

Yolo County Historical Society



Prez Says

Here we are – the end of May. We have scheduled a June Board meeting for Thursday, June 4 at 10 AM. We have many things to discuss. I do not know whether we will be able to have our First Friday Open House/Business in Woodland. It will depend on the opening of the restaurants.

Just a few notes of interest:

Katrina Gustafson, a third-grade teacher in Woodland, is creating a web site for third graders concerning Yolo County History. Dino Gay and I looked over the ‘historical facts.’ Look for more information about this in future newsletters.

The Hattie Weber, WPA, building is scheduled to begin this summer. Yay Team Hattie!

As the fair has been cancelled for this summer, I have included an article from an old society newsletter regarding the history of the Yolo County Fair. I think you will find it great reading.

We have lost another dear supporter of history in this county. Stella Dinger died in April. I have included her obituary and some memories of her in this newsletter.

Our annual meeting in June will be postponed to either July or August. We will send out a postcard.

Again, as always, History Rules!

Kathy Harryman, President

Patrons

Thanks so much to the following for supporting the *Yolo County Historical Society*. We could not run this organization without your additional help.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
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Become a patron by contributing \$100 or more.

The History of the Yolo County Fair



Welcome to the Yolo County Fair - Sign located at the Main Entrance 1950s

The first Yolo County Fair was held in the late summer of 1893 with horse racing being the main event. The Fair continued for several years until pari-mutuel horse racing was outlawed.

The Yolo County Fair was incorporated in 1935. Records indicated that the fair, once established, and the 40th District Agricultural Association, was expanded to include a horse show (1936) and industrial show (1937). Under the provisions of Section 81 of the California Agricultural Code, the petition for the 40th DAA was submitted in 1937.

The current 55-acre fairgrounds site, which was the former "Blowers Ranch," was purchased by the DAA Board of Directors in

1940. The existing buildings included a farmhouse, horse and cattle barns and a bunk house. Later a stock building was built and the exhibit building was relocated from the previous site.

In 1942 the DAA Board discontinued the fair due to World War II. The fair resumed six years later in 1948. Since that time the Yolo County Fair has operated successfully each year and has expanded the structures and scope to accommodate a successful annual fair and related non-fair activities.

The Yolo County Fair is the largest and oldest free gate fair in California. It maintains this status because of the hundreds of volunteers, county/community support, sponsorships, and partnerships with county businesses and individuals. The fairgrounds also hosts several large annual events such as the Sacramento Scottish Games & Festival, the Capital Camellia AKC show, 4-H Spring Show, and numerous other public and private events year around. The fairgrounds is also the county's emergency destination location for people and animals, training space for numerous police and fire departments, and housing for FFA and 4-H animals. The fairgrounds have an RV Park and a Little League Park operated by the City of Woodland.

The following is an article that first appeared in Volume 13, Number 1 July/August 1979 Yolo County Historical Society newsletter.

From Balloon Ascension to Sky Divers: Yolo County Fair 1891-1979

It is highly appropriate that one of the thrills of the last few Yolo County Fairs has been the Sky Divers. Adventures in the sky have occurred throughout the history of the fair. Bicycle races may have opened the festivities of the five-day extravaganza begun August 29, 1893 but the big event of the day was Professor Woodford's balloon ascension in the city park. He rose in his balloon "Pal Alto" to the height of 2,500 feet, cut himself loose from the basket of the balloon and floated to earth in a parachute. He arrived safely and repeated the voyage two days later at the fair.

After pari-mutuel racing was made illegal, the fair closed for a number of years but was reopened in 1937. This opening was marked by a parachute jumper coming down at Best's airport.

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Continued from preceding page – From Balloon Ascension to Sky Divers: Yolo County Fair 1891-1979

Of the first fair on record, little is known of the events themselves. The Yolo Agricultural Fair Association had been organized in 1891 with the following directors: Hon. L.B. Adams, president; M. Diggs, Charles R. Hoppin, W.B. Gibson, G.W. Woodard, S.T. Mowder, Dr. Thomas Ross, C.F. Thomas and J.H. Doolittle.

The first fair was held beginning September 1891. There is much more information available about the second fair which had its opening day Aug 29, 1893. The state legislature had designated Yolo County as the Fortieth Agricultural Fair District and had given both financial and moral support to this venture. The board was able to collect \$15,000 in purses and premiums for this venture. This fair, as well as other early Yolo County fairs had a circus and exhibitions of local talent. But horse-events, especially horse-racing created the most interest.

After the 1893 fair, the other early fairs were held at the old race track which left its name with Race Track Road, northwest of Woodland (now known as Kentucky Rd). Well-known horse breeders from throughout the state came to race their horses. Pioneer residents, the H.E. Coils, who followed the racing circuit, recalled the appearance of Senator and Mrs. Leland Stanford at the fair with the Senator's famous horses this way. "They had very luxurious equipment for their animals, and their own personal belongings were very extravagant."

The fair itself boasted 200 thoroughbred horses, the largest collection outside the state fair. From the time racing was outlawed until 1936, there was no annual County Fair, but only occasional local festivals and exhibitions.

Two ongoing events coalesced in the formation of a fair board to plan the 1936 fair. Yolo County had held an annual livestock show and exhibition for 4-H clubbers from 1930 on. Awards had been provided by the county farm bureau. This event became a part of the county fair.

And an enthusiastic response to a horse show planned by Mrs. Roy Robinson and Mrs. O.C. Railsback as a benefit for the St. Luke's guild at the Maples stables, caused the committee to petition the governor for the re-establishment of the fair district and county association. The committee was given funds from the state pari-mutuel fund. But they were informed that the event could not be limited to the house show. Judging the breeder stock and farm exhibits would have to be included. The committee decided to form a combination horse show and fair and nominated a board of directors for the governor's approval.

The first event, more horse show than fair, occurred May 7, 1936. Action by Governor Frank Merriam re-established the 40th District Fair Association. A record 1,500 attended the show at "the Maples". The fair board of 1937 considered its \$2,274.72 in the treasury and gave thought to improvements in the fair.



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The livestock and agriculture exhibits were financially successful, but the board felt that ticket sales as a whole were below expectations. So arrangements were made to add the Open House and Sugar Festival of the new Spreckles plant and an industrial exposition to the fair. The board also decided to keep premiums in line with those of the state fair and to award them for cattle, sheep, and hogs. A night horse show was planned.

On July 31, 1937, the combined fair and horse show, sugar festival, and industrial exposition opened with a bang. There were exhibits of farm machinery and automobiles at the exposition tent on Bush street. On the first day there were contests, stunts, and street dancing. The 184th battalion of the California National guard took to warring. Using a small barrel with fire hoses, with two teams shooting from opposite sides. The battle began at the blast of the city fire whistle and ended 15 minutes later. Miss Jane Woolsey reigned as horse show queen at the event which closed the fair. The new Yolo County Fair was a great success and continued to grow yearly.

At the fair of 1940, a carnival, two football games at Hyman field (Douglass Jr. High's field) and a four-county golf tourney at Fliers club as well as an anti-aircraft demonstration by an Army unit from San Francisco were added to the usual festivities.

During the two years of 1938-39 negotiations to buy land for a permanent fairgrounds occupied the committee and on August 10, 1940, the board decided to buy the old Blowers ranch, which is the present location of the fair grounds. The 40 acres were purchased for \$12,200, but the land was not used for a fair until the following year.

The first fair held in 1941, opened with exhibits housed in the existing farmhouse, horse and cattle barns, and a bunk house. The new \$10,00 livestock pavilion, housed the sheep and pigs, while the horses and cattle stood out under the shade of the trees.

World War II had come by 1941, and the board voted to discontinue the fair. The U.S. Army was using the land. They felt the congestion at the front gate might block troop movements. Sugar rationing and gas rationing would crimp domestic science and animal exhibits. The land itself was planted in crops, and the buildings housed labor crews during the war.

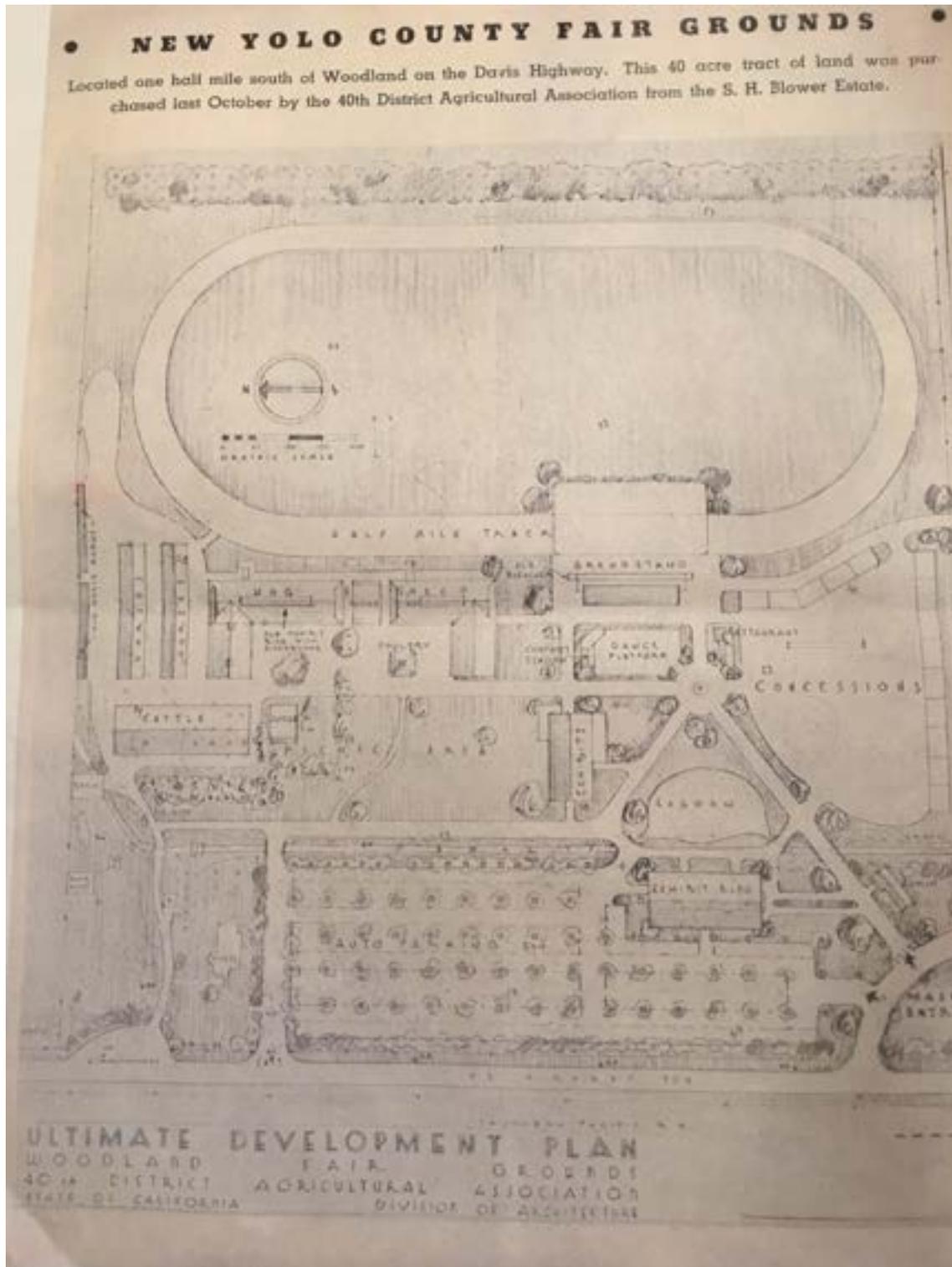
In 1944, the board decided not to renew the fair in 1945, but to pool all its resources for a bigger fair in 1946. It also decided to have the old buildings torn down. The scarcity of building materials and labor prevented rebuilding and again the board decided not to hold a fair.

In 1947, there was no fair. But on August 10, 21 and 22, 1948, the Yolo county Fair reopened and has continued yearly. Approximately 15,000 people swarmed through the main gate and some livestock exhibits had to be turned away because of the lack of space.

Admission to the fair was free. There was a centennial parade, crowning of the County Queen and Spreckels Sugar Queen, a carnival and dancing to Eddie Fitzpatrick and his orchestra from the City by the Golden Gate. A rodeo concluded the schedule of events.

Since then, the fair has grown in attendance and exhibits yearly. In 1976, 94,000 attended the 3-day fair. This year, over 100,000 are expected at the expanded 5-day event. And when you hear some parent say to a young child covered with the marvelous residue of cotton candy and caramel coated popcorn, "Look, look up in the sky." Remember Yolo County Fair goers have been seeing sky divers since the day of Professor Woodford in 1893.

*Credit for much of the information in the preceding goes to an article printed in the **Woodland Daily Democrat**, August 18, 1949, as well as to the Fair Booklet put out annually by the Yolo County 49th District Fair Association. Marianne Christopher Crawford Editor*



Stella Gloria Dinger, Jan. 25, 1933 — April 8, 2020

Obituaries - The Enterprise

Stella Gloria Dinger, age 87, passed away on April 8, 2020, from complication of lung cancer at her home in Davis. She was born in Mt. Kisco, N.Y., to Julia and Joseph Raiti, the youngest of three children. At the age of 1, the family moved to Detroit Michigan where her father secured a metalworker position at the Ford Motor Plant in Dearborn.



Stella joined the Air Force, where she met then married William Eugene Dinger on Aug. 8, 1958. Bill had been a widower with a 7-year-old son, Steven Ray; Craig Alan was born the following year. Bill's military career resulted in a three-year tour in England. They were divorced after 23 years but remained friends and were both present at special family celebrations.

In 1974, Stella followed her brother Joseph and sister Anita to Southern California. She found a position with Northrop Aircraft Division in Hawthorne. She retired with almost 20 years of service in 1995.

Stella stayed active in retirement volunteering for Yolo County Historical Museum, Hattie Weber Museum, Meals on Wheels and Kiwanis. She volunteered with the Yolo County Historical Museum for more than 20 years. She was an avid gardener with many home grown fruits and vegetables. She loved to share the harvest with family, friends and neighbors.

Stella is survived by her brother Joseph (Sandy); sons Craig (Perla) and Steven (Sue); granddaughters Ashley (Ray), Tanji (Michael), Rachel and Julia; and great-grandchildren Danial, Mackenzie and Mila.

There will not be a memorial service as the family will scatter her ashes later.

Remembering Stella

By Kathy Harryman

Stella was a wonderful human being. She scared me when I first met her. She was so 'in charge'. She volunteered as the keeper of the historical items at the Gibson House. So, whenever we wanted to know if a certain item was in the collection, we went to Stella. If someone gave the Gibson Museum an item, Stella was the first person who saw the item and catalogued it. She knew her stuff.

I worked with her when Starr Barrow and I worked to restore the Museum to a Victorian farmhouse. Stella was instrumental in finding the items that we said, (mostly Starr said) to place in its proper place within the house. Then when I put together the *Chinese Exhibit* and *100 years of Women in Yolo County*, Stella again proved invaluable to me. She was always supportive and accommodating working with me side by side. She no longer scared me!

Her willingness to help and her desire to do the best she was capable of really made her a valuable asset to the workings of the Gibson House Museum. When the county took over the museum, she left and shared her expertise with the Hattie Weber Museum in Davis. There she performed the same skills she used at the Gibson House to organize and coordinate the present artifacts and the incoming ones as well. I always wanted to know how old she was. She was so energetic! She would go up and down those stairs in a flash. She was someone that I am glad I had in my life. Her volunteering spirit and her historical focus made her someone I will never forget.

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Continued from preceding page - **Stella Gloria Dinger**

By Dave (and Alan) Flory

Stella was an extremely dedicated volunteer at both the Hattie Weber and the Yolo County Historical Museums. She had a great sense of humor, but she never hesitated to let you know when there was disagreement. One week she went to visit her brother in Southern California, so I thought I would help her out by organizing her upstairs office. Boy oh boy, was that a mistake. I learned real fast that you didn't tell Stella what to do and you didn't mess with her office. She didn't talk to me for a week.

Stella was a dedicated volunteer who spent hours researching and computerizing the museums historical data. Additionally, she was always available to provide general help around the Gibson House and setting up events and displays. She was always there when needed. Stella Dinger was a dedicated volunteer who was a good friend and will be missed by all.

God speed my friend.

By Dennis Dingemans and the Hattie Weber Museum Volunteers

Among the nice messages we have received concerning the passing of our museum's long-standing Office Manager were two that emphasized her contributions to her home neighborhood.

"The enclosed donation is in memory Stella Dinger, a resident of our cul-de-sac for many years. She was a delightful neighbor who visited with everyone and each year she willingly held the annual fall block potluck on her front lawn. We definitely miss her smiling face."

"We all will miss our friend and neighbor."

These notes were sent along with checks to the museum worth \$125. There were many flowers and fruits given by Stella over the years. Generosity came in many ways to the museum from Alder Place and we will never forget her and her skills as a computer manager, baker of sweets, and a green thumb extraordinary.

NOTE: If you are getting a mailed copy of this newsletter, please consider receiving a digital copy instead. It saves us around \$1.50 per person per mailing.

Please let me know, Kathy Harryman khwoodland@aol.com.

Business Buddies

Please support these local businesses. They support the *Yolo County Historical Society*.

The House Dresser
Corner Drug
Local Inspirations
Simas Family Vineyard