

## Town flourished, then faded on the river of time

By Jerry Bowen

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In my last column, we saw that the settlement of the Montezuma Hills was a long and troubled process. One of the more interesting claims made for a grant of land was the infamous “Luco Claim.”

That claim for a grant was submitted to the U.S. Land Commission after the deadline, using the excuse that de la Rosa’s wife had taken the claim documents with her to Mexico.

With no other immediate claimants or improvements to the land, the government had surveyed five townships and entered preemption claims for 100 settlers. When Congress authorized consideration by the Land Commission of the tardy Luco claim in 1854, the General Land Office withdrew the remaining disputed lands from public sale.

Now, of course, the citizens who had settled on the land the Lucos claimed to own, and others that wanted to settle on the claim, were highly upset. They protested the “Luco Swindle” and asked the courts, that if the grant were confirmed, it be located only on land that had not been surveyed and on unsettled land.

Both the District Court and the Supreme Court rejected Luco’s plea on the ground that the alleged claim was fraudulent and was antedated in the case decided in 1862.

But that didn’t end the problem there. Luco went back to court and cited an 1856 law that permitted the purchases of invalid claims to acquire their land from the government for \$1.25 an acre. Luco wanted to purchase the entire claim despite the fact that much of it already was preempted and settled. But once again he was rejected when the land office registrar decided in favor of the current settlers because Luco could not prove continuous possession, as stipulated in the law.

The legal battle between the Luco family and the government was expensive for the citizens who already had settled on the disputed land. Once Luco’s claim was rejected, they had to petition the government for title to their land.

A few of the earliest settlers to receive their patents directly from the federal government were Lindsey Powell Marshall and his sons, who received homestead or preemption patents between 1871 and 1873. James C. Collins, founder of Collinsville, purchased the same land twice - in 1857 from Luco, and in 1861 from the government -

in order to build Collinsville on the Sacramento River.

With the rejection of the Luco claim, Collins applied for a preemption patent and received it in 1872.

The Thompson & West map shows that most, if not all, of the land was in private hands by 1878, though not all the titles were yet safe. Finally, on Oct. 31, 1921, descendants of the original owners received the titles from the Superior Court of Solano County. During all the turmoil generated by the Luco claims, Birds Landing, Denverton and Collinsville were founded on the disputed lands.

Initially Collins bought 1,024 acres from the Luco brothers. He paid \$1 an acre for the first 650 acres and \$3 an acre for the adjacent 374 acres. After 1861 he acquired more land until he had a total of 2,800 acres.

On this land he established the town of Collinsville on the Sacramento River about four miles below Birds Landing. In 1861, the town boasted a post office, store and a wharf on the river. His dreams encompassed much more. The original map proposed a 2,390-acre city. Then, in 1862, Collins sold the property to S. C. Bradshaw for \$10,000, with existing mortgages of \$14,000. Bradshaw changed the town's name to Newport and started a promotion campaign to sell lots in the town.

Bradshaw concentrated his early sales efforts in San Francisco and Sacramento. He offered a claim to a town lot for every San Franciscan who paid for a round-trip ticket to visit the site. Apparently, there was not much local interest in the Newport lots, so Bradshaw hired agents in the east to promote the town. Even when he promoted Newport as a railroad center that rivaled San Francisco in size, he only managed to make a few sales.

By 1869, his debts forced him to dispose the heavily mortgaged land through a sheriff's sale for \$29,840.

The new owner held the property until 1872 before selling it for \$33,000 to Montezuma Hills rancher, E. I. Upham. Mr. Upham, an energetic man with a good business head about him restored the name of Collinsville to the town and proceeded to turn the town into an important Sacramento River shipping point.

Collinsville quickly developed into a substantial salmon fishing and packing industry and the population increased to 347 by 1878. Commercial salmon fishing was the economic base for the town of Collinsville. Large quantities of fish were shipped daily to San Francisco or canned for export. At the same time, two lines of steamboats were making daily stops at Collinsville from both directions. The town had three saloons, two stores,

two wharves, two hotels, a post office, a telegraph office, a Wells Fargo & Co. Express agency, a Chinese laundry, a school and the canneries. Because of frequent flooding, many of the buildings had to be built on stilts.

With the then-flourishing town of Birds Landing four miles north of Collinsville, the area was on the rise commercially and seemed to be destined for continued growth.

A cannery was established by A. Booth & Co. and ran for a short time before closing. Two other canning companies, E. Corville & Co. and the Sacramento River Packing Co., replaced it. Their operations included two canneries at Collinsville and one on Chipps Island. Their combined capacity was 60,000 1-pound cans a day with 300 employees. At the peak of the season, the canneries operated day and night, seven days a week.

The Salmon industry peaked in 1882 and began a decline when increasing amounts of debris washed down from mines in the mountains into the Sacramento River and its tributaries. The debris ruined the spawning grounds and the salmon runs declined as a result. By 1886, all the canneries on the river had closed down. The mining debris eventually reached the mouth of the Sacramento River where it flowed past Collinsville. The steamer channel originally was close to the western shore, but the debris settled there, closing the passage.

Around 1910, the site of the old channel had a crop of alfalfa and the new channel was near Sherman Island. The once-thriving community of Collinsville began a long, slow decline that has continued to today. Little remains of the once flourishing town and shipping port. A few homes still are occupied amid many others that are slowly falling to ruin.

In relatively recent times, the area attracted sportsmen and a few tourists. Sportsmen came for boating, fishing and hunting. Public and private launching facilities along the shore provided access to the river.

In addition, various plans for development in the area came and went in the 1960s. Pacific Gas & Electric Co. purchased property in the area for a nuclear power plant and the National Steel Co. bought land along this section of the Sacramento River for a major steel plant. Neither came to fruition.

As recently as 2002 Collinsville was discussed as a site for a deep port, but that was nixed a year later. An 18-hole golf course was planned, promoted and faded away.

With so many failed plans, it seems as though Collinsville may just completely fade away too. The Montezuma Wetlands dredge disposal site is being built nearby and

sediments dredged from Bay Area shipping channels are to be put on the pastures. The diked land is ultimately to be turned into wetlands and protected for wildlife.

Perhaps this ultimately will provide the final blow and Collinsville will just become another memory of Solano County's history. Only time will tell.

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