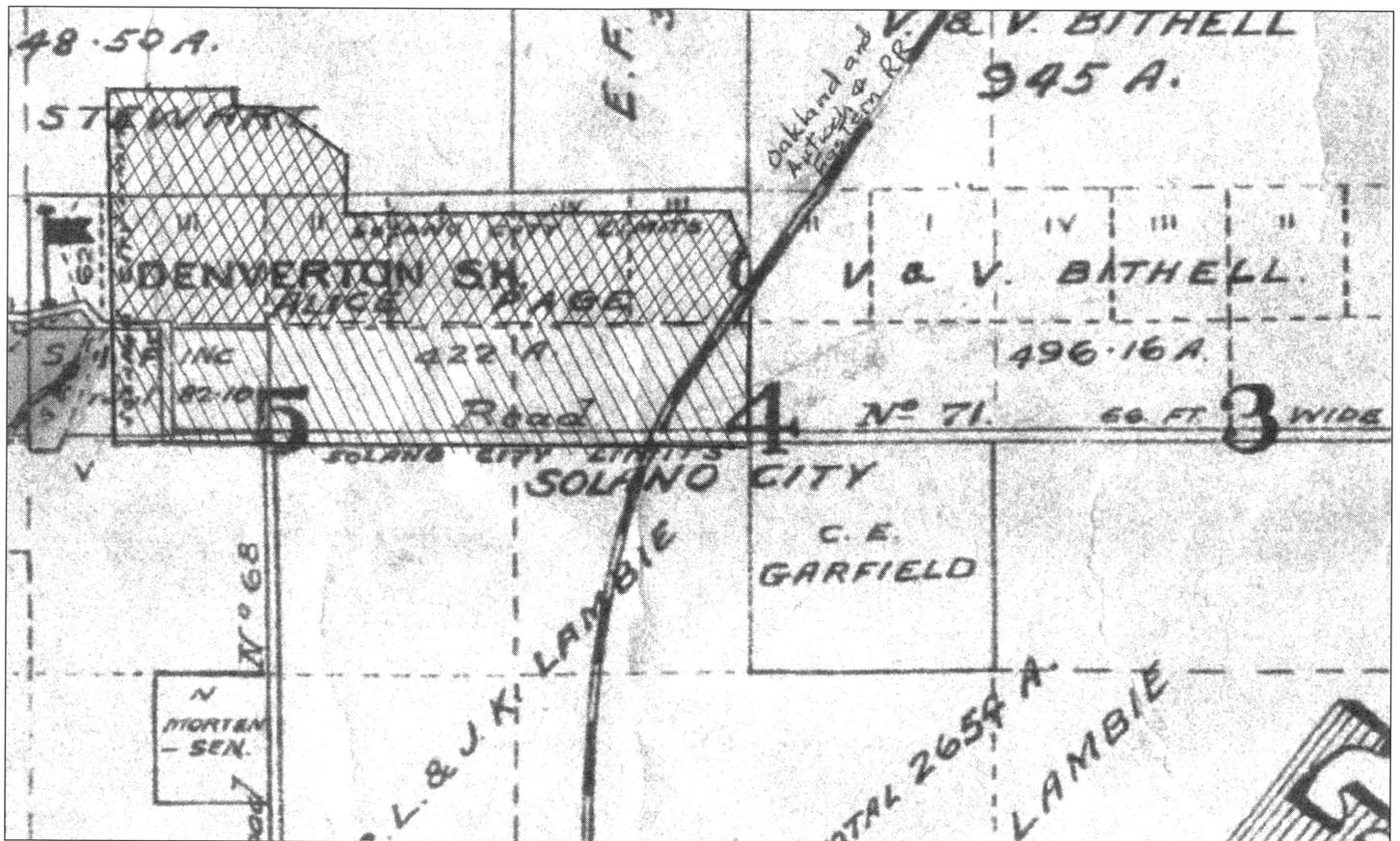


Solano City? Where's That?

Jerry Bowen



It was a magnificently planned community in retrospect. Solano City was planned to house 75,000 residents with a canal extending 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 had been successful. Today, hardly anyone has ever heard of it.

Before we delve deeper into the events leading up to the promotion of Solano City, I think it would be a good idea to explore the background of one of its main characters.

Patrick Calhoun, the grandson of U. S. Vice-President, John Calhoun, was one of the major promoters. He came to Solano County to recoup losses suffered to defend himself against bribery charges while head of United Railroads.

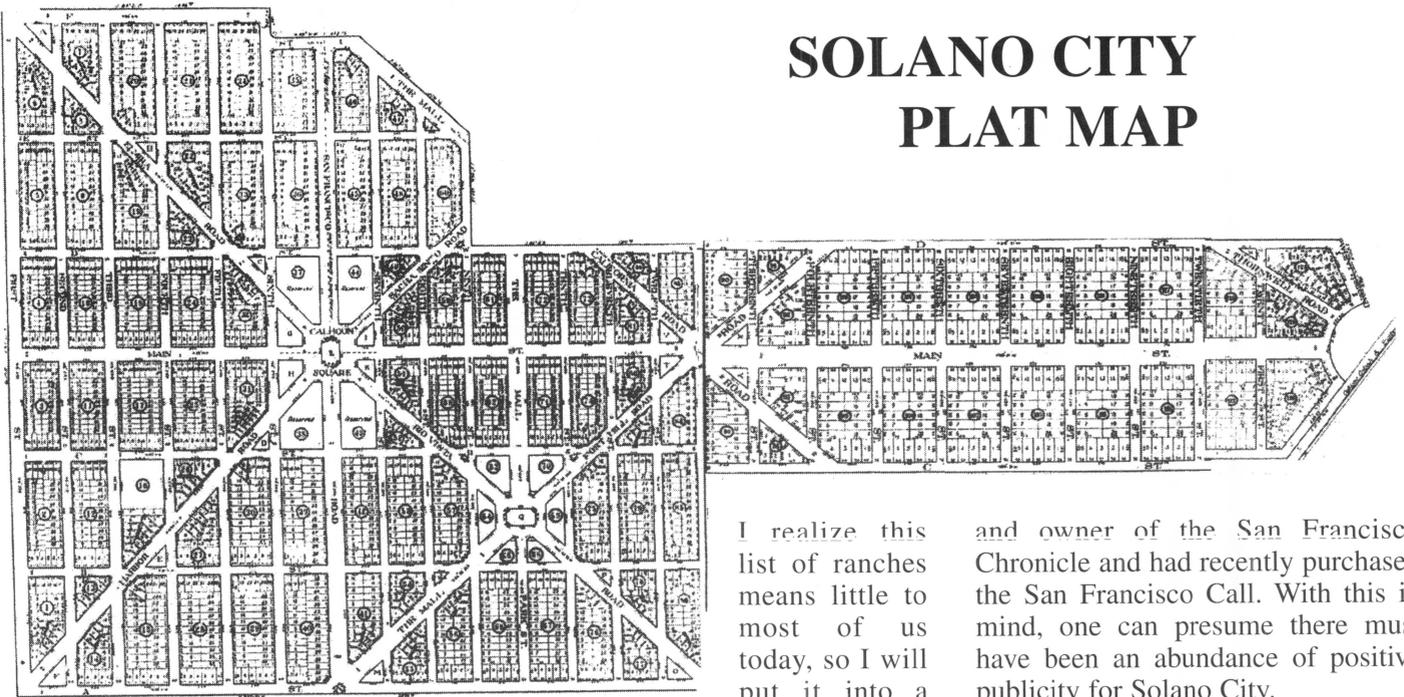
United Railroads owned the cable car business in San Francisco in the early 1900s. There was a movement underway in 1905 to convert to a fully electric train complex using underground electric systems. United Railroads was insistent on using the universal overhead electric trolley line. Overhead lines were much cheaper to build, but not as esthetically pleasing. In addition, the company refused to reduce the fares if the less expensive system was approved. Their only concession was to donate \$200,000 to the city to be expended on its parks. Not an altruistic gesture by any stretch of the imagination, they would receive their money back many times over in fares from park visitors.

United Railroads retained attorney "Boss" Ruef in the latter part of 1905 (after the election of the notorious

Ruef-Schmitz Board of Supervisors) and announced it would deal directly with the Supervisors. Ruef later confessed that arrangements had been made with him to pass the ordinance for overhead permits in the latter part of March, or early in April.

The earthquake and fire of April 1906, temporarily suspended transportation on the cable cars. Although, damage to the various cable slots was not serious, the company reported otherwise as a ploy to force the acceptance of the overhead lines. In fact, the cable cars could have been put into service within a month. But, no passengers were carried on these lines for many months after the earthquake because United Railroads would not release information on the true condition of its infrastructure.

SOLANO CITY PLAT MAP



In 1909, Calhoun was indicted, tried, and acquitted of the charges, but his defense cost him most of his fortune. In spite of his questionable background, the position of executive manager of the Solano City project was placed in his hands.

The company of Solano Irrigated Farms was formed and it filed Articles of Incorporation in Solano County on December 4, 1912, with the final approval being filed on January 22, 1913. The Corporation was to have a life of 50 years with \$2,500,000 in preferred stock, and \$5,000,000 in common stock at \$100 per share.

The newly formed company began making major land purchases throughout eastern Solano County. Some of the acquisitions from January 17, to May 9, 1913, included the following: The Muzzy ranch near Elmira along the Vallejo & Northern RR tracks and 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 (with natural gas wells that provided heating and lighting to Suisun), the Woods Ranch, Lewis Pierce Ranch near Elmira, the Alice Page Barnes' estate, and the West Ranch.

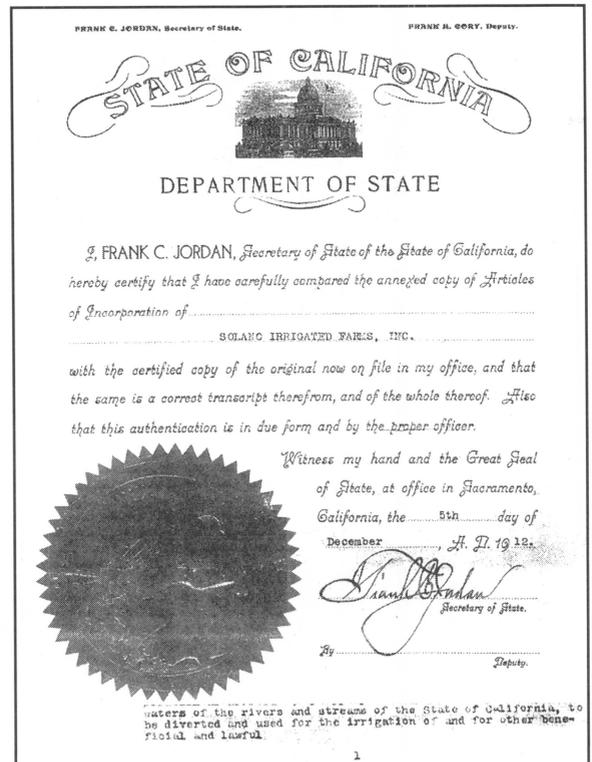
context that everyone can visualize. The purchase by Solano Irrigated Farms included land from Elmira to Collinsville along existing railroad lines and from the Suisun area to the Sacramento River near Rio Vista. Total land holdings included about 175,000 acres with approximately seventeen miles adjacent existing railroad lines. Having control of the land along the railroad line meant access to the rest of northern California via the railroad. In March 1913, the Vacaville Reporter announced plans for a "New Town of Solano." Surveys and plat maps were complete and construction begun. The city was to occupy 1,500 acres across Highway 12 from Denverton (southwest corner of Solano City) and between Creed and Lambie Roads. Along with the many residences, the designs included a concrete fireproof 50-room hotel, a bank, and provisions for telephones, water, lighting and a post office.

The project was on a fast track to completion. One of the investors, M.H. DeYoung, was the founder

I realize this list of ranches means little to most of us today, so I will put it into a

and owner of the San Francisco Chronicle and had recently purchased the San Francisco Call. With this in mind, one can presume there must have been an abundance of positive publicity for Solano City.

In April of 1913, Solano Irrigated Farms bought additional land along the Oakland-Antioch Railroad line, and announced a canal was being dredged from the Sacramento River to Solano City, a distance of nine miles with a width of 75 feet wide, and a depth of 17 feet. The first 700-acre reservoir was to have water by May



GIGANTIC PROJECT

Company With \$7,500,000 Will Develop Solano Land.

It is Securing Large Tracts and Already Owns Nearly 100,000 Acres Which Will Be Irrigated.

The Solano Irrigated Farms, Inc., filed in the county clerk's office at Fairfield Tuesday its articles of incorporation. The life of the corporation is fixed at fifty years, and the capital stock is \$7,500,000, divided into 75,000 shares of a par value of \$100 each. Of the capital stock, \$2,500,000 is preferred stock and \$5,000,000 common stock. According to the provisions of the articles of incorporation, the preferred stock is entitled to dividends of 7 per cent before the holders of the common stock shall receive any dividends.

The incorporators and directors are: Frederick Stenol, A. Van Bynst, E. Salomon, Oscar Samuels, William M. Coates, William F. Dixey, E. Harbert, William P. Taylor, Jr., E. Soderstrand, all of San Francisco.

This company is the outgrowth of the organization of a number of San Francisco and western capitalists which has purchased nearly 100,000 acres of land in the eastern part of this county for the purpose of development for intensive farming under a large irrigation system, plans for which are already under way.

Takes Over the Mussy Ranch.

After negotiations lasting over a period of six months, the sale of the great Mussy ranch in Solano county has been made. The Solano Irrigated Farms, Inc., will add this big tract to its gigantic holdings. A. J. Rich of San Francisco is at the head of the purchasing company.

The Mussy property embraces about 2,000 acres of land near Elmira, and has been considered one of the most valuable and largest properties in this section of the state. The price is approximately \$225,000.

This ranch is famous throughout the country for the quality of stock which it has raised, as the Mussy sheep have been in special demand for the last decade. This is the largest undivided estate of this character in Solano county, and will now be brought under water and set up into small farms. These farms will be on the main line of the Vallejo & Northern railroad, running between San Francisco and Sacramento.

This property was owned by the heirs of the Mussy estate, who are Haystack B. Mussy of Solano county, and Mrs. G. Albert Landsberg, wife of the prominent San Francisco architect.

Purchase the Bulkley Property.

The deal was closed Tuesday whereby A. J. Rich of San Francisco purchased from the R. B. Bulkley estate 1,200 acres of land situated in the vicinity of Nature Prairie. The purchase price was \$42,000. It is supposed that Mr. Rich is acting for the Solano Irrigated Farms Co., Inc., and this purchase will simply be another addition to the large holdings the company has been acquiring lately in the eastern part of Solano county.

Gets 640 Acres From McGarty.

The Gallean Company closed a deal Tuesday whereby the company purchased from Edward and Mary McGarty 640 acres of land situated five miles east of Suisun. The price is said to be \$20 per acre.

This land adjoins other lands heretofore purchased by the company, and is to be included in the large irrigation project under way by the company.

along with the completion of a temporary hotel capable of housing 140 people.

The following week the company reported the dredging was complete and designed so ships could dock at Solano City, load or unload, then return to the Sacramento River without having to turn around.

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 announcements proclaimed: "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 Capitol and Bay Cities. Will have three schools, a library & 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."

How could anyone resist such a sales pitch for the "greatest city ever planned?" People flocked to invest in this most ambitious land scheme.

The circus-like atmosphere was infectious. As Rich and Co. was preparing to open an office in Suisun near the Southern Pacific Railroad depot, the Solano Republican reported, "The new Suisun office will carry on its roof a large electric sign and be



Temporary Hotel built to house prospective buyers of Solano City lots

viewed by every passenger on the Southern Pacific trains who is awake to see it.”

The company started showing property to potential buyers on June 9, with initial sales at the Stewart corner at Denverton extending almost to Suisun.

The Solano Republican urged Suisun to take advantage of the project in an editorial saying, “...that 2,000 to 5,000 people might be settling in Solano County over the next year. What is Suisun doing to help this immigration along? They will pass through this place, eat, sleep and reside here at least a few days. What have we prepared to show them that Suisun is a good town?”

And come they did! On Aug. 17 an estimated 1,000 people arrived to look over the Solano City location. More than 80 autos shuttled people from

Suisun City on primitive roads to view and buy land in “the greatest city ever planned.”

Project backers claimed buyers had spent a total of one million dollars on farm sites and Solano City building sites although it is unclear just how many people had bought land.

It all came to a screeching halt October 17, 1913. The promoters, having apparently overextended themselves, could not pay their bills including notes and mortgages that were due on October 1. The company was placed into receivership and the city died almost overnight.

In January of 1914, Patrick Calhoun along with Paul Foster failed in their attempt to revive the project and today, virtually nothing remains. However, as you travel along Highway 113 between Creed and Hastings Roads, you will cross a por-

tion of the canal appropriately named, Calhoun’s Cut. The canal and surrounding area on the Rio Vista side of the road has been designated as the Calhoun Cut Ecological Reservation.

Calhoun filed bankruptcy in 1916 and vanished into obscurity only to surface again in the 1930s with a fortune he had made in San Joaquin valley oil.

In 1943 the final chapter in the saga of Solano City came to a close with sudden finality just like the project. At the age of 87, Patrick Calhoun was struck and killed by a taxicab in Pasadena, California while crossing the street.



Calhoun Cut as it looks today