

## Bear gave Grizzly Island new name

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Vast acres of tules, miles of sloughs and many smaller islands surrounding Grizzly Island make up the Suisun Marsh, the largest inland marsh in the continental United States.

A patent given by Gov. William Irwin to William L. Chapman on Jan. 17, 1876, named the area "Grisly Island." According to local legend, one summer grizzly bears migrated from Mount Diablo, crossing Suisun Bay, which was smaller than it is today, traveled across Van Sickle Island and finally came to "Grisly Island" to feed on the vegetation there.

A family named Carpenter lived on the island at that time. One of their sons went out riding and accidentally stumbled onto a grizzly bear sleeping in a patch of rose bushes. The boy's horse shied, the boy fell off and accidentally shot himself with his rifle. After that, "Grisly Island" became "Grizzly Island."

As early as the 1850s, white settlers came to Grizzly Island and the surrounding area to acquire land for ranching. From the beginning, building and maintaining levees and dredging the sloughs to ensure travel were of paramount importance. Hundreds of Chinese workers were brought in as a work force.

Some of the levees they constructed were made out of tule sod, cut with a tule spade into pieces of approximately 2 feet by 7 inches and then stacked like bricks. Remnants of these levees still can be found in the Suisun Marsh.

One of the larger landowners was W. J. Dutton who began to buy land on Grizzly Island in 1881 from William Chapman and others. Eventually, he owned more than 22,000 acres, which he broke into 21 parcels and leased as 1,000-acre dairy ranches to various Portuguese and Swiss-Italian dairymen.

Cattle, dairy farming, hay and grain became the mainstay of agriculture on the island. The cows were milked by hand, their milk fed to calves and pigs, the cream hauled by barge through the sloughs to a creamery.

Dutton's Landing became the center of activity at the turn of the century. Riverboats, paddle wheelers and schooners all stopped here on their way from the San Francisco Bay to Sacramento. Whatever the island produced - milk, cream, cattle, pigs, and grain

- was transported from here. In addition, Dutton's Landing boasted a hotel, warehouses, a slaughterhouse and a nearby creamery.

Another crop the island produced was green asparagus. The Alexander/Kellogg ranch brand was well-known both in the local markets and on the East Coast. During asparagus season, cutters and packers lived on the ranch, first in a converted horse barn, later in specially built housing. This lasted until 1945 when the asparagus roots were dug up.

The Rush family also was well-known in the Grizzly Island area. Hiram Rush, his family and his cattle arrived in the area in 1852, all the way from South Bend, Ind.

Rush purchased land near the Potrero hills, on the outskirts of Grizzly Island and started a cattle and horse ranch, which grew rapidly to encompass more than 5,000 acres.

Hiram Rush quickly became a member of local organizations, among them the Masonic Suisun Lodge No. 55. In 1856, while he was in the process of building a large brick storeroom in Suisun, his lodge brothers convinced him to add a third story to the building as a lodge room for the Order.

Rush deeded the room to the Order and for decades to come, this was known as one of the most comfortable and suitable lodge rooms in Solano County.

His son, Benjamin F. Rush, was born at Fourteen Mile House in Sacramento County on Oct. 12, 1852. Shortly thereafter, the family came to Solano County to settle on the newly purchased Rush Ranch.

Young Benjamin was educated in Oakland and San Francisco, later attended the Military Academy in Oakland and afterward Heald's Business College. In 1875 he returned to Grizzly Island to run the family ranch. His father, Hiram, had died in 1869.

Always eager to improve and expand, Benjamin Rush decided to establish a model stock farm together with William Pierce of Suisun. Both men purchased two large tracts of land near Rush Ranch. On Nov. 25, 1904, the Solano Republican wrote: "The new owners have secured a lease for a long term of years and intend to convert this into one of the model cattle-breeding farms of California. ...

"At least 150 acres of land will be seeded to alfalfa, which is recognized to be a most suitable feed for cattle. ...

"To start with, the herd, which has been named the Humboldt Herd, will consist of 250

head of registered short-horn Durham cattle. These were purchased from Joseph Marzen of Lovelock, Nev., who spent more than 30 years in developing the herd until it has reached a stage of perfection that has made the cattle famous all over the United States....

“Both Messrs. Rush and Pierce are enterprising businessmen and able and competent to carry out successfully the venture they have undertaken, namely, to develop and raise the standard of cattle breeding in Solano county (sic). The enterprising movement on their part will be watched with great interest by stock raisers of Solano county (sic).....  
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Benjamin Rush also took an interest in politics. In 1904, he decided to run for the California State Senate as a Republican, representing the fifth district of Napa and Solano. He won the seat with a landslide victory over his opponent.

For the next 24 years, he served as a senator. The Handbook of California Legislature, 38th session, 1909 lists his appointments: Chairman of the Agriculture and Dairying Committee of the Senate; Contingent Expenses; Drainage, Swamp and Overflowed Lands; Fruit and Vine Interests; Mines and Mining; Roads and Highways. All were subjects dear to his constituency, especially those from the Suisun Bay areas.

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