento came to vacation at "Martin’s Island" and locals say there were old cabins handing over the water up until the early 1980’s. The cabins were used first for fish canning, then for vacation use. A plaque from the 1960’s indicates they were called “Snuggle Inns” even back then!
MAP
OF THE
SAN JOAQUIN, SACRAMENTO
AND
TULARE VALLEYS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

prepared under the direction of the

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ON IRRIGATION
appointed under the Act of Congress approved
March 3rd 1873,
showing the country that may be irrigated and a
PROVISIONAL SYSTEM OF IRRIGATION
Compiled from the Maps of the
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CALIFORNIA
and from
Special Surveys and Examinations

Scale: 1 inch to 2 miles
1873.

Published by authority of the Hon. SECRETARY OF WAR
in the Office of the CHIEF OF ENGINEERS U.S. Army.
C.F. Hoffmann was the principal topographer; 1st issue was 1867. No mention of the 1873 date in any references. Two sheets printed on thin paper, folded into green covers. Outline color.
SWAMP AND OVERFLOWED LANDS.

Survey No. 679
Township 4 North
Range 3 East
Sections 11 and 14

Fraction of S.W. 1/4 of Sec. 11 and fraction of N.W. 1/4 Sec. 14.

Base and Meridian of Mount Diablo,

Containing 10.27 acres.
Surveyed Aug. 15, 1873

for C. L. Blake

FIELD NOTES.

Beginning at a point 37 1/2 chains East of the
Beginning of a point

SCALE, 40 CHAINS TO 1 INCH.
From the following publication:
"A Map and Record Investigation of HISTORICAL SITES AND SHIPWRECKS ALONG THE SACRAMENTO RIVER Between Sacramento City and Sherman Island"

Prepared by the Land Location and Boundary Section, California State Lands Commission August 10, 1988

Estimated location of shipwrecks on Steamboat Slough and Sutter Slough added to Map as red circles (May 2010)

Shipwrecks along Steamboat Slough from 1848 to about 1880 show it was a well traveled waterway. As silting
Political cartoon from 1880 showing how hydraulic gold mining may destroy steamboat river travel in the future. Hydraulic gold mining was soon banned by the state legislature, and plans were made for the first dredging project of the Delta waterways.

Steamboat Slough was one of the main channels to be negatively affected by sifting from the mining “slickins”, but it was later dredged along with the main Sacramento River or “Old River Sacramento” as it was called at that time.
It is proposed to correct this defect by making a section the channel of Old River from the head of the river at Old River to the town of Grand Island. This proposal was made in the legislature of the State of Louisiana in the year 1839.

The course of the river is so much the shortest that a very large portion of the water is lost by evaporation and by seeping into the river bed. In some places the water is 5 feet lower than Old River, and in others it is 3 feet lower.

This is the most direct and can be developed so as to save the least amount of water. The channel of Old River is already in existence, and so much of the water should be conveyed as far as possible by a canal to Old River.

The lower part of the river is dissected by a large number of islands, and it is necessary to build a dam across the river at Old River to control the discharge of the water from the head of the river. To do this, the dam should be built at the mouth of the river, and the discharge of the water should be regulated by gates and sluices. The dam should be constructed of stone and masonry, and should be covered with earth. The height of the dam should be such as to prevent the overflow of the river at high water.

The objectives of the project are to improve the navigation of the river, to provide a water supply for the town of Grand Island, and to prevent the overflow of the river at high water. The dam should be constructed as soon as possible, and the discharge of the water should be regulated by gates and sluices. The project should be carried out by the government of Louisiana.
1906 official survey shows that the Delta Islands and waterways have the same names as what we still use in the 21st Century. This map shows the “shoal” at the confluence of the West Branch and Middle Fork Commander Ringgold noted in his sailing Directions. In addition, the “Hogsback Shoals” area is still showing, but the waterway called Middle Fork in 1850 is called Steamboat Slough.
Until this point in time, the section of the Sacramento River below Walnut Grove to about Ida’s Island was referred to as “Old River” Sacramento. When roads were improved along the route past Isleton and Walnut Grove, it appears the transition to the current use of just “Sacramento River” came about.

The same section of the Sacramento River has also been referred to as the “Main Stem” or “Main River” in various documents over the years.
The Collins Estate on the west side of Grand Island, just north of the E.H. Myers home...April 30, 1942.

The old "Doe". Stewart house on Grand Island, erected in 18...1st House after leaving Steamboat slough bridge, going south.

View of Steamboat Slough Bridge taken from Grand Island side, entrance to Steamboat sloughs named after the steamers which plied up this slough before roads were built. All ranchers and orchardists loaded their crops and fruit aboard the steamers on their way to Sacramento.

Old Stewart Home on Grand Island, probably erected in the 80's or 90's...2nd house, going south. March 26th, 1944.
By 1935 the waterways had been dredged to clear out the mining debris that had raised slough beds, the “Hogsback Shoals” area had become a peninsula with residential homes and camping, and Steamboat Slough continued to be used for navigation and recreation.
1945 on Steamboat Slough

(Martin’s Island was renamed Snug Harbor by the early 1960’s)
Steamboat Slough

Clearing brush on Martin's Island, later renamed Snug Harbor

early 1940's
1945 on Steamboat Slough

(Martin’s Island was renamed Snug Harbor by the early 1960’s)
By 1952 many more homes and the marina/resort (called Martin's Island in the 1940's) was further developed along Steamboat Slough. In addition, other locations on Steamboat Slough would be developed: Hidden Harbor, Sacramento County Hogback Island park, Steamboat Resorts, and Steamboat Bridge beach area, to name a few.
Steamboat Slough - Sacramento Delta 1968
Section of 1975 California Delta Map

Railings from the Golden Gate Dredge are still at Snug Harbor

Snug Harbor 2010
Golden Gate Dredge at Snug Harbor 1984

Steamboat Slough bridge from Grand Island
Snug Harbor in the 1980's
general location of Hogback Shoals where several ships got stuck on the sandbar at low tides. Current-day Snug Harbor Peninsula

Hogback Shoals could be here but the travel mileage description does not indicate this
The effect of 15,000 cfs exported from the Sacramento River!

Full graphic and many historic maps can be found at:

http://www.DeltaREvision.com
Maps, sketches and historical data compiled by Nicky Suard, Esq, Snug Harbor Resorts, LLC on Steamboat Slough for the presentation to the Delta Historical Society November 2011 on the history of Steamboat Slough, “Old River” Sacramento, and steamship travel to Sacramento. For educational purposes only.

Please do not copy any of the maps or graphics contained herein without prior approval. Photos from the Sacramento Historical Society were found online are may not be used for any commercial purposes.

Contact: sunshine@snugharbor.net (916)775-1455

Reference website:

Http://www.DeltaREvision.com
Http://www.RyerIsland.com
Http://www.SteamboatSlough.com