

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

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WEBER POINT and SITE of
CHARLES M. WEBER HOUSE

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by

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WEBER POINT AND SITE OF CHARLES M. WEBER HOUSE

Weber Point, with the site of the Charles M. Weber house, is the oldest and perhaps the most important landmark in Stockton. Charles Weber was the founder of the city, and its early history is essentially the story of Mr. Weber's life. Owner of the land grant on which the town was built, Mr. Weber was responsible for its settlement and was the controlling force behind its growth. In later years, when Stockton had become the important industrial and commercial city he had foreseen, he was its benefactor and always provided generously for its development. In his home on the point, a commanding two-story adobe set back in well kept spacious grounds among the beautiful gardens and fine old trees which he loved, the pioneer founder, until his death in 1881, dreamed and made plans for the future of the town which his versatile, dynamic character had moulded.

Charles Weber stands out among the early pioneers as one of the important and influential first settlers of California. He was born in Hamburg, Germany, of German parents, February 16, 1814. His father was a Protestant minister, and held a high position in

the local school system. After graduation from the common school, Charles attended an academy in preparation for the university. His health broke down, however, and he was forced to leave school. He trained himself for the vocation of a merchant. In this occupation he was keen and aggressive, and laid the foundation of his later success in California in the merchandising business.¹

In 1836, Weber, with a cousin, emigrated to America. They landed at New Orleans, where Weber began work in a mercantile store. He became a victim of yellow fever and went to Texas to convalesce. He served in the army there. In 1840, illness again sent him to St. Louis to recuperate. Numerous accounts which he read of California interested him greatly. Thinking the California climate would help him regain his strength, he joined the Bartelson - Bidwell party which left Independence, Missouri, in May, 1841. This party, one of the first groups of white settlers to enter California, arrived at Dr. Marsh's place on the eastern side of Mt. Diablo in November, 1841. Resting there after

1. F. Fairchild, "Historical sketch of the pioneer who founded Stockton" in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, 5:1.

the long, tedious journey, the party broke up and scattered to various sections of the coast. Weber had brought letters from the East to Captain Sutter, and from Dr. Marsh's he went on to Sutter's Fort. Passing through the San Joaquin Valley, he was impressed with the fertility and beauty of the place.²

Weber spent his first California winter at the fort working for Captain Sutter as an overseer. In the spring he journeyed southward, examining the valleys and Spanish land grants. Again riding through the San Joaquin Valley, he confirmed his first impression of its possibilities. He especially liked the numerous groves of giant oak trees in the vicinity of the present site of Stockton which he thought gave the place an English atmosphere. He determined to make his home there when he could secure a land grant. As an alien, he himself could not obtain a grant; land grants were made only to Mexican citizens.

Meanwhile, until he could secure the San Joaquin land, he settled at San Jose. He formed a partnership with William Gulnac, a naturalized Mexican citizen, to carry on a store and general merchandising business. The partnership was profitable to both men so that they soon expanded and

2. G. H. Tinkham, A history of Stockton, 61.

organized other enterprises. They operated a flour mill, manufacturing sea biscuits and bread which were in great demand by the merchant vessels and whalers of the coast. During the Mexican war Weber's was the only place on the Pacific Coast where bread could be obtained for the navy. They ran, also, a blacksmith shop, salt works, a tannery, and manufactured the first shoes made in California.³

In 1842, Weber persuaded his partner to secure a land grant on the east side of the San Joaquin River. Gulnac petitioned to the governor, Micheltorena, in 1843, and in 1846 the grant known as El Campo de los Franceses, or French Camp, consisting of 48,747 acres, was officially given Gulnac. Weber, as his business partner, became half owner. The grant received its name because a group of French Canadian trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company for several years trapped beaver in San Joaquin County and camped a few miles below the present site of Stockton, at a place which became known as French Camp. Gulnac and Weber, in compliance with the Mexican law, drove several hundred head of cattle onto the grant. On their arrival they found that the trappers of the Hudson's Bay Company had left for the winter; because the Indians of the vicinity were especially dangerous,

3. Tinkham, A history of Stockton, 61.

they drove the stock on to the Cosumnes to be under the protection of the fort. Later, Weber made a treaty with the chief of the tribe, José Jesús, and the stock was driven back onto the pasture lands of the grant. A corral was built on the east side of Weber's Point. Weber's major-domo, James Lindsay, and the Indian vaqueros built tule huts on the north peninsula.⁴

The partnership between Gulnac and Weber was unsatisfactory to Mr. Weber, and, in 1845, he bought Gulnac's interest in the Campo de los Franceses grant. Weber became its sole owner April 3, 1845. Mr. Weber was anxious to build up a permanent settlement on his grant, but he was beset with difficulties in these first years. A smallpox epidemic broke out among the white settlers of French Camp. The settlers and Indian vaqueros fled to San Jose, with the exception of the major-domo, Mr. Lindsay. Disaster followed disaster. During the winter the Loo-lumna Indians of Amador County descended on the almost deserted village, murdered Mr. Lindsay, set fire to the buildings and drove off the stock. Mr. Tinkham, in an historical account of Stockton, says:⁵

4. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5: 6.

5. Ibid.

In April, 1845, a party of Pioneers, returning from the Micheltorena war to Sutter's fort found the tents in ashes. Upon further search, they found Lindsay's body floating in the channel, pierced with six arrows. Recovering the body, they buried it on the point that bears his name, and reported the murder to Captain Sutter, the prefect of the district.

For some time after these two incidents, fear of the Indians and smallpox prevented Weber from securing any settlers on his grant. In 1848, several families, headed by Napoleon Schmitt, were persuaded to locate on the grant. Then the Mexican War again broke up the community, for Weber made the families move to the lower settlements for safety. During this time, Weber still carried on his business in San Jose and superintended the grant from there, making trips back and forth. Throughout the Mexican war, he took an active part, serving as a captain in the American army and recruiting militia at San Jose.⁶

In 1847, Captain Weber took up his permanent residence on the Campo de los Franceses grant and as soon as possible in 1849 disposed of his San Jose business. From that time, he devoted his money and energy to the development of the San Joaquin property and its settlement. He

6. Finkham, History of Stockton, 66-67.

owned several thousand head of cattle and horses, which were driven from the San Jose ranch to the San Joaquin pasture lands. Strong corrals or rodeo grounds were built to protect the stock from Indian raids.

In the fall of 1847, as the immigrants came over the Sierras, Weber tried to persuade them to locate at Tuleburg as he called his settlement. The sloughs and the San Joaquin River were thick with tules which were characteristic of the place in early days. Most of the newcomers to California preferred to go on to the lower settlements which were more civilized and safer from the Indians. Finally, a group of trapper hunters came to establish homes at Tuleburg. Among them were Joe Buzzell, John Sirey, Harry T. Fanning, William Fairchilds, B. T. Thompson, and James McKee.⁷

The peninsula on the grant was selected as the best location for the settlement. The new families built tule covered brushwood huts. Captain Weber purchased a thirteen-ton, boat, María, in San Francisco, and, loading it with lumber, sailed it up the San Joaquin River to Tuleburg. A strong stockade was built on Weber Point, from Stockton.

7. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5: 6.

Channel to Lindsay Channel, with a broad ditch outside. Every evening the stock were driven inside the enclosure for safety. Weber also erected a small merchandise store like the one in San Jose to supply the settlers and for trading with trappers. Now that the Mexican War was over, permanent settlers gradually came to establish homes at Tuleburg, or Webersville, as the place was frequently called. To encourage settlers in his community, Weber made generous offers of a block of land in the town as well as a Spanish section of 480 acres in the country. Frequently he also furnished free seed, horses, feed and implements to cultivate the land.⁸

Weber's settlement continued prosperously in the next year without any molestations from the Indians or ravaging disease. The winter of 1847, marauding Indians menaced the lower settlements of Livermore, San Ramon and Pacheco valleys, and the settlers of these districts sought Weber's aid for their protection.

In January, 1848, occurred the discovery of gold at Sutter's mill race at Coloma, which within a few months was to cause the sudden growth and activity of Tuleburg, or,

8. Tinkham, History of Stockton, 68-69.

as it had been renamed by Captain Weber, Stockton, in honor of Commodore Robert Stockton. When Weber heard of the gold discovery in the vicinity of Sutter's Fort he was convinced that it could be found also in the streams of the San Joaquin Valley. He sent out a party of settlers who searched the territory for gold and found a great deal of it in the Stanislaus, Mokelumne and other streams.

Weber organized the Stockton Mining Company, a joint stock company, to work the mines and do a general merchandising business furnishing the prospectors with supplies. Among the members of the pioneer company were John M. Murphy, Dr. Isabel, Joseph Buzzell, George Fraezer, Mr. Pyle and Andy Baker. The famous mines - Murphys Camp, Sullivans Diggings, Angels Camp, Sansevina Bar and Woods Creek all derive their names from members of the Stockton Mining Company. With picks, shovels and mining equipment from Weber's store, the gold seekers prospected the Stanislaus and Mokelumne rivers. They camped on Weber's Creek, and, aided by the Indians, sent out mules and carts loaded with gold dust.⁹

The company organized by Weber carried on mining activities until September, 1848, when it was dissolved by

9. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5: 6.

the captain. Mr. Weber, with his usual foresightedness, realized that the little settlement in the tule covered sloughs was destined to become a large town of great commercial importance as the trading center for the Southern Mines. In October, 1848, he enlarged his store, with Henry Kerchner as his partner. The firm was known as Weber and Company. While trading was carried on with the trappers and Indians, the Stockton sloughs were not considered important. Then, with the sudden rush of people to the gold fields, the future greatness of Stockton as an inland port and industrial center was foretold. Mr. Tinkham, in his History of Stockton, says:¹⁰

...now the place was becoming a town of commercial importance, and the navigable streams had become the highways of commerce, over which vessels were hourly carrying freight and passengers. These channels were the keys to the commerce of the county, and citizens offered Weber thousands of dollars for lots fronting on the water; but he refused them all, reserving the levees for the future use of the city of Stockton.

Another writer, James H. Carson, whom Tinkham quotes in his "Early history of Stockton, the Admission Day City," in describing Stockton as it appeared in 1849,

10. Tinkham, History of Stockton, 74-75.

wrote, of the town and its shipping:¹¹

When I arrived, May 1, 1849, Stockton, which I had last seen graced by Joe Buzzell's log cabin, was now a vast linen city. The tall masts of the schooners, barks, and brigs, high pointed, were seen in the blue vault above, while the merry ye-ho of the sailor could be heard as box, bale and barrel were landed upon the bank of the Slough.

Captain Weber, having the new commercial interests of the town in mind, had Stockton surveyed by Major R. P. Hammond in 1849. In order for the new survey to be in proportion, Captain Weber had to repurchase some of the land which he had given away to new settlers in 1847. According to the Hammond survey, Stockton was laid out one mile square. Captain Weber soon sold lots to the town merchants but constantly refused to sell any of the waterfront, which he realized would be invaluable to the city in the future.

The pioneer steamer to make regular trips on the San Joaquin River to Stockton was the Captain Sutter, making its first trip in November, 1849. In less than six months, the owners of the craft made more than 100,000 dollars clear. Within the following year, nine small side-wheel vessels made daily trips between Stockton and San Francisco. The

11. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, II, No. 3:6.

roads from Stockton to the Southern Mines were as heavy with traffic as were the river and sloughs. Seven lines of stages and mule teams carried passengers and freight. The mule teams carried between 5,000 and 20,000 pounds of freight and were the only means by which the miners could get their supplies.

As in the other gold rush towns, every type of person drifted into Stockton, including many criminals, so that the local vigilance committee was frequently busy in '49 and '50. Before the end of 1849, the city had a permanent population of more than 1,000 people, a floating population of some 2,000 miners on their way to or from the mines, traders and merchants. In the winter it was the center where the miners went to pass the time until the weather cleared. There were the usual activities characteristic of the mining towns, with many drinking and gambling houses.¹²

In December, 1849, a fire swept through the tent city, which, within a few minutes, was a heap of ashes. The loss was 200,000 dollars. More substantial buildings with board walls and canvas roofs replaced the tent structures.

12. R. Vandergrift, "San Joaquin the gateway county," in Grizzly Bear, April, 1921, XVIII, No. 4:4.

In August, 1850, Stockton was incorporated as a city. It had grown so large in the last two years that a better form of government was necessary. November 15, 1850, the alcalde called an election to create a board of councilmen. The officials who were elected passed ordinances, erected a hospital and planned many improvements. However, they soon resigned, for, with neither state nor county government organized, there were no means of raising taxes. For five months there was no law or order in the town. Quarrels and murders were frequent, with general conditions in the city in a bad way. The citizens, taking matters into their own hands, organized a city government and elected a board of councilmen, one of whom was Captain Weber.¹³

Stockton grew rapidly until in May, 1851, another disastrous fire swept the city. A large portion of the residential district was destroyed, the property damage estimated at 1,500,000 dollars. In August, 1851, Captain Weber deeded all of the streets, channels and public squares to the city. Named by Captain Weber in the survey of 1849, most of them had names of a patriotic

13. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5:8.

and military significance. Despite the heavy losses by fire, after the admission of California as a state, and the incorporation of Stockton as a city, the town grew slowly and steadily.¹⁴ Commerce and modes of transportation kept pace with the other changes and improvements. In March, 1853, the 413-ton side-wheel steamer, Thomas Hunt, arrived at the wharf on an experimental trip to see if large steamers could navigate the slough to Stockton harbor. In the next year, in March, 1854, the California Steam Navigation Company was organized, which ran first class steamers daily on the Stockton route until 1869. In November, 1869, the Central Pacific Railroad began a line connecting Oakland, Stockton and Sacramento.¹⁵

On November 29, 1850, Captain Weber married Helen Murphy, whom he met at Sutter's Fort several years before. They made their home on Weber Point in a rambling two-story adobe with broad verandas, which was located on the beautifully landscaped grounds of the peninsula. Their three children, two boys and a girl, were born and reared there. Bayard Taylor, who visited the Webers at

14. Tinkham, History of Stockton, 76.

15. Tinkham, "Early history of Stockton, the admission day city," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5:6.

their home, wrote of it:¹⁶

We were greatly delighted by our visit to Captain Weber's, who transformed a tract of land between two sloughs into a garden. There is no more delightful villa in existence. A thick hedge, outside of which is a row of semi-tropical trees, surrounds the peninsula. The gate opened into a lofty avenue of trellis work, where the sunshine strikes through branches of amethyst and crysolite, while on either hand, beds of roses fill the air with odor. The house is low and spacious, the woodwork of natural redwood. Vine covered verandas surround it, and every window discloses a vision of plants that would be the glory of any green house on the Atlantic Coast.... The garden delighted us beyond measure. The walls were waist deep in fuchsias and geraniums, and the pepper trees with their loose, misty boughs, hailed us as do friends from Athens. A row of Italian cypresses were shooting rapidly above the other boughs in the garden. How they will transform the character of the landscape when their dark obelisks stand in full stature!

As pioneer founder and settler of Stockton, Captain Weber, until his death in 1881, was probably the city's most influential citizen. Throughout his lifetime he worked to serve the city which his vision and determination had created. He aided its development in every way possible. Always a generous benefactor, he donated land and money to worthy causes, city improvements, churches,

16. Fairchild, "Historical sketch of the pioneer who founded Stockton," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 32.

and schools. Throughout his lifetime, especially as the San Joaquin Valley became more valuable, he had many bitter experiences with squatters and individuals who tried to take advantage of his wealth and position. He spent thousands of dollars contesting and settling lawsuits.

Toward the end of his life, Captain Weber often seemed bitter and disillusioned, and by some was considered eccentric. He became aloof, withdrawing as much as possible from public life and social contacts although in his earlier life he was of a genial nature. He preferred the quiet solitude of his lovely home and gardens which he loved and cared for until his death. He took a violent dislike to any trespass of his property. However, despite his peculiarities during his later life, he was always respected and beloved by those who understood him. Miss Fairchild, in a sketch of Stockton, says of him:¹⁷

He devoted his life largely to the uplift of his fellow-men and was noted as a citizen who invested his money in the festival of beauty, grandeur and public benefits. His heart was full of those qualities which make and prove the firm, valued, and worthy citizen. He died May 14, 1881, and there was not one in the

17. Fairchild, "Historical sketch of the pioneer who founded Stockton," in Grizzly Bear, September, 1912, XI, No. 5:2.

large concourse of citizens who joined in the procession and ceremonies that did not mourn his loss by showing how securely he had fixed himself in the esteem and respect of every circle in which he moved.

Today the old Weber home, long a show place of which the city was justly proud, has disappeared. A few of the fine old trees still standing mark the site of Stockton's pioneer landmark. The city itself is increasingly a living testimony of Captain Weber's enterprise and keen insight. With a population of some 50,000 persons, it is the center of one of California's largest and richest agricultural districts. Much of the agricultural land has been reclaimed from the useless tule swamps. Called the Netherlands of America, the San Joaquin delta is made accessible to the outside world through Stockton's harbor. Three transcontinental railroads have their routes through the city. An important industrial and commercial inland city, Stockton recently completed an extensive project to give the city a deep water harbor by dredging fourteen miles of the San Joaquin River, thus connecting the city of Stockton with San Francisco Bay.¹⁸ The deep water port will be another tribute to the foresight and judgment of Stockton's founder, who, from all of California, chose the San Joaquin sloughs as the location of his settlement.

18. F. J. Taylor, California, land of homes, 269-270.

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