

TRAVEL TO SACRAMENTO VIA DELTA WATERWAYS IN 1850: Steamboat Slough Focus

A SERIES OF CHARTS,
WITH
SAILING DIRECTIONS,

EMBRACING SURVEYS OF THE

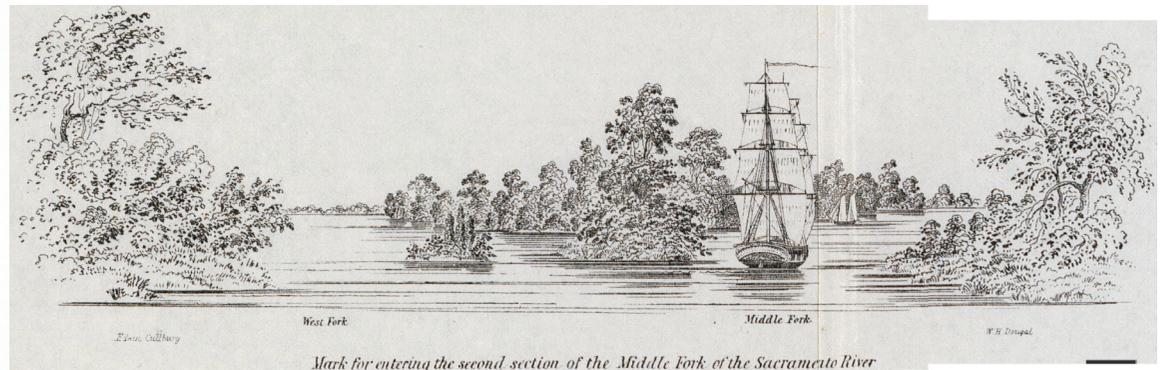
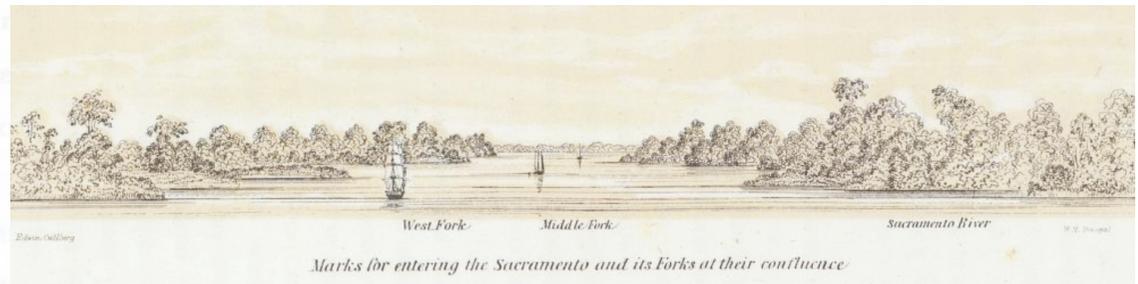
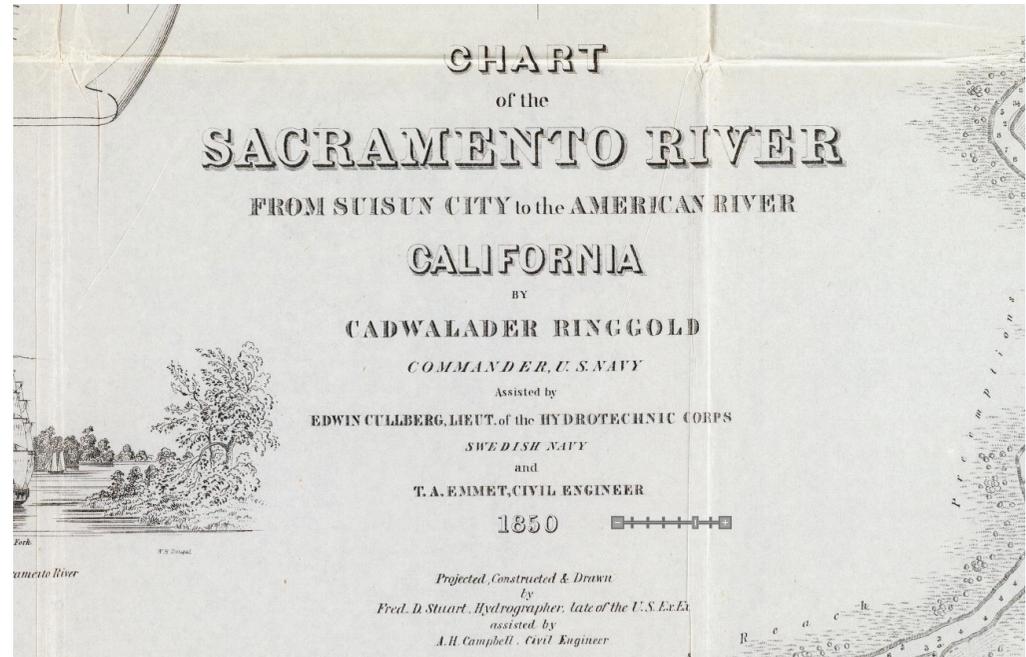
FARALLONES, ENTRANCE TO THE BAY OF
SAN FRANCISCO, BAYS OF SAN FRANCISCO AND SAN
PABLO, STRAITS OF CARQUINES AND SUISUN BAY, CONFLU-
ENCE AND DELTIC BRANCHES OF THE SACRAMENTO AND SAN
JOAQUIN RIVERS, AND THE SACRAMENTO RIVER (WITH THE
MIDDLE FORK) TO THE AMERICAN RIVER, INCLUDING
THE CITIES OF SACRAMENTO AND BOSTON,

STATE OF CALIFORNIA.

BY
CADWALADER RINGGOLD,
COMMANDER,
U. S. NAVY.

FOURTH EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS.

WASHINGTON:
PRINTED BY JNO. T. TOWERS.
1852.



Small craft may safely pass through the two fathom channel, between Great Chain islet and Point Sacramento.

Vessels bound to the westward, or down the bay, after leaving Point Simmons, have room to make good boards before reaching east end of Middle Ground, having care not to pass within a line drawn between Points Simmons and Palo Alto.

After passing the buoy, on east end of Middle Ground, short tacks are necessary. Quick, sure working craft, of moderate draft, may tack to advantage, inside and between Holbrook isle and Point Rowe, and again in the channel between King and Preston isles.

The soundings in the north channel are very regular, and if the lead is freely used, much advantage may be gained. Short tacks are also necessary until after reaching Point Edith, as will be evident from the chart.

Suisun Bluff, on with Mount Riley, clears west end of Lower Middle Ground.

The channel, after passing the buoy, becomes wide, and one tack over in direction of Suisun Bluff, with ebb tide, will bring in near Navy Point.

On the first quarter of the flood tide, the current is strong to N. E. before reaching west end of the Middle Ground. Vessels bound up must guard against being carried out of their way by this cause, and detained by either getting ashore or anchoring.

SACRAMENTO RIVER.—The best directions I can give for the safe navigation of the river, are to recommend and advise a close adherence and reference to the chart, with the assistance of the lead-line. I deem it only necessary to point out the obstructions as they exist, and will be encountered in ascending the river.

After having passed Tongue Shoal, according to the ranges marked on the chart, and course shaped for the river, a clear channel will be found with very little interruption until reaching Garnett isle, which has a spit making off from either end.

New York Plain Tree, nearly in one with the Single Tree, clears Tongue Shoal.

SAGADEHOCK.—In Sagadehock Reach there is an extensive shoal lying along the right bank, to avoid which, the opposite shore must be kept aboard from the time of rounding the point below. Flats lie off the mouth of the slough, (above this shoal,) which connects with the San Joaquin river.

The main river and the Middle Fork are the only available channels. The West Fork, and the sloughs connecting with it, are not navigable except for small boats; originally, they were successfully frequented by trappers, for otter and beaver. On the west, the waters terminate and waste themselves in swamps and mud flats.

The main river has some obstructions in its channels, commencing at Ida isle, thence up to near the outlet forming Hensley's slough. From this point there is a clear, bold, and uninterrupted channel.

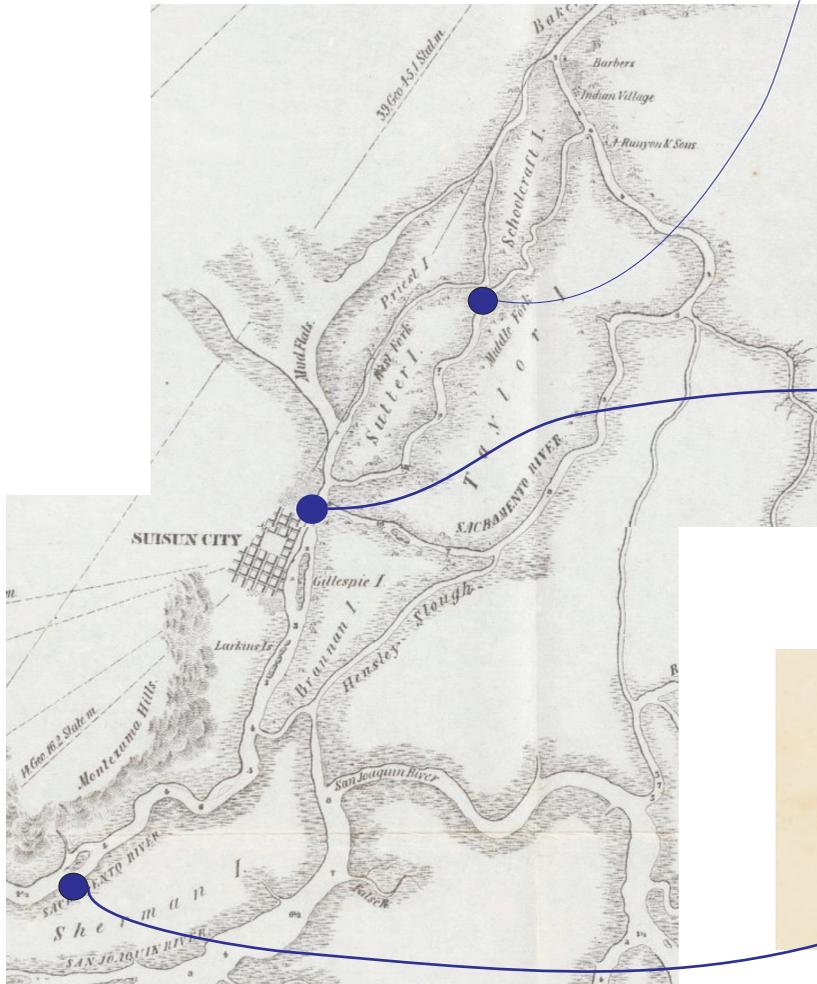
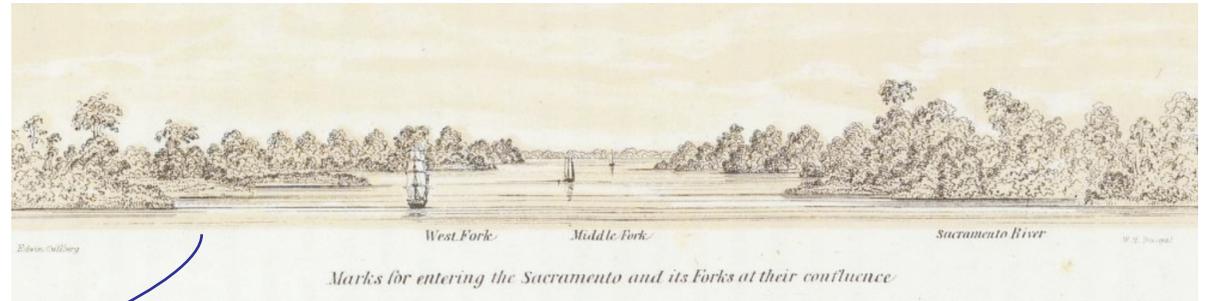
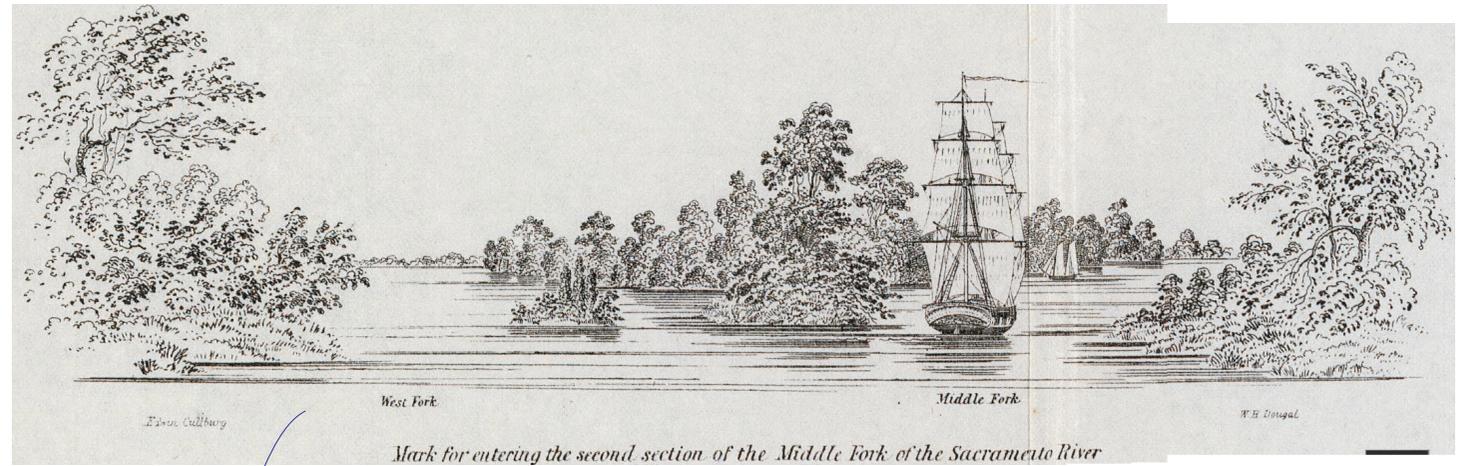
The Middle Fork has a middle ground at its mouth, represented on a large and convenient scale.

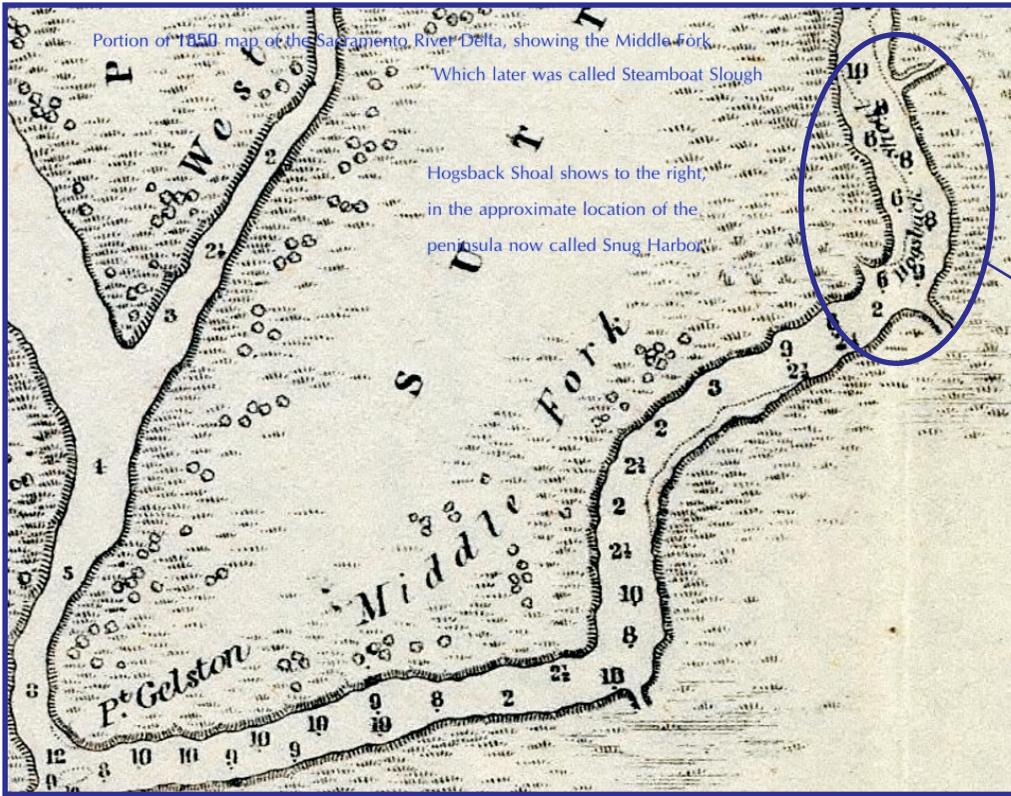
Hogsback Shoal, in the Middle Fork, is next in order and importance. This passed, by following the chart closely, the second section is reached without much difficulty, and which, although contracted and narrow, has a deep channel.

Entering the main river at Barber's Ranch, a good clear channel is found until after passing Webster, or the Russian Embarcadero, where the river shoals for a short distance, soon again increasing in depth with little variation. Arriving at the last bend, below Sacramento City, the channel contracts, and may be followed according to the harbor plan, attached to the chart.

Snags do not often obstruct the channel; they lie along the margin of the river, and are generally seen, except during the season of freshets. At the lowest stages of the water, the maximum depth available for vessels proceeding up the Sacramento river, owing to the obstructions existing in portions of the channels, does not exceed ten feet; from six to eight feet in the San Joaquin river.

Sketches of the view along the Sacramento River and "Middle Fork" which was renamed Steamboat Slough by 1856.





Priest and Sutter Islands became Ryer Island,
 Hogback Shoals noted on a more detailed map
 By Commander Ringgold

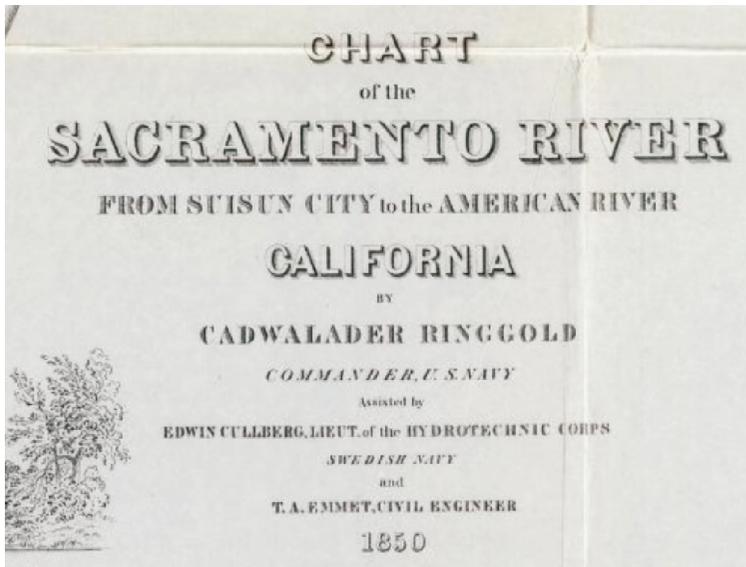
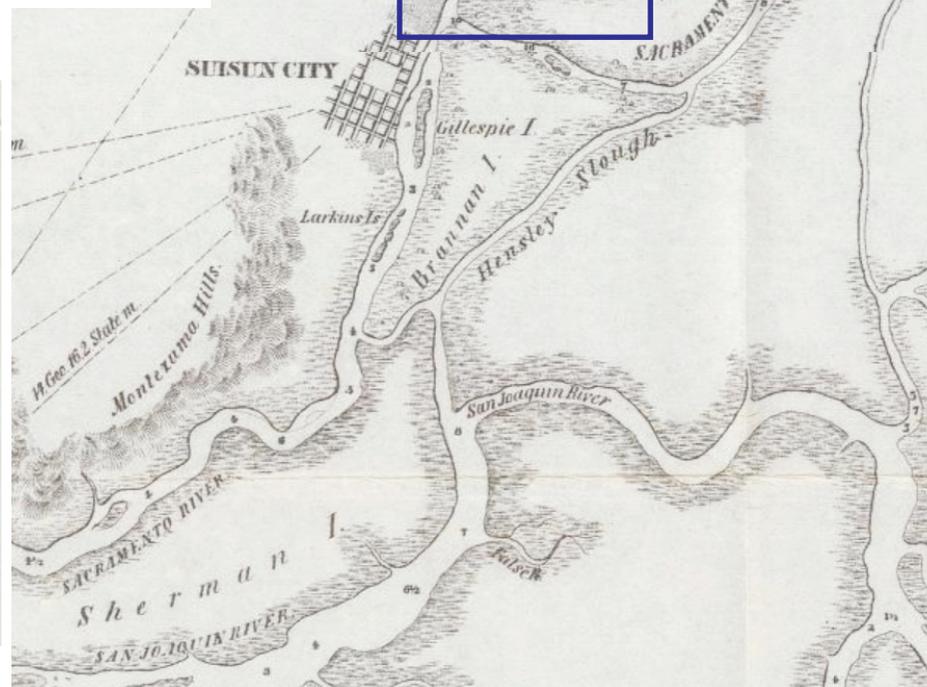


CHART of SUISUN & VALLEJO BAYS

with the CONFLUENCE of the
RIVERS SACRAMENTO AND SAN JOAQUIN

CALIFORNIA

BY
CADWALADER RINGGOLD

COMMANDER U. S. NAVY

Assisted by

SAM. R. KNOX, LIEUT. U. S. N.

and

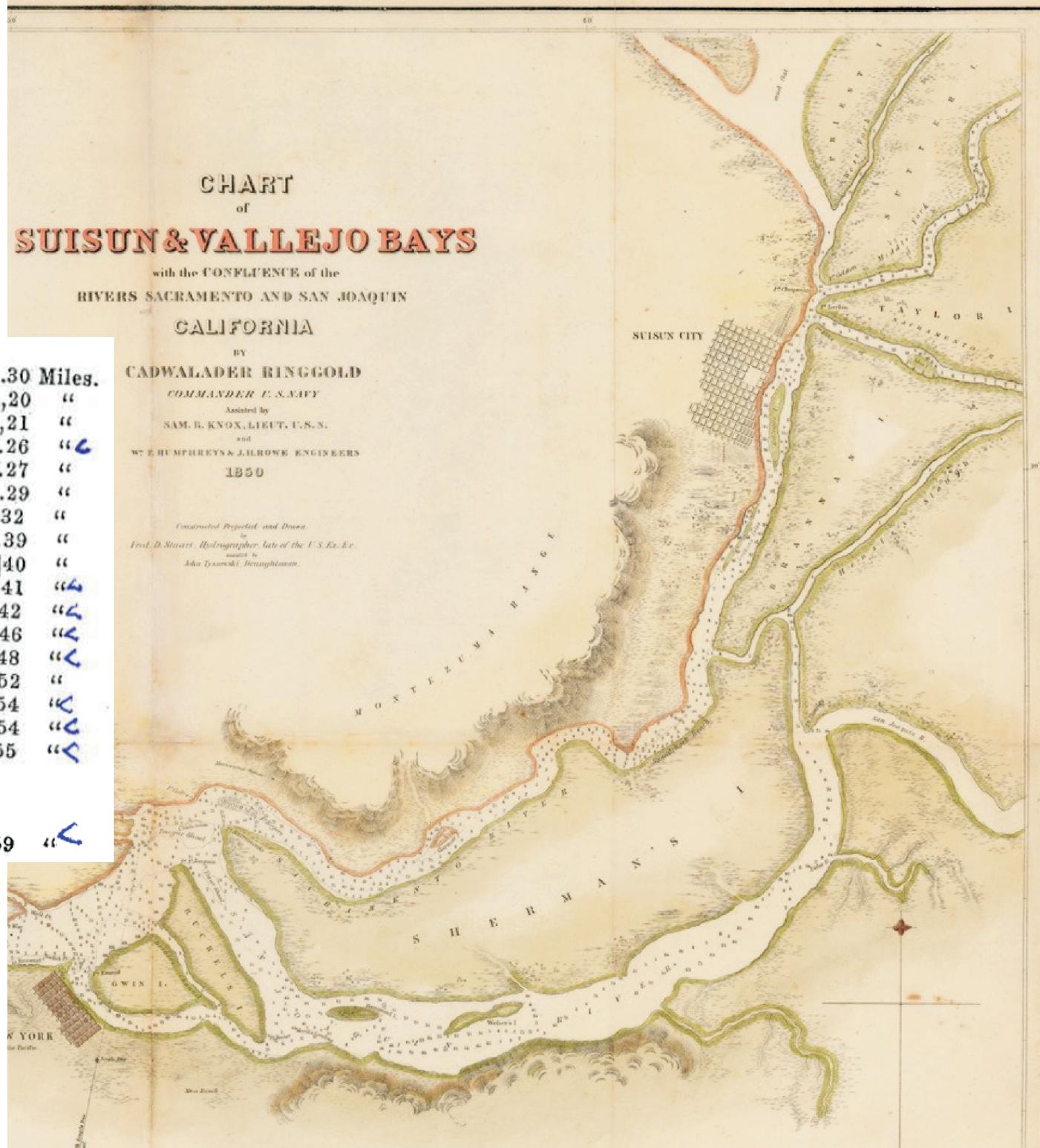
W. E. HUMPHREYS & J. H. HOWE ENGINEERS

1850

Constructed, Projected, and Drawn

by Fred. D. Stuart, Hydrographer, late of the U. S. E. E.

under the John Tyssowick, Draughtsman.



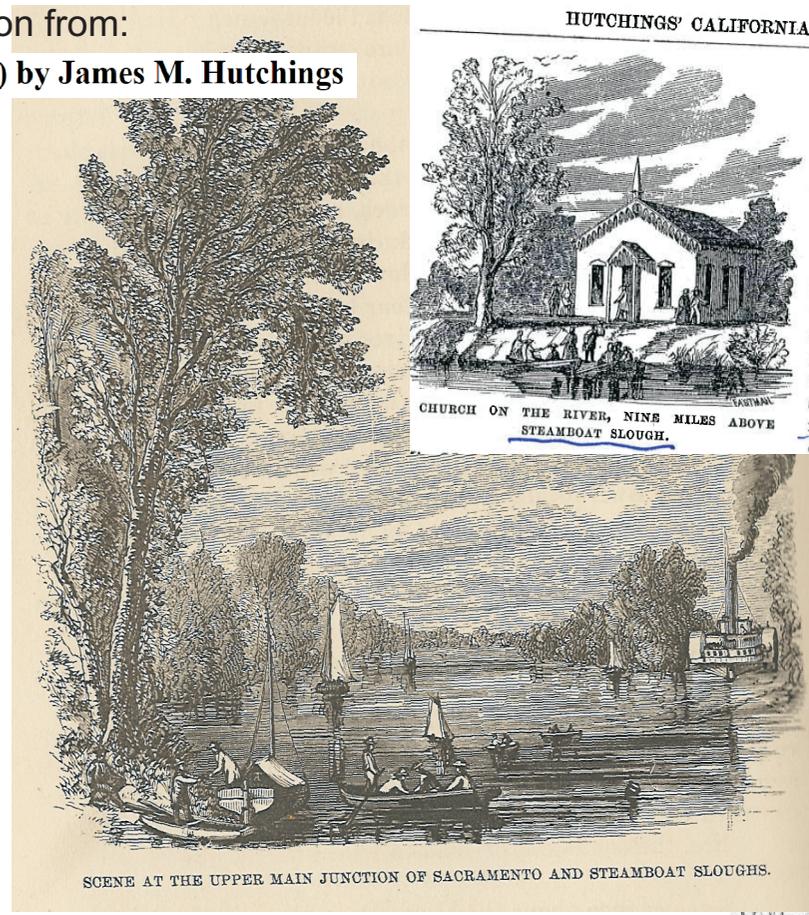
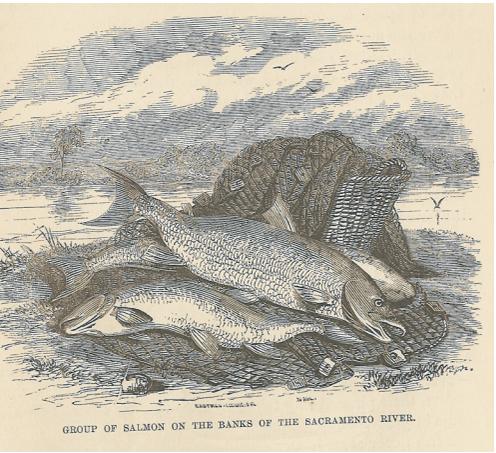
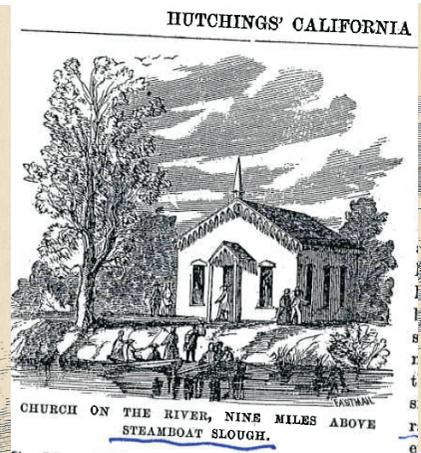
From San Francisco to Benicia.....	30	Miles.
Benicia to New York.....	20	"
" to mouth of San Joaquin,	21	"
" to mouth of Sac. River,...	26	"
" Montezuma,.....	27	"
" Lone Tree Island,.....	29	"
" Twin Houses,.....	32	"
" Seven Mile Slough,.....	39	"
" Wood Island, [2 M. Long.]	40	"
" Rio Vista,.....	41	"
" Mouth of old Sac. River,	42	"
" Mouth Cache creek slough,	46	"
" Hog's Back,.....	48	"
" Beaver Slough,.....	52	"
" Mouth Steamboat slough,	54	"
" Mouth of Sutter slough,...	54	"
" Head of Sutter slough,...	55	"
[one mile long.]		
" Head Steamboat slough,		
and junction with the main Sacra-		
mento river, [5 miles long.]	59	"

Sketches and Steamboat Slough description from:
Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California (1862) by James M. Hutchings

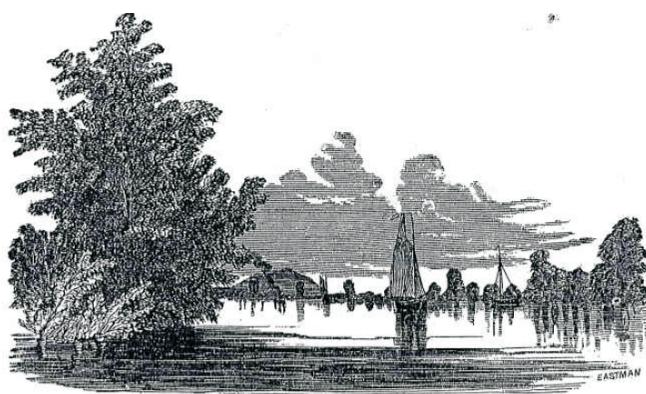
STEAMBOAT SLOUGH.

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.

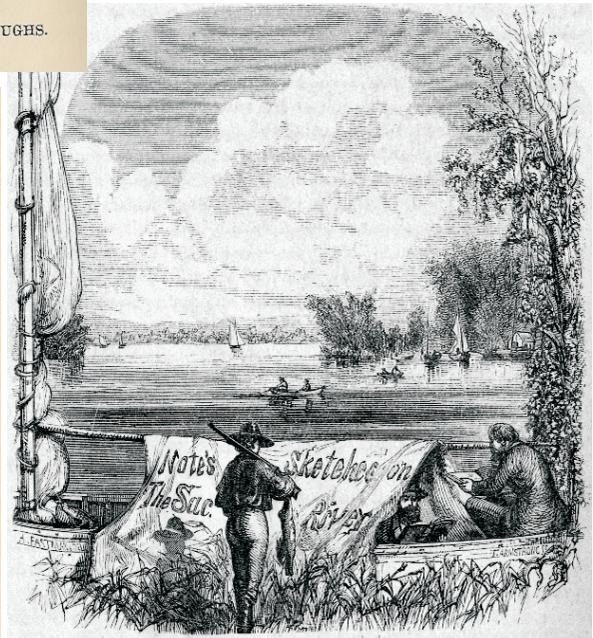
As we pass through Steamboat Slough, we are impressed with the narrowness of the channel for such large vessels, the luxuriant foliage of the trees that adorn its banks, and the snug little cabins, nearly shut out from sight by wild vines and trees, that are seen at intervals on its margin. Indeed the 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 drooping 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.



← Boat exiting north end Of Steamboat Slough



VIEW FIVE MILES ABOVE STEAMBOAT SLOUGH.

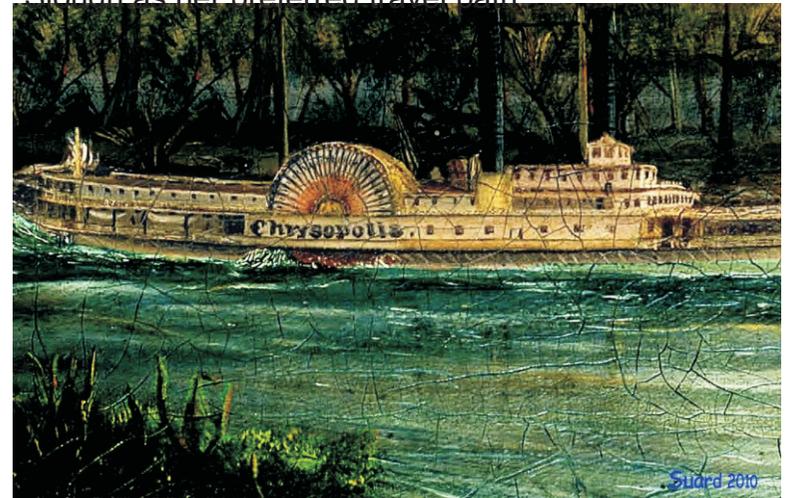




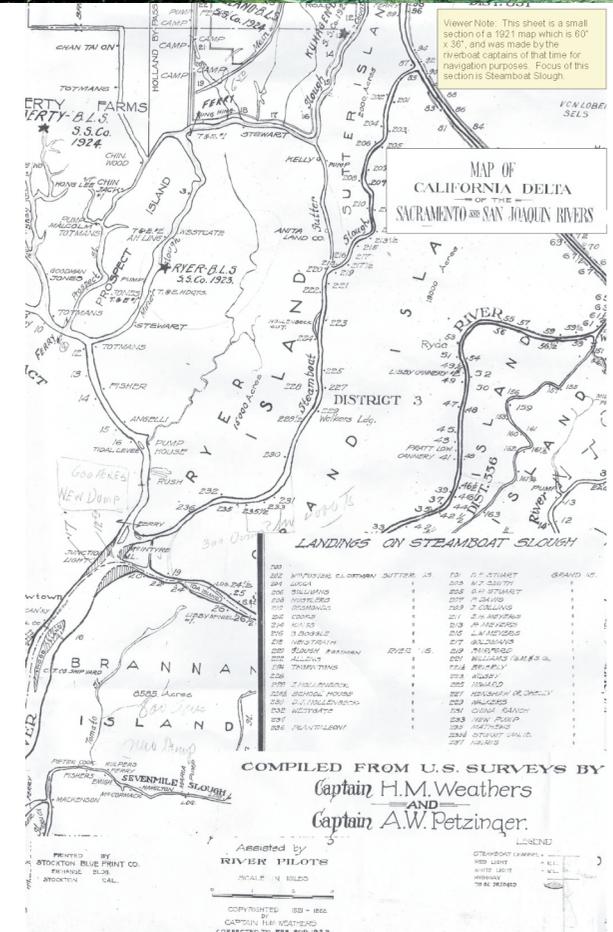
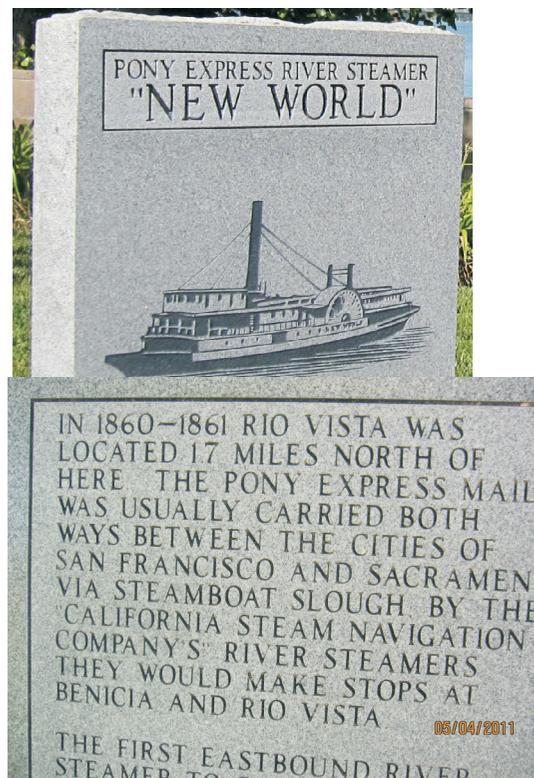
California Place Names by Erwin G. Gudde 1949:

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).

The Chrysopolis set the record for fastest travel time from Sacramento to San Francisco...using Steamboat Slough as her preferred travel path



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.





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.

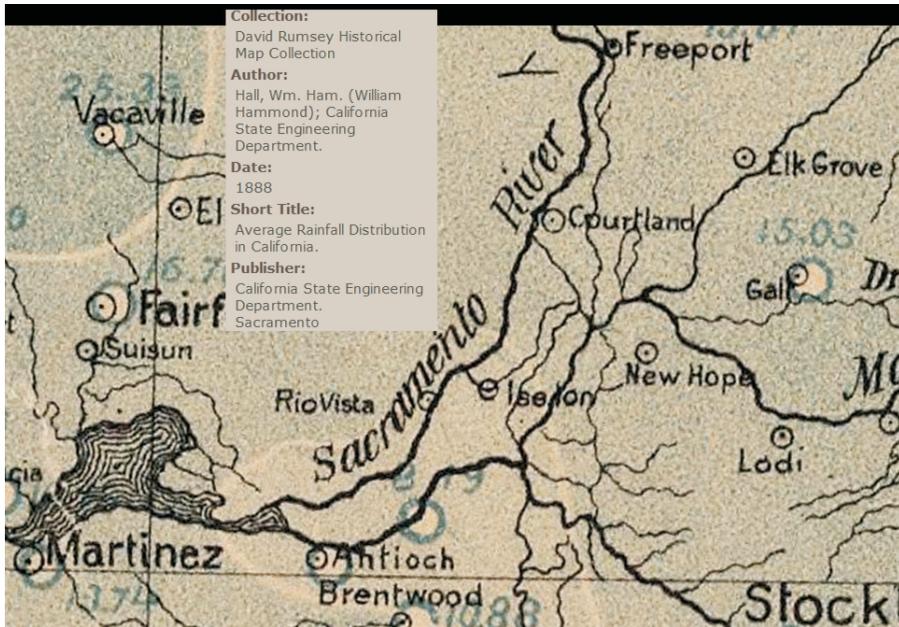
Steamboat Slough was one of the main channels to be negatively affected by silting from the mining "slickins", but it was later dredged along with the main Sacramento River or "Old River Sacramento" as it was called at that time.



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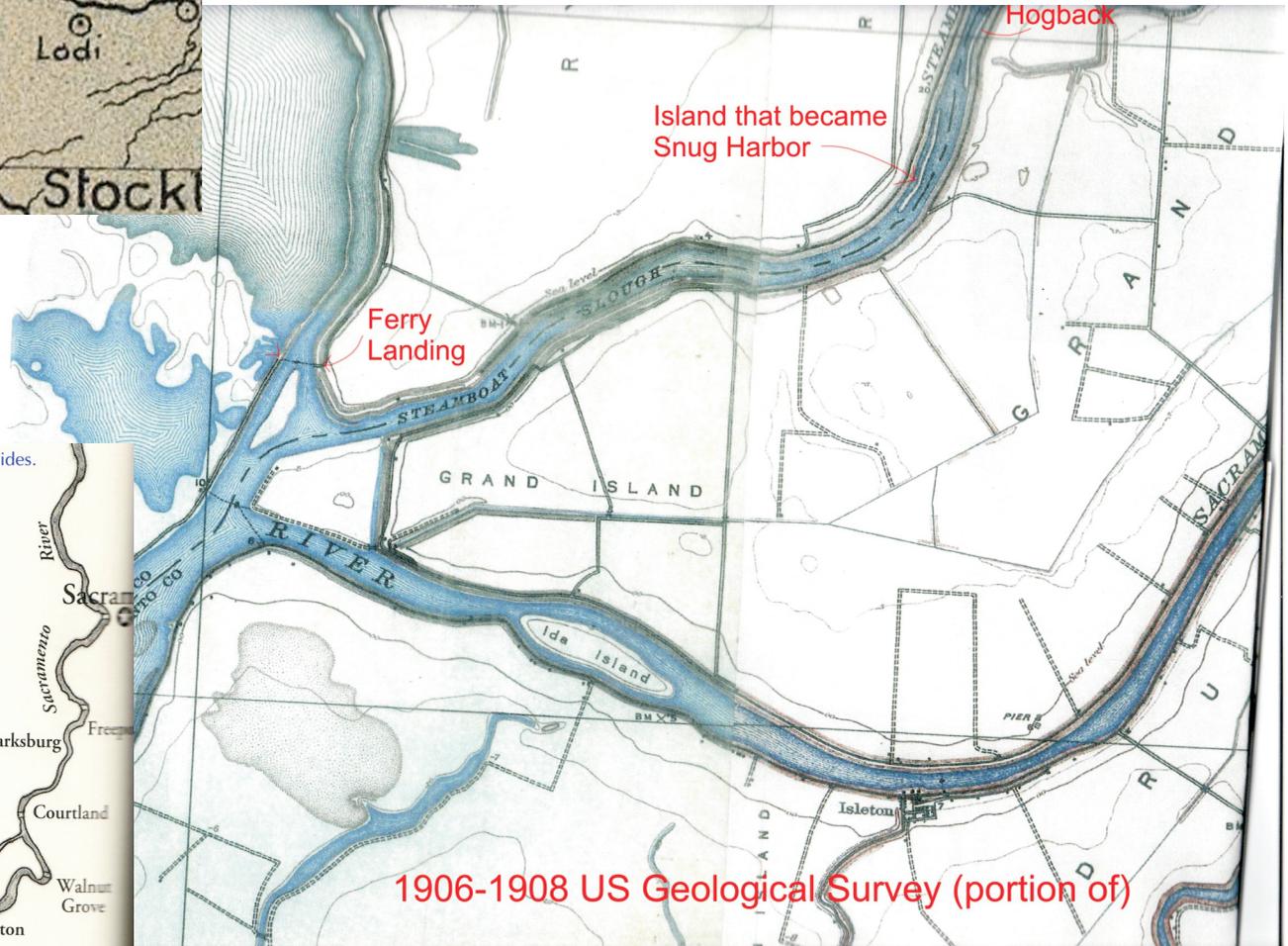
THE SACRAMENTO RIVER IN THE FUTURE.



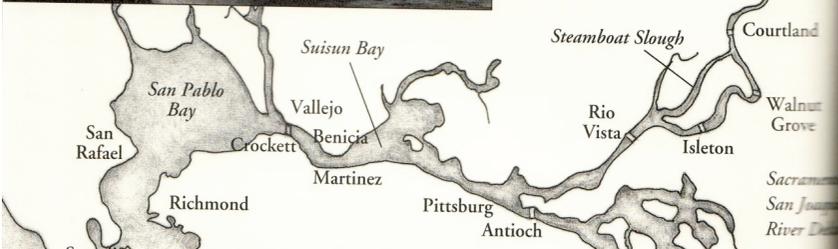
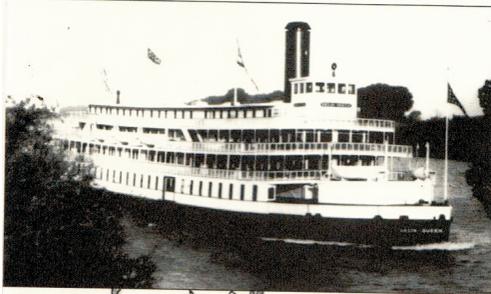


1906 official survey shows that the Delta Islands and waterways have the same names as what we still use in the 21st Century. This map shows the “shoal” at the confluence of the West Branch and Middle Fork Commander Ringgold noted in his sailing Directions. In addition, the “Hogsback Shoals” area is still showing, but the waterway called Middle Fork in 1850 is called Steamboat Slough.

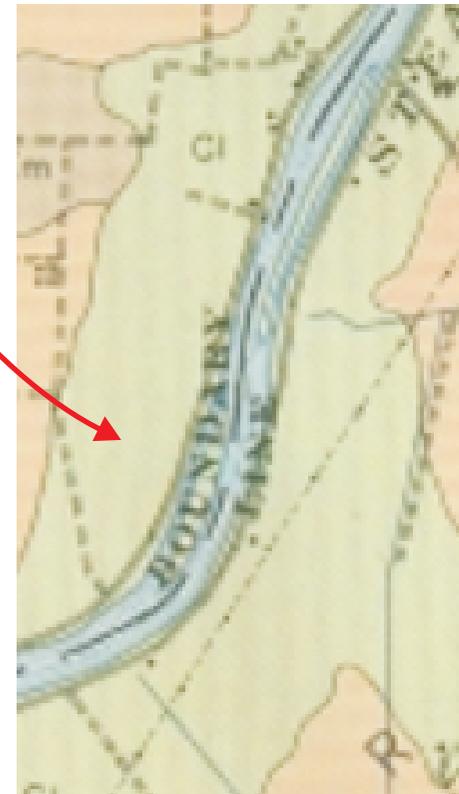
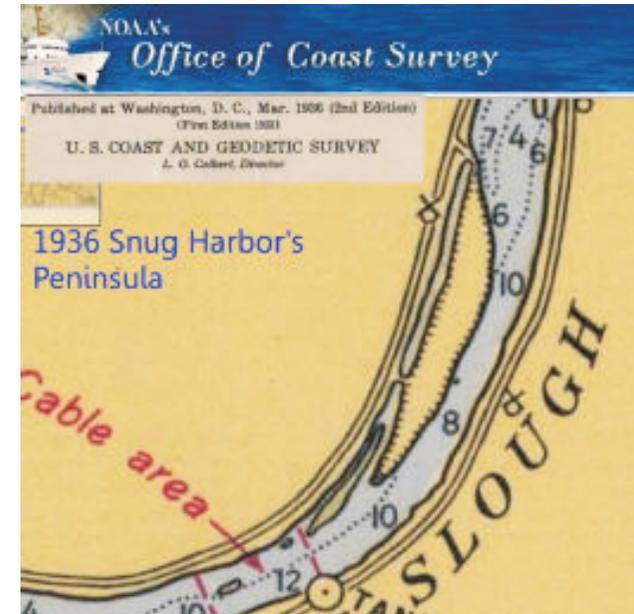
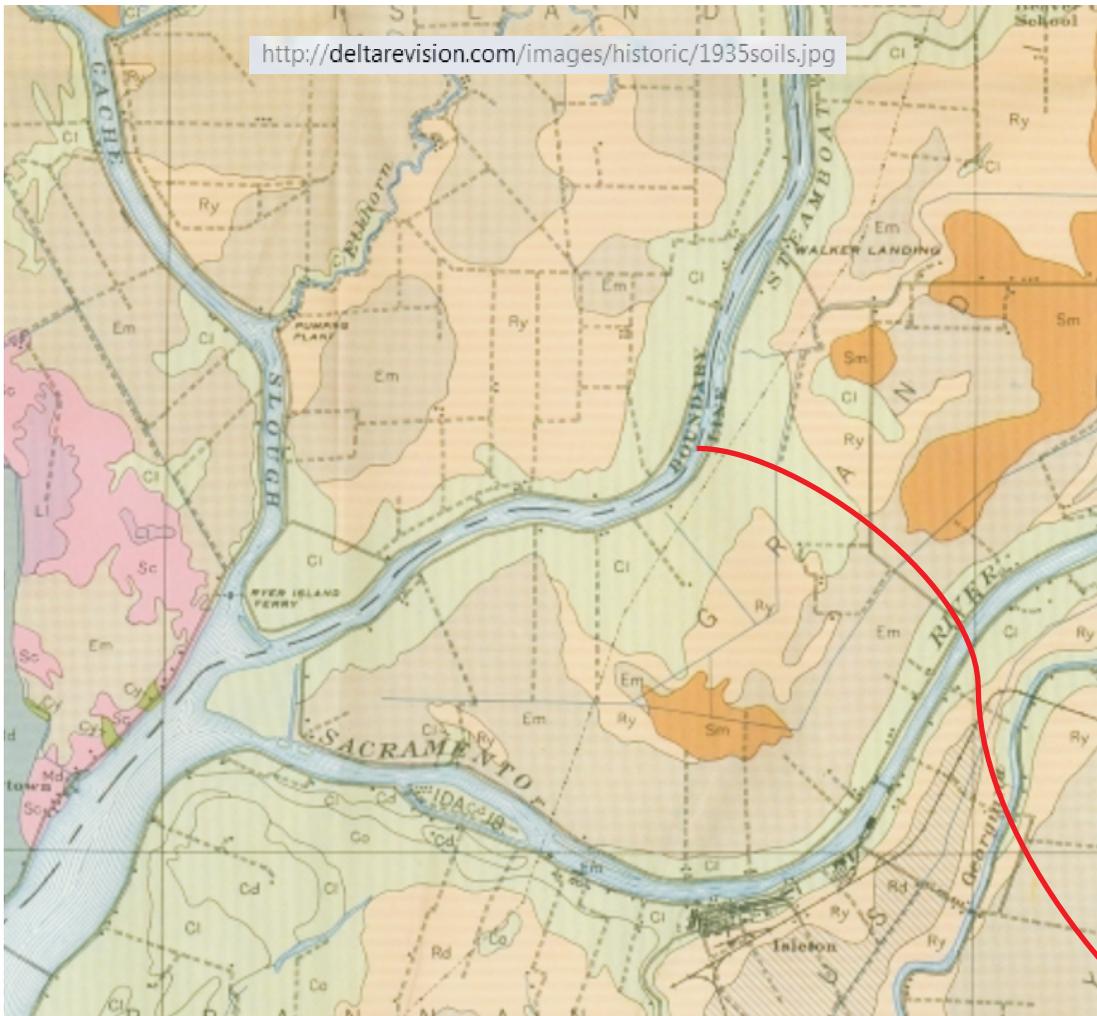
Some official surveys referred to the Sacramento River where Steamboat Slough is shown in the official USGS 1906 survey



1927 Route of the Delta King and Delta Queen using Steamboat Slough, subject to tides.



The Delta King & Queen used Steamboat Slough



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.

Steamboat Slough & Ryer Island scenes 1940s to 1989's

Steamboat Slough-Sacramento Delta 1968



SPARAGUS KING Ryers Island Sacramento River (Italian-Americans)



Steamboat Slough bridge from Grand Island

