

# Grand plans for Solano City crumbled

**By Jerry Bowen**

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In this series of columns on relatively unknown towns of Solano County, one has been missing: Solano City.

In retrospect, it was a magnificently planned community. Solano City was to have 75,000 residents with canal access to the Sacramento River and railroad access to the rest of California. In a county that had only 25,000 residents, it would have become Solano County's largest city if the promoters' efforts had been successful. Today, virtually no one has ever heard of it.

A company, Solano Irrigated Farms, filed Articles of Incorporation in Solano County on Dec. 4, 1912, and final approval was filed Jan. 22, 1913. The corporation was to have a life of 50 years, with preferred stock of \$2.5 million and \$5 million worth of common stock at \$100 per share.

The newly formed company began making major land purchases throughout eastern Solano County.

Acquisitions from Jan. 17 to May 9, 1913, included the following: The Muzzy Ranch near Elmira along Vallejo and Northern railroad tracks, the Bulkley Ranch near Maine Prairie, the McCarty, Chandler-Hastings Tract, 6,000 acres near Suisun, 5,000 acres near Rio Vista, the Lambie Ranch, James A. Keys Ranch, the Frietas Ranch, which had natural gas wells providing heating and lighting to Suisun, the Woods Ranch, Lewis Pierce Ranch near Elmira, the Alice Page Barnes' estate and the West Ranch.

This list of ranches may not mean much to you today, so let's put it into a simpler perspective. The land purchased by Solano Irrigated Farms included land from Elmira to Collinsville along existing railroad lines and from the Suisun area to the Sacramento River near Rio Vista. Total land included approximately 175,000 acres with about 17 miles along existing railroad lines.

One of the major players in this grandiose scheme was Patrick Calhoun, the grandson of Vice President John Calhoun. In 1909, he was suspected of bribing San Francisco supervisors to obtain permission to put up overhead electric lines for his electric street car company, United Railroads.

After being indicted and tried in San Francisco for graft, he was acquitted. In spite of

this, executive management of the Solano City project was placed in his hands.

In March, 1913, the Vacaville Reporter announced plans for a "New Town of Solano." Surveys and plat maps for Solano City were complete and construction began. The city was to occupy 1,500 acres across Highway 12 from Denverton (southwest corner of Solano City) and between Creed and Lambie Roads. Designs included a concrete, fireproof, 50-room hotel, bank and many residences. Arrangements were made for telephone, water, lighting and a post office.

The project was on a fast track to completion. One of the investors just happened to be M.H. DeYoung, who founded and owned the San Francisco Chronicle. In addition, he had just bought out the San Francisco Call. With this in mind, positive publicity for Solano City could be presumed to have been in the bag.

In April, 1913, Solano Irrigated Farms bought more land along the line of the Oakland-Antioch Railroad. In addition, they announced the canal from the Sacramento River to Solano City was being dredged and would be nine-miles long, 75-feet wide and 17-feet deep. Water in the first 700-acre reservoir was to be in by May, 1913.

The following week the company reported that dredging the canal to the town was complete and was designed so ships could arrive, unload or load, then continue back to the Sacramento River without having to turn around. In addition, a temporary hotel capable of holding 140 people was to complete by May 1, 1913.

Finally on July 18, 1913, Solano City was announced as "The next real estate sensation on the market, and 30 blocks of the new city have already been spoken for and inquiries for mercantile and other locations were greater than the company could care for."

Other sales pitches in the announcement included:

- City laid out for 75,000 inhabitants.
- First allotment to include 1,000 acres of business & residence lots.
- First city on West Coast planned in detail before being built.
- Solano City will be the most beautiful city in America.
- Will be an inland seaport capable of taking any vessel except ocean liners.
- Will be the business center for the Solano Irrigated Farms Corp.

- The Oakland-Antioch RR passes through the city giving quick access to electric train passenger service to the capital and Bay cities
- Will have three schools, a library and city hall.
- 1,000,000 seedlings purchased to provide shade trees throughout the city.
- Wholesale and warehouse section located on railroad lines and near the head of the canal.

Wow! Today one can only wonder how anyone could resist such a sales pitch for the "greatest city ever planned!"

It all came to a screeching halt Oct. 17, 1913. The promoters overextended themselves and couldn't pay their bills, including notes and mortgages that had become due Oct. 1. The company was placed into the hands of a receiver and Solano City died almost overnight.

An attempt in January, 1914, to revive the project by Patrick Calhoun and Paul Foster failed and today virtually nothing remains. However, as you travel along Highway 113 between Creed and Hastings roads, you will cross a portion of the canal to Solano City named appropriately, Calhoun's Cut. On the Rio Vista side of the road it is also designated as the Calhoun Cut Ecological Reservation.

The story of Solano City has so intrigued me that I intend to do a more complete version in the December issue of the Solano Historian, Solano County Historical Society's magazine. I am very interested in any input from the readers who have knowledge of this little known niche in the history of Solano County.

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