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John Sutter and His Fort

by John Kelly and George Stammerjohan

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By John Kelly and George Stammerjohan

We are very pleased to present "John Sutter and His Fort" researched and written jointly by John Kelly and George Stammerjohan, both dedicated volunteers at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park in Sacramento.

On July 1, 1839, Johann August Sutter¹ reached California aboard the ship *Clementine*, late from Honolulu, Sandwich Islands, and Russian Alaska. The decision to come to California had been a fairly recent one on the part of Sutter though he had not reckoned on a five month stay in Hawaii or the roundabout sea journey to the Mexican territory.

John Sutter had left Missouri the year before, for the Oregon country and like many then and later westward bound emigrants, altered his mind and his plans as he traveled along. Like so many, Sutter was an intellectual sponge, absorbing new ideas, new thoughts, new vistas and squeezing out new concepts for his future. Once he arrived at the Hudson's Bay Company trading post of Fort Vancouver, Sutter told the acting superintendent, James Douglas, he wished to settle in



JAMES DOUGLAS

the Willamette Valley, establish a large farm and once having a feel of the basic success he would travel to Switzerland and organize a large colony of German and Swiss emigrants. Learning how productive the valley could be for cattle and what an eager market the Hudson's Bay Company might provide, Sutter was then in favor of establishing a large cattle ranch. For the first time he mentioned "California"; he would import the cattle from the Mexican Department to the south. Once "his" cattle grazed upon "his" land, then Sutter would go to Europe and bring out to the Oregon country the German and Swiss colonists. Now, who should he talk to about conditions and routes from California?

Apparently, James Douglas, or someone else in the area,



JOHN AUGUSTUS SUTTER, 1803-1880

told him about the former American fur trapper, Ewing Young, who the year before had driven a herd of horses and cattle from the Valle de Rio Sacramento over the Cascades and into the Willamette. Part of the herd was for his own ranch in Red Bud Valley, a wing of the Willamette, while part of the herd went to beef-hungry Hudson's Bay men. Sutter traveled up the valley to Young's place, stayed for three days and returned to Fort Vancouver excited over his new plan to settle in California. Not one word more did Sutter have on any plans to settle a colony in the Oregon country.

Sutter was ready to head south for California in an instant but Douglas convinced him he had little chance to reach California now that winter had set in. Sutter would have to wait and in the meantime Sutter apparently convinced Douglas that he would soon have a large cattle ranch and would gladly supply all the beef animals Fort Vancouver could use. Sutter would drive them each year over the Ewing Young route from California to Oregon. Sutter also discovered he might reach the Mexican province by taking a ship to Honolulu and then catch a merchant brig for California. An HBC ship was about to sail for the Sandwich Islands and John August booked passage. By early December 1838, he was ensconced in one of the two boarding hotels in the busy little village of Hono-

lulu. However, no ship was outbound for California for months.

As far as can be told, Sutter stayed near Honolulu during the five months he was in the Sandwich Islands. He did not leave the island of Oahu and therefore never met King Kamehameha, III, who was staying at Lahaina, away from his half-sister who was the governess of the Island of Oahu. Sutter did meet numerous businessmen, organized letters of credit and bought on account portions of the outfit he would need to establish his colony. He also found that there was a Royal Hawaiian office for contract labor in Honolulu. Here he arranged a three year contract to take nine lower class males and three females, called "Kanakas" (or "commoners")² to identify that they were not royalty or clergy of the Hawaiian society. One Hawaiian male disappeared before Sutter reached California, and officially Sutter reached Monterey with eight men and "two" women.³

After five months Sutter sailed for the west coast of North America. First there was a side trip to Russian Alaska, but finally he reached California, first arriving at San Francisco (i.e. Yerba Buena) where the ship was ordered to Monterey. Yerba Buena was not a port of entry for Mexican California. In Monterey he met Governor Juan B. Alvarado and secured a "Carta de Seguridad," a passport to travel plus a "Boleto de Disembarque" - a pass to leave his ship.

John Sutter then returned to San Francisco. He visited

Sonoma, met the Vallejos who encouraged him to settle in the northwest of then "civilized" California, that is somewhere under the eye of Mariano G. Vallejo. But, Sutter wanted to be his own man, on his own empire. He noted that local citizens

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MARIANO G. VALLEJO

took off their hat when approaching Senor Lieutenant Colonel Vallejo, the commandant general of California.⁴ They took off their hats when walking by the Church, and when passing Vallejo's headquarters office, even if the esteemed "general" was not in. Sutter would keep his hat on; he would go someplace described in the wondrous stories of Ewing Young.

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Sutter did visit the Russians of Fort Ross; he completed connections started at Sitka just weeks before. He would buy much from the Russians, including two years hence their property along the coast. And, the Russians would turn to Sutter as a food supplier after the Hudson's Bay Company and M.G. Vallejo formed a not very secret partnership to supply the Russian-American Company's Alaskan outposts with grain, vegetables and beef in 1840. Despite the myth that Sutter failed the Russians, he, in fact, delivered hundreds of tons of wheat, ground flour and beef to Russian contracted ships at Yerba Buena harbor for delivery in Alaska. Even the reputed threat of Sutter's agricultural foundation would keep the Honorable Company-Vallejo prices low.

Finally, in August, 1839, Sutter started up the Sacramento River, exploring as far north as the outskirts of modern Yuba City. He liked the area of the lower Feather River, but his crew of would-be colonists complained: "Too far from civilization." He dropped back to the American Fork, sailed several miles up it and landed - about where the Sacramento city dump is today. From here he explored; it was hot, dry, the grass was thick and brown; he noted the high water marks on the trees and the trash from floods jammed in the lower branches. He picked out a site, high ground, good view, but no water nearby. It was the highest ground - the area today is occupied by the facilities of the Sacramento Bee newspaper (21st & Q & R streets).

So, John Sutter went back to a smaller hill, still above the flood, closer to his landing site. It was bare; a long rectangular shaped ridge with a somewhat stagnant pond of water beyond the north slope;⁵ no one lived here. There was no sign of Indian occupation. Sutter climbed the hill, looked around, and must have shrugged his shoulders: it will do. Okay, we put the camp here. The "empire," and "rancho" and "establishment" of New Helvetia was founded - on the worst choice site; the only practical site. So are great beginnings begun.

While John Sutter was the first European to settle in the Sacramento Valley, he did not enter a totally unknown world. The area had been explored by Spanish patrols as early as 1806. The Spanish searched for mission sites, but found "water sources scarce and difficult," due to the heights of the river

banks, and the native population already leery of European contact. The Spanish were replaced by travelers from the Mexican presidios, and by explorers from Fort Ross and American and British trappers. The Hudson's Bay Company had attempted to trap the valley beaver out of existence as a means to deflect American trappers entering the Sacramento from the San Joaquin Valley. The real purpose was to protect the fur-rich Snake River country in modern-day Idaho. By the mid-1830s, cattle and horses were being driven north from Mexican settlements up the valley to the Oregon country.

Two weeks after the camp was established, Sutter's nearest neighbor, Dr. John Marsh, rode the sixty-odd miles from his rancho near the slopes of Monte Diablo to pay a call. He viewed the tents and the brush huts, and the mosquito and frog-filled pond and the adobe bricks Sutter's workmen were preparing for a three-room structure, and dubbed the whole place: "Sutter's Frog Pond."⁶

From Sutter's "Frog Pond," the place became "Sutter's Station," as he became a candidate for Mexican citizenship, a representative of the Mexican government, a justice of the peace, and an applicant for a land grant for 11 leagues. Mexican citizenship came in 1840, and the grant for 48,400 acres (more or less) was approved in 1841. Sutter's grant was for a colonizer, an "empresario," and he would have to place 12 settlers on his colony of New Helvetia to establish the legitimacy of the grant, and gain additional acreage in compensation. In July 1844, Sutter was appointed a militia captain in the newly reorganized auxiliary militia of California. With a reinforced militia force, Sutter went to aid the embattled Mexican governor, Manuel Micheltoarena, against rebellious Californios. The governor awarded Sutter, in a time-honored and legal manner, 22 more leagues of land as compensation for his governmental loyalty. The governor lost against the rebellious forces and surrendered; Sutter was captured on the bloodless field of battle on the first day. Released by the victorious Californios, Sutter's loyalty to government orders given by the former Governor Micheltoarena and his ability to now support the victors gained him his freedom, restoration of his duties, and command of the old northern frontier of Alta California. Micheltoarena had promoted Sutter to the rank of lieutenant colonel, but Sutter wisely retained only the rank of captain, and wrote of himself as "Comandante" (Commander).

While all of this occupied one part of the stage, Sutter's establishment had become the colony of New Helvetia, but "Sutter's Station" was still a three-room adobe hut with a new tule roof. The old roof had burned off during the late winter of 1840. There was an adobe-walled corral immediately east of the house, a collection of tule huts, and a wooden picket pallisade to ward off unwanted visitors. In the spring of 1841, the main house was planned inside the pallisade. It would be three stories tall, and feature a projecting upper floor (in the Swiss style), would have a shingled roof, and would have approximately ten rooms. Then, Sutter received a terrible fright, and all plans changed.

Whether John Sutter planned to wall his establishment

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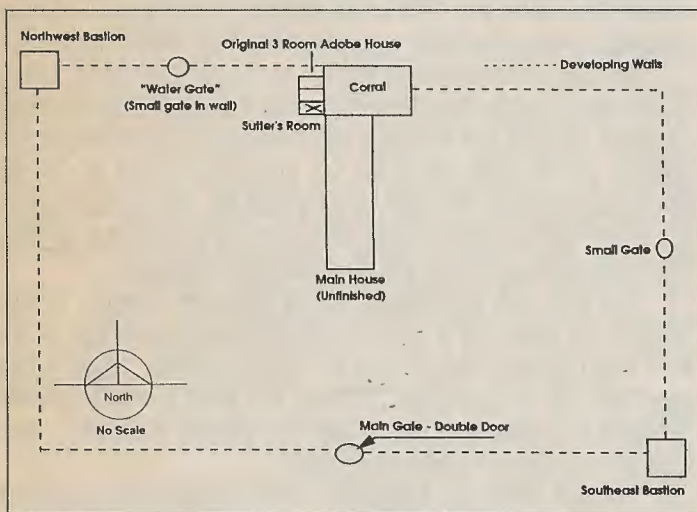
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from the first or not is not known. He had certainly seen enough protected settlements in his North American travels from Fort William (Fort Laramie), to Fort Hall and Fort Vancouver, to Fort Ross and M.G. Vallejo's fortified Petaluma Rancho headquarters. Only John Marsh lived in an unfortified house, though his house was sturdily made, and loopholed for rifles. In the early spring of 1841, Sutter became aware that the commanding general of California, Lt. Colonel M.G. Vallejo, was rattling his sword, and threatening harsh action against the Swiss colonizer. Sutter started a fort around his house.

Naturally, it took time; thousands of adobe bricks had to be made, and to make the bricks, dozens and dozens of laborers. The two opposite bastions were built first, approximately three stories high (about 27 feet), and then an outer, low



SCHEMATIC OF NEW HELVETIA, 1841

wall to connect the bastions and protect an inner courtyard. In secret, Sutter bought ten cannon at San Francisco harbor, and smuggled them up-river. The guns were old Spanish tubes from the revolutionary wars, but they were cannon. He also sent John Sinclair to Honolulu to purchase small arms, but the venture was not successful. By early fall, Sutter had completed the two bastions, the cannon were mounted, a five-foot wall encircled the courtyards of the establishment, and plans were in the works to build the walls higher, and add an inside wall and rooms between the walls.

Inside the walls, the main building, rectangular in shape, stood empty and unfinished. It lacked doors and windows, and while the gabled roof framework was in place, shingles and more importantly, shingle nails were lacking. Apparently in late November 1841, the main (or central) building was covered with a tule thatch for protection. The main building would not be finished until 1843.

Sutter continued to live in his one room in the original three-room house that stood immediately northwest of the new central building. By late 1842, the outer walls had reached approximately 18 feet in height, and the double front gate was finished. On a flattened, reinforced roof on either side of the main (south) gate, a 12-pounder gunnade cannon had been

installed to sweep away any foot attack against the portal. A gallery lined the interior side of the outer wall. An inner wall had gone up to approximately 14 feet in height, and the outer wall and inner wall attached with a slanting wooden shed-like framework. Roofs were made of tule thatch, hopefully to soon be replaced with wooden shingles. The last wood shingles were put on in April 1846, after the wind stripped the tules off the northeast side of the fort.

Between the inner walls on the west, south, east, and northeast-facing walls, rooms were partitioned off with adobe bricks and whipsawed planks. Doors were made, and as more Americans arrived, Sutter worried about hasps and padlocks to secure the rooms.

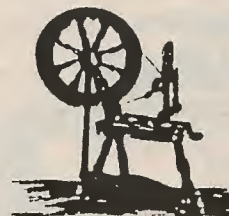
In the fall of 1841, Sutter, despite the threat of ouster by the Mexican government, had purchased the movable property of Fort Ross. The former Russian fort was stripped of furniture, lumber, glass windows, doors, and even whole buildings, which were knocked down, bundled up, and shipped to Sutter's developing fort. The majority of the move - over a two year period - was successful, but mishaps did occur, and some Russian structures did not survive to reach Sutter's developing fortress. Several buildings reached Sutter's, but work crews could not define how to reassemble the intricate structures.

The fort, nearing completion in 1843 (it was actually never finished), was described by Lansford Hastings in some detail:

In form it is a sexangular oblong, its greatest length being 428 feet, and its greatest width, 178 feet; 233 feet of its length being 178 feet wide, and the residue but 129 feet. It is enclosed by permanent 'adobie' walls, which are 18 feet high, and three feet thick, with bastions at the corners, the walls of which, are five feet thick. It is entered by three large swinging gates, one of which is on the north, another on the south side, and the third on the east end - - The first of these is entirely inaccessible from without, because of a deep and impassable ravine, which extends the whole length of the fort, on the north; on each side of the second (that is the south), is a plat-form, upon each of which, a nine pounder is planted, and the third is completely commanded by one of the bastions.

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There are two bastions, each of which has four guns, two nine pounders and, two six pounders; and in all, there are twelve guns of different caliber. The inner building of this fort, consists of a large and commodious residence, for the various officers, in connection with which is a large kitchen, a dining room, two large parlors, the necessary offices, shops and lodging apartments. Besides these there is also a distillery, a horse mill and a magazine, together with barracks...

Inside the main courtyard of the fort, Sutter built, or reassembled from Russian Fort Ross, several wooden structures. The largest, in the southwest corner, was the "plankit" (blanket) factory. Several small wooden structures were built in the southeast courtyard, near the east gate.

The Mexican-American War passed the fort without serious physical effect; however, Sutter's involvement as a U.S. supporter did cost him heavily in financial expenditure. Little of it was ever paid back.

After years of drought, and learning to farm in California, Sutter in 1847 saw agriculture begin to pay. His debts were heavy, and his attempts to pay and keep his creditors at bay was a major stress on him. The year 1848 would be a bumper crop year; everything was coming to fruition. What actually came was the discovery of gold, and while at first it appeared to be a blessing, it in turn became a demon to Sutter. Unable to profit as a miner, he turned to merchandising, but found himself a fish among sharks. Reportedly, the outclassed and befuddled (by his growing alcohol problem), Sutter was cheated and looted by his partners. The flood of argonauts drawn by the gold strikes swarmed past Sutter's Fort like locusts. They took what they wanted.

Sutter began to rent parts of the fort, until by mid-1849, he owned but controlled little of the fort. Shortly thereafter, disillusioned, outraged at his son's (John August Sutter, Jr.) creation of Sacramento, overrun by miners, but free of debt by his son's actions, Sutter sold the fort, and retreated to his agricultural property at Hock Farm on the Feather River.

Historic Structures and Sites

The only above-ground Sutter period resource at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park is the "Central Building," constructed by John Sutter between 1841 and 1843. Sutter constructed a rectangular structure that could be characterized as a one-story building with a full basement and full attic. It is 65 feet in length on the north-south line, with a width of 35 feet east-west. Originally, the ground, or basement, floor had no doors or windows. Entry was from the first-floor level via stairs covered by a locked trapdoor for which only Sutter had a key. After the sale of the fort, windows and doors were cut into the adobe walls. Small windows on the west, south, and east sides and a door on the west side were left intact during the 1890s reconstruction of the fort. The small windows in the south wall were walled up during the 1959 rehabilitation of the central building.

The first floor (or second level) was divided into seven rooms. The western half became Sutter's private apartment of four rooms, while on the east was a central hall (dining area with simple furniture). At the north end of the hall was a room used as a public business office; on the south end of the hall, the room has been identified with the short tenure of Doctor William Gildea. How this room was appointed and furnished is not known.

The attic was unfinished during the Sutter period. It was reached by stairs (or a ladder) located at the north end of the hall, and currently duplicated by wooden stairs. How Sutter used the attic is unknown. During the gold rush, the central building was used as a hotel, and the upstairs became a common (dormitory-like) sleeping area.

The first floor was apparently reached by double approach sets of wooden stairs on the west and east sides of the central building. The stairs were open without railing.

The remainder of the Sutter period portion of the historic unit is archaeological in nature. The south and west walls of the pioneer monument and the southern portion of the north-east bastion are close to the original Sutter alignments. Unfortunately, the excavations for the stepped common brick foundation almost certainly destroyed any archaeological remnant of the Sutter construction. As noted below, excavations in search of the extension of the south wall and the alignment of the east wall were unsuccessful. Except along the outside of the existing north wall, it is probable that any remaining evidence of Sutter-period construction was destroyed when the site was graded in 1891.

Since the only remainder of the Sutter construction on the site is the central building, the statements of eyewitnesses are critical to understanding the size and shape of the original fort/factory. In addition to the Hastings quote, there are several other descriptions of the fort.

In his reminiscences, Sutter notes that:

I built one large building and surrounded it with walls 18 feet high and bastions. The walls enclosed about five acres. They were of adobe blocks about two and one-half feet thick, bastions five feet thick, and under the

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bastions the prisons. I then erected other buildings, bakery, mill, blanket factory, all inside. ...four years were occupied in building the fort.

There are minor inconsistencies in the various descriptions of the fort. For instance, Hastings notes the exterior walls as three feet thick, while Sutter states that they are two and a half feet thick.

Beginning in 1848, Sutter leased space to individuals for commercial activities, and then sold the fort for \$7,000 in 1849. From then through the early 1850s, numerous doors and windows were cut through the exterior adobe walls. In part due to this cutting, and in part due to the salvaging of the wood construction, parts of the fort had fallen into ruin by 1857. By 1858, only the damaged central building and the southwest bastion in ruins remained.

During the period 1849 to about 1875, the sixteen lots on the two blocks bounded by 26th-28th and "K" and "L" streets were in the hands of numerous owners, and subject to a variety of sales, transfers, and tax auctions. During this time, the central building was used as a hotel, residence, and junk depository. Mrs. Olive Lawson and her nine children used the structure as a residence from about 1859 to 1868, when she was evicted by the sheriff, and the property was put up for sale at tax auction. In 1867, Lawson had replaced the dilapidated adobe south wall of the central building with a common brick wall, which remains today, hidden by an adobe facade.

As time went on, various pioneer groups in California became interested in the historic value of the fort, and attempts were made to gather information about the complex from first-hand sources. This culminated in an 1889 article in *Themis*, a short-lived Saturday Sacramento publication, showing maps of the fort based, to a great degree, on the memory of John Bidwell. As we shall see, Bidwell's memory was accurate.

In 1888, the Native Sons of the Golden West (NSGW) made a decision to raise funds to purchase the fort property, and rebuild the fort as a memorial to California pioneers. The generation of the *Themis* maps was part of their research. The driving force behind the reconstruction, civil engineer Carl E. Grunsky, searched for pioneers who had seen the fort in its original configuration, and took several of them out to walk the grounds. In his account Grunsky notes that the remainder of portions of the exterior walls showed clearly as low linear mounds that were readily identifiable along the west and south perimeter of the fort. He further notes that the location of the southwest corner was, in part, established by excavating for coal. The blacksmith shop was known to have been along the south wall one room east of the corner, with the colliery (coal and charcoal storage) in the corner room. Apparently, Grunsky and others carried out a primitive project in historic archaeology, and discovered the remains of the coal pile. Unfortunately, the north and east walls were not as easy to identify.

After a considerable fund-raising effort in 1889, the

NSGW was able to secure the two blocks from Benjamin Merrill, a resident of Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Merrill placed in the papers of transfer a deed restriction stating that the property must always be used for public purposes. The State of California accepted the property from the NSGW in 1891, with the provision that it be managed by a board of trustees appointed at the pleasure of the governor.

Between 1891 and April 1893, the NSGW rehabilitated the central building by filling in various holes with adobe, covering the common brick south wall with a layer of adobe, and digging under the structure and implanting a common brick foundation. At the same time, partially funded by a \$20,000 grant from the state, the NSGW attempted to reconstruct the exterior walls and associated interior shed structures. The exterior walls are of common brick, with portions of the shed walls of adobe, and portions of fired adobe brick. In April 1893, the partially reconstructed fort was formally presented to the State of California in a "Grand Ceremony." The state put up another \$10,000 to finish the shed structures. The shed walls in the west and southwest sections of the fort were completed by the state, and are of adobe bricks fired for the state by Muddox Co. The oval pond was excavated by Grunsky to represent the slough that abutted the north wall of the fort during the Sutter occupation. By 1897, the hole Grunsky had graded for the pond had not yet been improved. The water-filled stagnant oval was cited by the City of Sacramento as a mosquito hazard, and the state contracted 12,000 cubic yards of soil and filled the pond.

There are numerous differences between Sutter's Fort (as represented in written accounts and on the Kunzle map) and the 1890s Pioneer Memorial. The most important of these differences are as follows:

1. The footprints of the two constructions vary considerably.
 - a. The fort was 428 feet on its east/west axis, while the Pioneer Memorial is 320 feet long.
 - b. The fort was 178 feet north/south at the west end, while the Pioneer Memorial is 163 feet at the same point.
 - c. The fort was 129 feet north/south at the east end, and the truncated Pioneer Memorial is 137 feet wide at the

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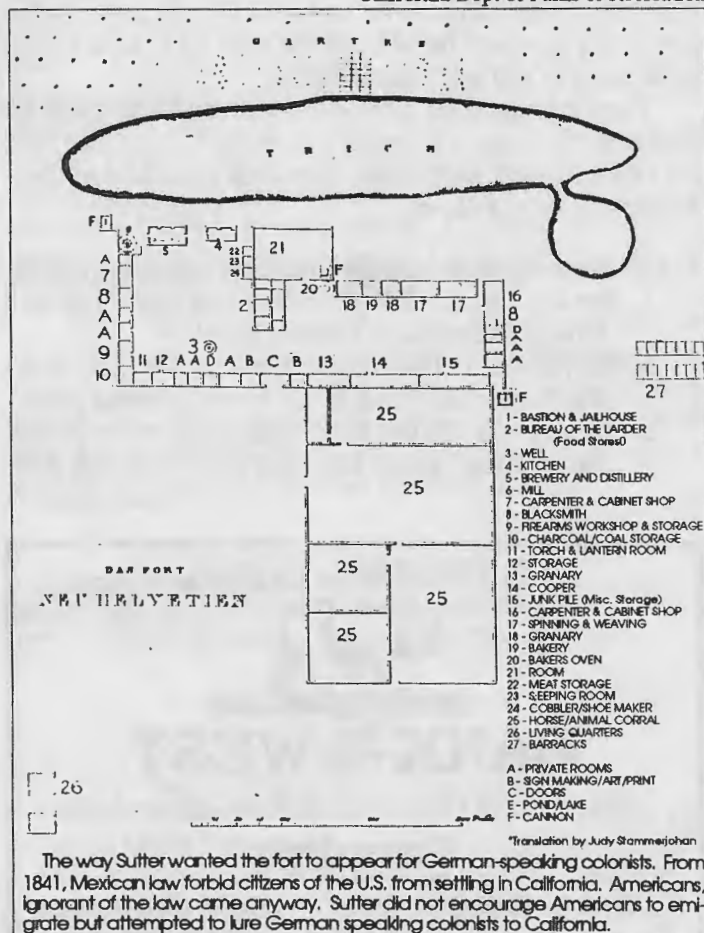
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existing east end.

- d. The fort had corrals to the north and northeast of the central building, while the "Kyburz Annex" occupies the space north of the central building in the Pioneer Memorial.
- e. The east wall of the fort distillery was 72 feet west of the central building, while the "Distillery" (museum) in the Pioneer Memorial is only 25 feet west of the central building.
- f. Sutter's original three-room adobe, which extended north from the northwest corner of the central building, does not exist in the Pioneer Memorial.
- g. The large adobe-walled threshing enclosures and corrals which abutted the south exterior wall east of the south gate do not exist in the Pioneer Memorial.

2. Based on the Sutter and Hastings descriptions, the original exterior walls were 18 feet high. The walls of the reconstruction are 15 feet high. Grunsky indicates that the NSGW did not believe that the original walls were 18 feet high. Additionally, he states that the NSGW could not afford to build an exterior wall higher than 15 feet. Sutter estimated his walls

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THE KUNZEL MAP PUBLISHED IN GERMANY, 1848

at two and a half feet thick, while Hastings states that they are three feet thick. The Native Son's common brick exterior wall is two and a half feet thick. Both Sutter and Hastings note that the adobe bastion walls were five feet thick. The NSGW common brick bastions have walls two and a half feet thick. Sutter notes that the interior shed walls are 14 feet high, while the NSGW shed walls are only eight feet in height. No comments on the thickness of the shed walls have yet been discovered, so no comparison is possible.

3. All of the exterior walls and some of the interior walls in the fort were of sun-dried adobe, while the Pioneer Memorial walls are a combination of sun-dried adobe bricks, kiln-fired adobe bricks, and common bricks.

Except for the Sutter-period central building, the differences between Sutter's Fort and the California Pioneer Memorial clearly separate these constructions (See map on page 33). These differences should be accommodated to reduce problems associated with the established interpretive period for the current version of the fort.

The fort sat partially complete, with no interior partitions or improvements in the shed rooms, until the San Francisco earthquake/fire of April 1906.

In April 1906, the fort was converted into "Camp Sutter" to house refugees from the San Francisco disaster. Newspaper accounts from the period imply that the fort already had some water and electrical lines, and go on to state that these were upgraded and a sewer installed, which was hooked into the city sewer in the middle of the block on 28th between "K" and "L" streets.

During this period, wood partitions were installed in some of the sheds, and wood and brick flooring was placed throughout the structures. "Camp Sutter" was decommissioned in June 1906, and left in its improved state.

In 1907, the state purchased and gifted to the city enough of the property in the 26th-27th and 27th-28th, "L" and "M" blocks to reroute "L" Street around the southwest corner of the fort, which extended into the original street alignment.

For unknown reasons, the Sutter's Fort Board of Trustees was disbanded by the governor in 1921. Following this action, numerous members of the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West began to put pressure on the governor and legislature to complete the fort as the Pioneer Museum envisioned in the 1890s. To this end, Harry Peterson, curator of the Stanford University Art Museum, was hired as a consultant in 1926 to develop a plan. After submission of his \$20,000 renovation and improvement scheme in 1927, Peterson was hired as curator. He served in that position from 1927 until his death in 1940. During that time he built the wagon sheds along the north wall, shaked the shed roofed sections as they were during the Sutter period, had many of the shed rooms floored in "adobe," put up numerous "adobe" partitions in the shed rooms, and added a considerable variety of other improvements.

Peterson, more than any other person, was responsible for turning the fort into the Pioneer Museum envisioned by the Native Sons and Daughters as part of the Pioneer Memorial. He solicited pioneer California collections from all over the western United States, and developed artifact museums in the fort to display them. He also attempted to recreate what he called "house museums" by using some of the artifacts along with locally constructed "rustic" furniture to furnish several of the rooms in a manner he thought appropriate to the Sutter

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RECONSTRUCTED SUTTER'S FORT, 1907

period. Peterson's career was capped with the elaborate displays prepared for the 1939 Centennial celebration. Part of these displays consisted of a series of massive bleached oak display cases in the central building, and in a continuous line in the west wing of the shed structure.

Except for periodic maintenance, there was no significant work on the fort between 1938 and the end of World War II. Sometime between 1946 and 1955, the tiles on the central building, Kyburz annex, museum, and bastions were removed and replaced with pine shakes. Much of the archaeology noted above was conducted in conjunction with a major rehabilitation of this sole remnant of the Sutter period.

In 1959, the interior of the central building (except for the adobe walls) was removed and then replaced. Workers were able to salvage about 50 percent of the joists supporting the second floor of the structure. As a safety measure, they cut channels in the upper sides of the joists, and replaced "T" rails which are implanted in the exterior with concrete and rebar. The culmination of the work consisted of peeling the south wall down to the masonry and placing a new adobe cover, along with whitewashing and roofing.

In 1955, there began a five-year series of excavations designed to give a clearer picture of the fort as Sutter knew it.

The 1955 excavations were initiated by Sacramento State College (California State University, Sacramento) at the invitation of the Division of Beaches and Parks, Department of Natural Resources. The excavations were conducted in the form of an archaeological field class under the direction of Drs. Richard Reeve and Brigham Arnold.

The 1955 research resulted in excavation of two trenches

to the east of the fort, one set of excavation units (XU) against the south wall of the main gate, four sets of XUs along the exterior of the west wall, and one set of test augerings in the north portion of the east yard.

Beginning in the winter of 1957 and extending through the spring of 1958, Charles L. Gebhardt conducted excavations under a Standard Services Agreement with the Division of Beaches and Parks. His report is also very short, but gives a clear indication of his goals. Gebhardt was hired to test the research of Hero Rensch, state park contract historian. Rensch began a literature search in 1955 with the intent of discovering the actual size and shape of the original Sutter's Fort. By 1958, Rensch had discovered several documents, including two 1850s maps based on the field notes of the first land survey of the city of Sacramento. Based on these maps, Rensch estimated that the original east wall of the fort was in 28th Street, and that the original north wall was 50 feet north of the existing wall.

Gebhardt sited his excavation units with the intent of testing Rensch's data. Gebhardt laid out two north-south trenches between the existing east wall and 28th Street -- the first with its south end parallel to the line of the south wall and 80 feet east of the existing east wall, and the second parallel and adjacent to the east side of the walkway paralleling the east wall. Gebhardt notes that the positioning of his trench "A" 80 feet east of the east wall placed it in one of the areas last graded

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John Sutter and His Fort From page 25

John Kelly Collection



SUTTER'S FORT ABOUT 1850. NOTE ADDED BELL TOWER

during the 1890s reconstruction. One of the documents located by Rensch was the grading map prepared by C.E. Grunsky for restoration of the fort. This map shows the lot as it existed both prior to and after the restoration grading. The

California State Library



MAIN HOUSE IN DETERIORATED CONDITION

original contours are shown as dotted lines, and the grading contours as solid lines.

These same excavations recovered considerable information on the remains of the Sutter occupation of the site. While the archaeologists were excavating, a map was discovered in the Bancroft Library that showed that the fort as reconstructed was much smaller than Sutter's original construction. These so-called Kunzel maps are based on two maps prepared by John Bidwell and Pierson B. Reading, which Sutter sent to Germany. The map, along with the text describing the wonders of California, was published in Germany in 1848 (See page 24).

The fort of John A. Sutter has therefore come in a near circle, even if it is approximately one-third smaller in its reconstructed condition than it was as Sutter developed it. And, all of the outbuildings, like the "Vaquero casa" (cowboy's house) southwest of the front gate, or the granary, located east of the east gate, "a long bisquit throw away," and the large

horse, cattle and threshing corrals at the southeast front are all gone. There was no room or money when the fort was reconstructed. The Slough replica (pond) is empty, partly to conserve water during these years of drought and partly waiting to have the west end bottom repaired. The pond presented a long period puzzle. Why was the east end concreted and deeper, but the west end allowed to exist in a shallow, mud bottom condition. The mud bottom caused the pond to leak, the water following underground the old slough channel toward William Land Park in south Sacramento.

California Department of Parks & Recreation



THE FORT AS IT APPEARS TODAY

A Department of Parks and Recreation staff member found the answer several years ago while doing research on another project. The mud bottom was to accommodate the three-to-five Cayman Alligators that lived in the pond during the first decade and a half of this century. The alligators were penned in by an ankle high wire scroll fence.

Some eight years ago the volunteers at the fort who make up the membership of the Sutter's Fort Docent Association, a branch of the Sacramento State Parks Docent Association, began a program of room rehabilitation: taking the fort room by room back to that year of transition, 1846, when three banners flew over the fort in one year: Mexican, the Red Star of the Popular Movement, and the U.S. flag. Each room of the fort receives a thorough research project and a careful detailed interpretive plan. The plan is reviewed by Department of Parks and Recreation staff and then is put into effect. Each room is equipped with "hands-on artifacts," mostly replications, which can be used and demonstrated to the public during special event days such as the five Living History Programs held each year. The goal, within reasonable limitations that no one can exactly duplicate the past, is to give an appearance that John A. Sutter, if he could return from the grave, would find familiar and comforting: that his image of his "establishment" and "his goals" are being shown to the world.

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**OH THAT I HAD IN THE WILDERNESS
A LODGING-PLACE OF WAYFARING MEN!**

John Sutter and His Fort From page 26

Notes:

1. The writer, James Zollinger, in an article on John Sutter in the California Historical Society Quarterly, 1936, and his book, *Sutter, The Man and His Empire* (New York, 1939), tried to prove that Sutter (pronounced "Suitor") added an extra "t" to his name when he arrived in the United States. Unfortunately, Zollinger did not do his homework. From the Sutter family baptismal records at Kandern, Germany, Swiss government records at Liestal, Burgdorf and Bern, to his arrival paper at New York on July 14, 1834 aboard the ship *Sully* (U.S. Archives, Ship's Passenger List, 1834) Sutter's name is spelled with 2 ts. The name "Sutter," or "Suter," is an old Alemannic Swiss-German word meaning cobbler or shoe maker. Three generations of Sutters were at Kandern, Baden, Germany (then the Dukedom of Baden) and all spelled their name "Sutter" from John August's grandfather downward.

A second point, almost all the Sutters were named Johann (or John). Johann is a Christian given name, for St. John the Baptist. This is similar to Hispanic Californian names of the last century starting with "Jose," or "Jose y Maria," for Joseph, father of Jesus, or Joseph and Mary, parents of Jesus. John Sutter's common name was August and in California, by friends called "Don Agosto." Mariano G. Vallejo, for example, by intimates was addressed as "Don Guadalupe." Sutter's grandfather was Johann Jakob Sutter, his father was Johann Jakob Sutter and Johann August's only brother, born five years later in 1808 was named Jakob Frederick Sutter (Baptismal Records and Foreign Registry Records, Kandern, Germany).

2. The word "Kanaka" is a European derivative from the Hawaiian word "Kane" which means "Men," a term used by Hawaiian males when they introduced themselves to the early European sailors. For a readable introduction to Hawaiian history see: Ruth M. Tabrah, *Hawaii, A History*, New York, 1984. Also, the exhibits on "contact with outsiders" at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawaii.

3. Of the three females from Hawaii, one was apparently under the age of child bearing and therefore was not counted by the government in Honolulu on the contract or by the Mexican authorities. However, the Honolulu newspaper, noting the sailing of the *Clementine* commented that Sutter took "9 men" and "3 females" with him to California. What happened to the Kanaka who disappeared is unknown. The contract listing all the names of the Hawaiians was not kept; the Royal Archives did not start keeping such records until 1841 (State Archives of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii, November, 1989 - Personal Visit and Research; also the State Library of Hawaii, History of Hawaii Room, Honolulu, Hawaii, November, 1989).

4. The title and administration of the rank "Commandante General" could be given to any level of Commissioned Officer and not necessarily to a general. The rank conferred a temporary advancement to the level of "senior commanding

officer" with an acting rank of General; it was not a promotion to the grade of general in the Mexican Armed Services. At the time, Vallejo was a Captain of Presidials, the highest rank available for senior Presidio officers, and a Lieutenant Colonel of California's civic militia.

5. The Native Nisenan-Maidu of the area probably knew by tradition that the site was an earlier group of Indians' burial ground. Department archaeologists in the early 1960s removed at least seven burials of a pre-Nisenan people from the area around the main central building. Very little is known about these Native Americans who once occupied Sutter's hill.

6. Whether John Sutter and John Marsh knew each other before August, 1839 is unknown. Marsh obviously wanted to see who this new settler was and what plans he had. Marsh was the type who liked to visit. The two would become the best of squabbling, name-calling friends.

Sources:

Kelly and Stammerjohan, Historic Research Files on Sutter & Fort.

This article grew out of the cultural inventory for Sutter's Fort State Historic Park and the General Plan published in September 1990 and Ms. Eileen Hook's *New Helvetia: The Dream and the Reality*, The Sutter's Fort State Historic Interpretive Plan, Office of Interpretive Services, 1987.

There are numerous books out on Sutter or Sutter's era. Many are hopelessly outdated. While now dated, Richard Dillon's biography on Sutter, *Fools Gold*, currently reissued as *John Sutter, Sacramento's Sainted Sinner* (3rd edition) is still one of the best bios of Sutter around. Dillon offers an interpretive view, it is his picture of Sutter, and while shaky in parts, presents a thoughtful, balanced view of Johann August Sutter.

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John Kelly, a native Californian from Long Beach, is a State Archaeologist with the California Department of Parks and Recreation and for 20 years worked on Cultural Inventories and General Plans, often in conjunction with co-author George Stammerjohan. Mr. Kelly has been involved in re-enacting with the Sutter's Fort Living History Program for almost ten years, where he portrays Dr. John Marsh. He and his wife, Claudine, live in the Orangevale area.

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**Copies of this issue available at
Sutter's Fort State Historic Park**