

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SOCIETY NEWS

The program at the regular meeting at Micke Memorial Building, 8 p.m., will be "San Joaquin Events", historical slides, presented by Stockton photographer Leonard Covello.

Mrs. Alice Watson will conduct a tour for members on April 30 to Fiddletown, Plymouth, Sutter Creek, and Jackson.

HISTORICAL FACTS

Material for this bulletin was collected and edited by Miss Gladys Boynton.

For information for this article we are indebted to:

1. Wm. J. Lange, representative in charge of the Mokelumne Area Office of the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Mr. Lange furnished material on both Pardee and Camanche Dams.
2. Mrs. Gertrude Kettelman, who gave us information about the first irrigation project. She has carefully preserved bills and records kept by David Kettelman, who was treasurer of the Mokelumne Ditch and Irrigation Co. organized in 1875.
3. Sherwood Beckman, now president of Woodbridge Irrigation District, who loaned a history of that project (25th Anniversary Report, 1954).
4. Pacific Gas & Electric Co., whose books "Rivers of California" and "P. G. & E. of California" were used.

MAN'S USE OF THE MOKELUMNE RIVER

"Outstanding scenery and colorful history are the qualities that make the Mokelumne River one of California's most exciting streams. Rising at the crest of the Sierra in a relatively narrow headwater area in Alpine County, the Mokelumne is 130 miles long. It drains an area of 700 square miles and has an annual average runoff of 722,000 acre feet of water at Pardee.

Its three headwater branches, the North, Middle and South Forks, occupy impressive canyons 1,000 to 4,000 feet deep and drain a rugged area about 47 miles long and 16 miles wide.... The North Fork is the largest branch and begins in the barren snow fields of the Sierra at altitudes up to 10,000 feet. "(Quotes from "Rivers of California".)

The Mokelumne River crosses San Joaquin County and forms the county's northwest boundary before it drains into the San Joaquin River near Suisun Bay.

The river takes its name from the tribe of Indians who found the area hospitable to their needs long ago. Muk-kel was their principal village and "umne" means "people of".

The earliest water systems from the Mokelumne were made by gold miners back in 1855, when the Butte Ditch was built bringing water by flume and canal for placer mines south of Jackson. In 1873-74 the Amador Canal and Mining Co. completed a new canal to a point above Sutter Creek.

Strangely, it was a French prince who was largely responsible for building the first hydroelectric plant on the Mokelumne. Prince Andre Poniatowski came to the United States in 1892. While in San Francisco, he met and married Miss Elizabeth Sperry, sister of Mrs. W. H. Crocker. Mr. W. H. Crocker was the president of the Crocker-Woolworth Bank in San Francisco, and it was he and the prince who, a few years later, built Electra Powerhouse, the first to send its electric output to San Francisco.

Prince Poniatowski became interested in mines of the Mother Lode in Calaveras and Amador Counties which seemed to offer promise of further development. He, with others, founded the California Exploration Co., and the prince went out seeking low cost electric power to be used in the mines. His explorations on the Mokelumne resulted in building the Blue Lakes Powerhouse five miles from Jackson in 1897.

But the prince was convinced the Mokelumne had the potential for much greater electric power. He dreamed of serving San Francisco, 143 miles away.

Prince Andre and W. H. Crocker promoted and organized the Standard Electric Co. of California. They then proceeded to build the Electra Powerhouse near Jackson, putting in the finest equipment possible at that time. In 1902, Electra was finished and went into operation. Blue Lakes was then discontinued. Electra supplied much of the electric power for the San Francisco Peninsula, and it continued to operate for 46 years. A new and greater Electra was built in 1948 and is still in operation.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. now has the following reservoirs on the Mokelumne River. Lower Blue Lake completed in 1874, Upper Blue Lake in 1881, Meadow Lake in 1885, Twin Lakes in 1898, Bear River in 1900, Salt Springs in 1931, and Lower Bear River in 1952.

Five powerhouses are in operation on the river, four by P. G. & E. at Salt Springs, Tiger Creek, new Electra, and West Point. One at Pardee is operated by East Bay Utility District for Oakland and its neighboring communities.

The first company organized for the purpose of obtaining irrigation water from the Mokelumne was the Mokelumne Ditch and Irrigation Co. in 1875. Sylvester Treadway was president and David Kettelman was treasurer. They planned to build a rock masonry dam near the old Westmoreland Bridge in Calaveras County. Canals were to carry water to Bear Creek and from there water was to be distributed by lateral ditches to ranches.

The dam was built, but was washed out in a spring flood the first year. Due to difficulties in obtaining rights of way for canals it was never rebuilt.

In 1891, Byron C. Beckwith founded the Woodbridge Canal and Irrigation Company. In that same year, a timber dam was built on the Mokelumne just north of where the headgates are on the present Woodbridge Dam. This dam was washed out by high water in the spring of 1895. Later a new timber dam was built further downstream where the present dam is located. In 1910, the wood dam was replaced by a concrete one.

Unfortunately, there was no control over the headwaters of the river, other than the small Blue Lakes Dams. So there was much high water in the spring snow runoff and not nearly enough to irrigate ranches later in the summer. Farmers were reluctant to participate in the project because they could not get the water when needed.

In 1924, the Woodbridge Irrigation District was formed as a political subdivision, and was recognized by the State Security Commission in 1927 when sufficient landowners became included in the district.

In 1929, the large concrete dam at Pardee was completed on the river 5 miles north of Valley Springs. It was constructed by the East Bay Municipal Utility District to supply water from the Mokelumne by aqueduct to serve communities on the east side of San Francisco Bay.

An agreement covering the release of water from the Pardee Reservoir was executed between East Bay and Woodbridge Irrigation District. Now that farmers are assured of a sufficient irrigation water supply all summer, the Woodbridge Irrigation District has prospered. It is the Woodbridge Dam that keeps the water in popular Lodi Lake throughout the summer.

Camanche Dam, situated 15 miles east of Lodi, and 10 miles below Pardee, was completed in 1963. It was built by East Bay Municipal Utilities District as a supplemental reservoir to supply standby storage waters which can be released as needed downstream, thus preserving the bulk of the water in Pardee for domestic consumption in the East Bay.

An additional feature of Camanche is the flood control factor requested by the Federal Government to protect the rich crop lands in the lower Mokelumne River area. For this reason there was federal assistance in paying for the dam. This flood control feature is much appreciated by the Mokelumne River Irrigation District, representing 12,000 acres of farm land near Lockeford. Neil Locke, president of this association, says of the river, "Finally we have it about where we want it".

Comanche Reservoir is expected to provide one of California's finest recreation areas for boating, fishing, swimming, and water skiing. The fish hatchery below the dam is being successfully operated to raise steelhead trout and furnish spawning grounds for salmon.

Now over 400,000 acre feet of water storage has been constructed in eight reservoirs on the Mokelumne and its tributaries. Water is stored in these reservoirs during the spring runoff and flood periods and is later released to generate power and to supply farms and homes with water which would have otherwise wasted into the ocean.

Thus has man made wise use through the years of one of the great rivers flowing through San Joaquin County.