



Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation

March Newsletter, 2023

So You Think It's Been a Wet Winter? The Great California Flood of 1862

In the summer and fall of 1861, every rancher and farmer in California was on his knees praying for rain and a wet winter.



After nearly two decades of drought, rivers were sluggish, muddy, trickles, while creeks and streams were long dried up and wells had become dusty, dry holes.



Livestock and people were moved into the high Sierras in search of moisture, even from the dew, or a few green plants to graze.



The deer and other wild game had disappeared, moving on to more hospitable surroundings along with many ex-Californians. Everyone hoped the coming winter would bring relief in the form of life giving rain.



Well, you've probably heard the old saying "Be careful what you pray for", and in this instance no truer words were ever spoken. When it began to rain in November of 1861, people rejoiced in the streets! Finally an end to the long suffering and a renewal of the land. At the start of winter, things were looking up. But...it just wouldn't stop!



From the end of November through the middle of January, the rains became torrential and non-stop.



Sonora reported 69 consecutive days and nights with rain so intense that it was “almost sufficient to drown a man standing in it with his hat off”. These were warm storms – today called “Atmospheric Rivers” – that came on the heels of early December storms that dumped 10-15 feet of snow in the Sierras. The warming spell and unusually heavy rain storms created a massive volume of runoff turning any waterway into a dangerous, destructive, raging torrent.



The roaring waters took out nearly every bridge or ferry in California, Oregon, Washington, Utah Territory (including Nevada), and Arizona stranding thousands.



Typical flood damaged bridge.



An ocean filled the Central Valley from the Coast Range to our foothills and 300 miles long to a depth of 30 feet.



The entire city of Sacramento was under at least 10 feet of water forcing the legislature to be moved to San Francisco.



Sacramento in 1862

Locally, a raging Sutter Creek completely destroyed and removed sawmills, roads, houses, and mining operations of those too close. Several Chinese and Mexican mining settlements were completely obliterated with no survivors. The town of Mokelumne City, located along the Mokelumne River, was erased entirely, never to be rebuilt.



Towns such as Mokelumne Hill and Volcano were clobbered by mudslides, damaging or destroying nearly every building in town.



An example what mud slides can do.

This catastrophic flooding stopped all communication by inundating telegraph poles. Nearly 1/3 of all buildings in the State were destroyed with one home in eight destroyed and another three out of eight damaged. An estimated 4,000 people were officially reported drowned, but the real toll was thought to be at least double that. Approximately 250,000 cattle drowned with sheep and pigs at another 100,000.



An untold number of chickens perished, driving egg prices to \$3 a dozen, which would be about \$80 today. Food was in short supply for months. In some parts, the water didn't recede until June, leaving a gigantic mess to clean up and rebuild. After the greatest gold rush of all time, California was left bankrupt.



Today, most places that were inundated in 1862 have rebuilt and stand in the same spot – including Sacramento, Stockton, etc. Levees have been raised, but sediment over the years has raised the river bottoms too.



Old Sacramento today still fronts on the river, but 10 feet higher. Note: The brown columns in front of the door were cast in our own Knight Foundry.

The great flood of 1862 was not a one time “won’t ever happen again” event. A period of record snow pack and lingering warm rains... anybody have a rowboat for sale?

[Visit our Website](#)

[Like us on Facebook](#)

[Contact Us](#)

**DONATE
TODAY**

**Do you know someone who would like to receive our monthly newsletter?
Send contact information to info@sccbf.org to be added to our
distribution list.**

The Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School is rich in Gold Rush history. This beautiful building is California’s second oldest two-story brick schoolhouse. The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation has restored the first and second floor making it a wonderful rental for any occasion. There are four rooms within the Historic Grammar School that can be rented.



Contact the City of Sutter Creek for information on rates and availability - (209) 267-5647 ext. 230 or email info@cityofsuttercreek.org

Whether it's a love of our heritage, a special connection to our town's diverse, deeply rooted cultures, or a desire to improve your community, every donor's passion for Sutter Creek is unique. A donation to Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation is the perfect way to fund your passion and watch it prosper. By connecting people who care with causes that matter, we help ensure a stronger, healthier tomorrow. We provide a simple, powerful and highly personal approach to giving.

SCCBF is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) - Tax ID #87-1825043

SCCBF a Nonprofit, 501(c)(3) | PO Box 24, Sutter Creek, CA 95685

[Unsubscribe info@sccbf.org](mailto:info@sccbf.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by info@sccbf.org in collaboration with



Try email marketing for free today!