

Everett Smith, Maidu resident of Marysville, was formally retained under contract to address potential Native American concerns within the Study Area. In addition, members of the Native American Heritage Commission were also contacted (see Correspondence).

Project Location and General Characteristics

Two distinct property types exist in the project area. The first includes developed land with maximum coverage located within the commercial/residential core area of the city of Wheatland. On these lots, the existing development style includes past excavation and substantial grading as well as nearly 100 percent land coverage. Development potential in these areas is limited to redevelopment of existing disturbed land. Some existing commercial and residential buildings date to Wheatland's early historic period. The second property type includes agricultural parcels. In most cases, these properties have also experienced surface and subsurface disturbance through land grading for agriculture/grazing purposes. However, these parcels for the most part retain original grades and native/introduced vegetation mixes. Cultivated fields, orchards, dirt trails and roads, and ranch facilities are the typical disturbances found. These areas extend outward from the City's commercial/residential core.

The Study Area falls roughly between the Bear River on the south and Dry Creek on the north. Grasshopper Slough meanders through the central part of the Study Area. Unnamed remnant slough channels, shown on the USGS quad, may have also drained the area in times past. As part of flood control activities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers improved levees along the Bear River and Dry Creek. Water was diverted out of Grasshopper Slough into Dry Creek. Residents remember that Grasshopper Slough was a major watercourse before this diversion.⁸⁶

The land forms a level floodplain of the Dry Creek-Bear River valley. The city of Wheatland occupies an upland erosional remnant between the Bear River and Dry Creek. The general Study Area borders a rise along the old channel of the Bear River on the south. Hydraulic mining debris clogged the channel between the 1860s and 1880s, and the sediments pushed the main channel approximately ½ mile to the south, where it remains today. The old channel is currently under orchard cultivation. Large portions of the project area are within the 100-year flood zone of the Bear River and Dry Creek. Prior to hydraulic mining, the Bear River may have been able to carry peak flows. Even prior to levee reconstruction along the Bear River, the downtown core of Wheatland largely escaped historic flooding, which often inundated the immediate surroundings (Neyens, personal communication 1996).

Geologically, the area is covered by the Mehrten Formation, a late Miocene-early Pliocene volcanic mudflow. Soils within the Study Area are a somewhat poorly drained reddish-brown gravelly clay loam, known as Wyman loam (Herbert and Begg 1969). This soil series is part of the Redding and Corning association, which consists of gravelly and cobble material containing a high percentage of quartzite and chert gravels. The soil has poorer drainage than is typical for

⁸⁶ Neyens, Juanita, 1996. Personal communication. President, Wheatland Historical Society, Mayor, City of Wheatland. Wheatland.

the Wyman series, due to the adjacent streams and an intermittent high water table (Herbert and Begg 1969). These soils are rich and highly favorable for the cultivation of most crops.

The Study Area falls within the Great Central Valley or Lower Sonoran Zone (Storer and Usinger 1971). The dominant overstory species within the project area are valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) and willow (*Salix* spp.). Blackberry (*Rubus vitifolius*) and other riparian species occur along Bear and Dry Creeks, Grasshopper Slough, and other remnant slough channels. Grass cover consists of annual grasses such as wild oats (*Avena* spp.), brome grasses (*Bromus* spp.), and fescue (*Festuca* spp.). Other species such as common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) are common in the area. The grass cover is dense during the winter and early spring, but dries up rapidly after the wet season. The seeds, leaves, stems, roots, and fruit of many of these plants served a multitude of subsistence and utilitarian purposes to prehistoric occupants of this area.

Much of the rural Study Area is currently in agricultural (crop) production. Nearly half of the land within the Study Area boundary consists of walnut and almond orchards. The other half of the Study Area is mostly cultivated. A small percentage of the Study Area acreage lies fallow in grass and annual weed species. Undeveloped portions are used as a nesting and hunting area for several species of waterfowl, birds, and small mammals.

Prehistory

Wheatland falls between regions with established archaeological sequences. Accordingly, the principal cultural chronology for the lower Yuba County region is drawn from cultural chronologies developed for three neighboring localities; (1) Sacramento Valley/Delta, (2) Lake Tahoe, and (3) the western Sierra foothills, namely (a) Bullard's Bar⁸⁷, Park's Bar⁸⁸, Garden Bar⁸⁹, Lake Oroville⁹⁰, Beale Air Force Base⁹¹, and Lincoln/Roseville⁹². Current chronologies and the cultural entities to which they relate still require considerable refinement and study.⁹³ Archaeological affinities of the lower Yuba County region to one or more of these

⁸⁷ Humphreys, S.D. 1969. The Archaeology of New Bullards Bar. National Parks Service Contract 414-10-4-940-23, Central California Archaeological Foundation. Sacramento.

⁸⁸ Johnson, J.J. and D.J. Theodoratus. 1978 Cultural Resources of the Marysville Lake, California Project (Parks Bar Site), Yuban and Nevada Counties. Submitted to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Sacramento District, Sacramento.

⁸⁹ Johnson, J.J. and D.J. Theodoratus. 1978. *Cultural Resources of the Marysville Lake, California Project (Parks Bar Site), Yuba and Nevada Counties*. Submitted to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Sacramento District, Sacramento.

⁹⁰ Riddel, F.A. and W.H. Olsen. n.d. An Archaeological Reconnaissance of New Bullards Bar Reservoir. Yuba County.

--Ritter, E. 1968. Culture History of the *Tie Wiah* (4-But-S84). Oroville Locality. Manuscript on file University of California, Davis.

⁹¹ Nilsson, Elena, Russell Bevell, Jerald J. Johnson, Amy Huberland, and Michael S. Kelly. 1995. *Cultural Resources Inventory and Evaluation of 14,700 Acres on Beale Air Force Base, Yuba County*. Prepared for Beale Air Force Base by Dames and Moore, Inc., Chico. Manuscripts on file NCIC-CSUS, Sacramento.

⁹² Jackson, Thomas L. 1995. *Cultural Resources Inventory, Twelve Bridges Project, Lincoln, Placer County*. Pacific Legacy, Inc., Aptos. Manuscript on file NCIC-CSUS, Sacramento.

⁹³ Nilsson et al, 1995. Op cit.

archaeological sequences is presently unclear. To date, little progress has been made toward reconciling their regional archaeological records.⁹⁴

Tahoe Sierra Archaeological Sequence

The archaeology of the north-central Sierra region was first outlined by Heizer and Elsasser (1953) in their study of sites located in Martis Valley in the Truckee-Tahoe Basin. Subsequent research within the Tahoe Sierra has produced a more detailed picture and revision of the region's culture history. A broad view divides the prehistory of the Sierra Nevada and adjoining regions into intervals marked by changes in adaptive strategies that represent major stages of cultural evolution. At the regional level, in the Tahoe Sierra for example, finer grained archaeological phases divide local prehistoric sequences.⁹⁵

Lincoln/Roseville Area

Other investigations in the lower foothill/valley edge region have identified a similar assemblage of "Martis-Like" artifacts, namely along Dry Creek⁹⁶ and along Auburn Ravine⁹⁷ in the vicinity of Lincoln and Roseville, with sites dating back to 500 B.C. Recent test excavations within the Twelve Bridges Project near Lincoln⁹⁸ suggest use of the area as early as 2,500 years ago (Late Martis/Middle Horizon period) up until the time of historic contact and/or the malaria epidemic of 1833. There is no direct evidence of post-contact use or occupation at the investigated sites. Preliminary conclusions drawn from archaeological investigations in the Twelve Bridges Project suggest seasonal use and/or occupation by groups with closer affinities to foothill/mountain groups than Central Valley groups.⁹⁹

Bear/Yuba River Area

Between 1984 and 1985 archaeological, ethnographic, and historical research was conducted in the area of the proposed Garden Bar Reservoir, along the lower Bear River in Nevada and Placer counties.¹⁰⁰ No specific chronology was established for this area but valuable archaeological data were collected.

In 1975, California State University, Sacramento, conducted extensive archaeological and ethnohistorical investigations within the area of the proposed Marysville Lake Project, situated in the Sierra Nevada foothills in the vicinity of Parks Bar on the Yuba River.¹⁰¹ Numerous

⁹⁴ Peak and Associates, 1995. Op cit.

⁹⁵ Elston, R.G., J.O. Davis, A. Leventahal and C. Covington. 1977. *The Archaeology of the Tahoe Reach of the Truckee River*. Manuscript on file Nevada Archaeological Survey. University of Nevada, Reno.

--Elston, R.G., K. Ataman and D.P. Dugas. 1995. *A Research Design for the Southern Truckee Meadows Prehistoric Archaeological District*. Manuscript on file Toiyabe National Forest. Sparks.

⁹⁶ Palumbo 1963. Op cit.

⁹⁷ Robinson 1967. Op cit.

⁹⁸ Peak 1995. Op cit.

⁹⁹ Peak 1995. Op cit. Pages 7 and 8.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson and Eddy, Op cit.

¹⁰¹ Johnson and Theodoratus, 1978. Op cit..

prehistoric sites were recorded, and an ethnographic study of the northern Hill Nisenan was produced.

The finding of Windmill type/Early Horizon artifacts at CA-Sut-23 on the Bear River southeast of Wheatland¹⁰² represents the time period between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago in this portion of the Central Valley fringe. The presence of manos and pitted petroglyphs indicate that some Windmill-related peoples visited the vicinity of what is now Beale Air Force Base during earlier times.¹⁰³

Ethnography

The Study Area is within the territory once claimed by the Valley Nisenan, or Southern Maidu, a Penutian-speaking central California group. Their traditional homelands once included the lower drainages of the American, Yuba and Bear Rivers, and the lower reaches of the Feather River.¹⁰⁴ The Hill Nisenan had settlements higher up in these drainages. The Nisenan were the southernmost of the three Maidu divisions,¹⁰⁵ inhabiting the northeastern half of the Sacramento Valley and the adjoining western slopes of the Sierra Nevada.

Nisenan groups in the valley tended to define themselves by stream systems, and native communication often followed these waterways. In the foothills and mountains, the major drainages became formal or informal boundaries, with the land in between forming the districts. The Placerville District is between the Cosumnes River and the Middle Fork of the American River, the Auburn District between the Middle Fork of the American River and the Bear River, and the Nevada City District between the Bear River and the Yuba River.¹⁰⁶ The Nisenan recognized several political divisions within their territory.¹⁰⁷ One such center was at the mouth of the Bear River, including the valley drainage of the Bear and a stretch of the Feather River. The Bear River may have been a potential boundary. In *Overland Monthly*, Powers wrote: "As you travel south from Chico the Indians call themselves Meidoo, until you reach the Bear River; but below that it is Neeshenam, or sometimes Mana or Maidee, all of which denote men or Indians."¹⁰⁸

Named ethnographic villages occur in the vicinity of Rocklin, Lincoln, Loomis, Horseshoe Bar, Newcastle, and near Auburn,¹⁰⁹ and along the upper and lower reaches of the Yuba River.

¹⁰² Olsen, Willam H. 1959. Archaeology of CA-Sut-23, the Watson Site. Manuscript on file California State Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento.

¹⁰³ Nilsson et al, 1995. Op cit.

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, N. and A. Towne. 1978. Nisenan. In *Handbook of North American Indians: California*, Volume 8.R.F. Heizer, Editor. Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁰⁵ Maidu, Konkow, and Nisenan

¹⁰⁶ Wilson, Norman. 1994.. *Notes on the Occupation of Foothill Nisenan at Contact Times in the Auburn-Lincolns Area, Placer County*. Unpublished manuscript on file with the author. Auburn.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson and Towne, 1978. Op cit.

¹⁰⁸ Powers, S. 1877 Tribes of California. *Contributions to North American Ethnology* Volume III. U.S. Department of the Interior, Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, Washington D.C. [Reprinted by University of California Press, Berkeley 1976; serials in *Overland Monthly*]

¹⁰⁹ Wilson, Norman. 1993. *A Cultural Resource Assessment of the Horseshoe Bar Project, Loomis, Placer County*. Manuscript on file NCIC-CSUS. Sacramento.

Kroeber¹¹⁰ lists no villages along the lower reaches of the Bear River. None have been formally located for Wheatland and its environs. Wheatland residents¹¹¹ report an “old Indian burial ground” located at McCourtney Crossing, now covered most of the year by water from Camp Far West Reservoir.¹¹² Dorothy Boom,¹¹³ granddaughter of early Wheatland pioneer Leona Scott Dam, occasionally fed biscuits to visiting groups of Indians in the 1800s. Grace Nightengayle¹¹⁴ notes that her family once hired Indian shepherders on their foothill ranch east of Wheatland. She recalls that most Indians during these early times lived along the Yuba River, nearer Marysville. Many died of smallpox; their bodies are now buried deep within the Yuba River gravels. Apart from these accounts, no other evidence of Native American use of the immediate project vicinity has been reported.

Major villages known as *Lelikian* and *Intanto* are recorded as being located upstream of Wheatland along the Bear River.¹¹⁵ These people traded and visited with the Indians of the Forest Hill Ridge and used this ridge route to cross the Sierras to trade with the Washoe.¹¹⁶ Named villages along the Yuba River were *Chiemwie*, *Onopoma*, and *Panpakan*. Adjacent to the confluence of the Yuba and Feather Rivers were the villages of *Yupu* and *Taisida*.¹¹⁷ Other major Valley Nisenan settlements are recorded at *Pit chi ku* (Roseville), at *Ba ka cha* (Rocklin), and at *Ba mu ma*, a salt spring near the town of Lincoln.¹¹⁸ (Littlejohn 1928:34; Wilson and Town 1978:388).

Hill and mountain Nisenan winter villages were located on ridges adjacent to streams or on flats along the rivers, often between the 1,000 and 2,000 foot level, out of the fog belt and with a southern exposure.¹¹⁹ These villages were generally smaller than those of the valley people, and during certain periods of the year, many families lived away from their main villages while they engaged in subsistence activities. Every part of their territory was within one or two days’ journey from the winter village; thus, it was possible to have some winter movement to the valley floor or up into the mountains by small groups of hunters, families, or those who wanted to visit or trade.¹²⁰

Few villages occupied the valley plain between the Sacramento River and the foothills. Although both the valley and foothill people hunted and gathered there, the resource focus was along the edges of rich ecotones, either the rivers and the valley floor, or the valley floor and the

¹¹⁰ 1925: Pl. 37.

¹¹¹ Neyens, Juanita. 1996. Personal communication, archaeologist, Dames & Moore, Chico.

¹¹² Nelson, Earl D. and Associates. 1986. *Land Use Element and Environmental Impact Report, City of Wheatland General Plan*. Manuscript on file City of Wheatland, Wheatland. Page 10.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Wilson and Towne, 1978. *Op cit.*

¹¹⁶ Wilson, 1994. *Op cit.* Page 6.

¹¹⁷ Wilson and Towne, 1978. *Op cit.* Figure 1.

¹¹⁸ Littlejohn, Hugh W. 1928. *Nisenan Geography*. Manuscript on file, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

--Wilson and Towne, 1978. *Op cit.*

¹¹⁹ Wilson, 1994. *Op cit.*

¹²⁰ Wilson, 1994. *Op cit.*

foothills.¹²¹ The plains surrounding Wheatland fall in between these two rich ecotones. Low site densities were found in similar open and exposed terrain west of Lincoln. The lands at what is now Beale Air Force Base did not support a resource base that was critical to the survival of prehistoric peoples. The open exposed terrain along the western edge of the Sierra Nevada foothill region is very hot in the summer and very damp in the winter, thus limiting the amount of time most Native Americans would undertake subsistence activities there. Thus, it is not likely that Native Americans would have spent an appreciable amount of time in the area, instead retreating to villages and camps along the lower Yuba River to the north, and back into the hills to the east where they would find abundant shade, water, and protection from the wind and potential enemies.¹²² The availability of firewood may also have been a strategic factor in locating villages in the foothill oak woodland.¹²³

Nisenan villages consisted of from four to 12 separate dwellings, housing a nuclear or polygamous family, with the main cooperative or corporate unit being an informal bilateral “family”. Larger social organizations, called tribelets, were formed by several villages uniting under a single chief. Permanent semisubterranean dwellings (*hu*) and a dance house (*kum*) were constructed at these year-round village sites. Seasonal camps were located along creeks, and temporary lean-to structures with some mud covering at the base were built.

In addition to village sites, daily activities were carried on at seasonal camps, quarries, ceremonial grounds, trading locations, burial grounds, task-specific sites for fishing, hunting, and gathering vegetable foods, river crossings, and battlegrounds. These locales were accessed by a network of trails. Major north-south trails along the margin of the foothills that were usable year round, as were other east-west trails along the natural levees of the stream courses.¹²⁴

As with most hunters and gatherers, vegetable food resources formed the subsistence baseline for the Nisenan. The Nisenan used a wide range of floral and faunal species, although they apparently made extensive use of only a small percentage of these. The least productive time of the year was late winter-early spring. The salmon run began in late spring. Roots were dug in the spring and were consumed raw, steamed, baked, or were dried for later use. Grass seeds were harvested in summer. Acorns became available in massive quantities in the autumn. An acorn diet was the hallmark of California Indians, and acorns were the primary staple for those groups who inhabited the foothills of the Sierra.

Nisenan population in pre-contact times is thought to have numbered around 9,000.¹²⁵ Euro-American expansion into the Sacramento Valley during the 19th century initiated a series of changes which proved devastating to native American populations. In 1833, a great malaria epidemic which swept through the Sacramento Valley killed an estimated 75% of the Valley Nisenan population. The malaria seems to have been introduced by the Hudson Bay trappers in

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Nilsson et al. 1995. Op cit. Page 126.

¹²³Wilson, 1994. Op cit.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Kroeber, A.L. 1925 *Handbook of the Indians of California*. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 78. Washington D.C.

1831-32.¹²⁶ The 1833 epidemic that decimated the Indians in the central Valley played a major role in defining the post-Contact land use pattern of the Indians of the region, as well as impacting the Euro-American economic development.¹²⁷ By the end of the 1830s, over half of the original population was gone and the survivors were facing a time of great stress and the rapid destruction of their prehistoric way of life.¹²⁸

The malaria remained endemic, with frequent sharp local outbreaks until 1880, afflicting both the remnant native populations and the early settlers, namely military personnel at Camp Far West and mining camps of the Sierran foothill region.¹²⁹ Wilson has suggested that the few Valley people surviving the epidemic joined the Hill bands with villages at higher elevations. As the known season in which the illness could be contracted is the late spring to early fall months, June to September,¹³⁰ Indians returning to the Wheatland area during this time would risk contracting the disease. With the discovery of gold and the subsequent influx of a large Euro-American mining population after 1849, Maidu numbers were further reduced by disease and genocide. Surviving individuals were ultimately forced to permanently vacate their ancestral homes.

Valley and Hill Nisenan groups were culturally, linguistically, and presumably ethnically related, but there seems to be a separation of the Valley Nisenan and the Foothill Nisenan near the edge of the valley where the foothills start. Social and religious ties in the valley were stronger to the north and west along the rivers than to the east. Territory disputes and resource competition prevailed between the valley peoples and the foothill peoples.¹³¹ The valley peoples tended to interact socially and economically more with non-Nisenan valley peoples such as the Patwin, who lived on the western side of the Sacramento Valley, than with the Hill Nisenan. They were more oriented to the Sacramento, American, Yuba, Feather, and Bear Rivers on the valley floor. Their large villages with rich and complex cultural characteristics are usually found along these watercourses.¹³² For example, Nisenan in the Roseville-Rocklin area seem to have been more influenced by the Valley Nisenan, while groups in the Loomis Basin fall into the Auburn-foothill sphere.¹³³ Similarly, Hill Nisenan peoples were more likely to have close relations with surrounding non-Nisenan hill and mountain peoples, including the Konkow, Mountain Maidu, Washoe, and Sierra Miwok. Valley flooding created tule forests, ponds and swampy areas, and helped insulate the edge of the foothills from the river peoples, at least until summer.¹³⁴

¹²⁶ Cook, Sherburne. 1943. *The Conflict Between the California Indian and White Civilization*. Ibero Americana: 21. Berkeley. University of California Press.

¹²⁷ Peak, 1994. Op cit. Pages 2-47.

¹²⁸ Wilson, Norman. 1995. A Chronology and notes on the European Discovery, Exploration and Settlement in the Sierra Nevada Region, 1542-1848. Unpublished manuscript on file with the author. Auburn

¹²⁹ Peak, 1995. Op cit. Pages 2-48.

¹³⁰ Peak, 1995. Op cit. Pages 2-48.

¹³¹ Wilson, 1994. Op cit. Page 2.

¹³² Ibid. Pages 1 and 2.

¹³³ Wilson, 1993. Op cit. Page 2.

¹³⁴ Wilson, 1993. Op cit. Page 2.

History

Early Explorations

In 1769, the Spanish government sent Father Junipero Serra into present-day California to establish missions among the Indians. The California Indian population plummeted during the mission period, and their lands came under Spanish ownership. Seeking more native souls to replace those in the coastal areas who had died, the Spanish began to explore the Central Valley. Expeditions led by Gabriel Moraga in 1808 and by Luis Arguello in 1821 crossed portions of present day Yuba County. While no Nisenan were removed to the missions, it is believed that they did harbor escaped missionized Indians.

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, the Wheatland vicinity was visited by trappers from the Hudson's Bay Company and American Fur Company, exploiting beaver and other fur resources. These and other trappers set up temporary camps in Nisenan territory and relationships were friendly. John C. Fremont explored the area in 1846.

Early Settlement

California came under Mexican rule in 1822 when Mexico became independent of Spain. As British and Americans were allowed to become Mexican citizens, they acquired large tracts of land granted to them by Mexico and initially dominated the business and commercial affairs of the region. Land in California was first granted by Mexican governors. John Sutter initially established land holdings that included much of what is now Yuba County. Sutter owned more than Mexican law permitted; therefore, he sublet parts of his estate to other settlers. In 1844, a Mexican who had been in the employ of Sutter, Don Pablo Gutierrez, obtained a grant of five leagues on the north side of Bear River, now known as the Johnson grant.¹³⁵ The land grant, dated December 22, 1844, was first known as Rancho de Pablo, for Pablo Gutierrez, the grantee. Wheatland falls within the center of this land grant. During 1844 Gutierrez built an adobe house at the place afterwards called Johnson's Crossing, located about three miles east of Wheatland. Gutierrez was killed in 1844-45 in the Micheltorena campaign and his grant was sold at auction by Sutter, as magistrate of the region. The land was purchased for \$150 by William Johnson and Sebastian Kyser, who settled there the same year. After the purchase, the grant was divided, with Johnson taking the east half and Kyser the west. In 1846 they built an adobe house a short distance below the crossing.

For several years after 1845 Johnson's Ranch was well known as the first settlement reached by the overland immigrants after crossing the Sierra¹³⁶ and is considered to be the end of the Emigrant Trail.¹³⁷ Here immigrants rested and obtained supplies. In 1847 it was the base from

¹³⁵ Thompson and West. 1879. History of Yuba County, California. Oakland

--Delay, Peter J. 1924. History of Yuba and Sutter Counties. Los Angeles: Historic Record Company.

--State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation. 1976. *California Inventory of Historic Resources*. Sacramento. Page 139.

--1928: 159.

¹³⁶ Gudde, E.G. 1974. *California Place Names*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Page 158.

¹³⁷ State of California, 1976. Op cit.

which survivors of the Donner Party were rescued. Sebastian Kyser served as a member of one rescue party. Among those rescued was 16-year-old Mary Murphy, who met Johnson and married him that June. She divorced him that same year and married Charles Covillaud, another immigrant who visited the Rancho. Her name was given to the new town of Marysville that Covillaud laid out in 1849-50.

By 1849 there were a number of settlements along Bear River established by people engaging in mining, the livestock trade, trading post, sawmills, hotels, cutting hay, and raising cattle.¹³⁸ Johnson's Crossing provided a way station for teams engaging in hauling freight from Sacramento to the northern mines.¹³⁹ It also became a stopping place for trappers, explorers, and travelers. In the year 1846 the Rancho was visited by various explorers and immigrants. John C. Fremont and Kit Carson camped at Johnson's Rancho in 1846. General Stephan Watts Kearney and his troops stayed at the Rancho in 1847. Traffic at Johnson's Crossing appears to have decreased to a point where in 1854 it was reported that the crossing was rarely used (Horn 1988:5). A chain of title to the Johnson Rancho is provided in Thompson and West's (1979) and Delay's (1924) county histories.

The Donner Party in Wheatland

For several years after 1845 Johnson's Ranch was well known as the first settlement reached by the overland immigrants after crossing the Sierra (Gudde 1974:158) and is considered to be the end of the Emigrant Trail (State of California 1976:139; 1982:159; *Wheatland News* 3/16/1973). Here immigrants rested and obtained supplies

The Donner Party is the name given to a group of emigrants, including the families of George Donner and his brother Jacob, who became trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during the winter of 1846-47. Nearly half of the party died, and the survivors were brought to the Johnson Ranch in Wheatland after being rescued in 1847. At the ranch they rested and restored their health before heading on to Sacramento. Among those rescued was 16-year-old Mary Murphy, who met Johnson and married him that June. She divorced him that same year and married Charles Covillaud, another immigrant who visited the Rancho. Her name was given to the new town of Marysville that Covillaud laid out in 1849-50. The Donner Party has become legendary as the most spectacular episode in the record of Western migration (Virginia Western, 2004).

Mining

Geologically, the Wheatland Study Area lies west of the Mother Lode, well away from the major gold mining region. In contrast to the richness of the Mother Lode region to the east and the placer deposits in the rivers to the north and south, mineral deposits within the region are limited to placer gold along the minor drainages and copper deposits in the foothills to the east.

--State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation. 1982. *California Historical Landmarks*. Sacramento.

--*Wheatland News*, 3/16/1973.

¹³⁸ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit.

¹³⁹ Hoover et al. 1966. Op cit.

The Study Area falls within the Wheatland (or Bear River) placer gold mining district.¹⁴⁰ During the gold rush, placer gold was recovered from nearby creeks and streams.¹⁴¹ John Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill, near present-day Coloma, in 1848. Soon afterwards, the gold rush began and the region became quickly populated with prospectors, entrepreneurs, and others seeking easy fortunes. After June 1848, miners began working the ravines east of Wheatland.¹⁴² By about 1851, a number of miners were working small bars on the Bear River, downstream from Camp Far West.¹⁴³ In 1876 there was some dry washing of gold at Camp Far West, but little production.¹⁴⁴

Hydraulic gold mining began in California as early as 1853, and by 1857 it had become widely practiced in the Sierra Nevada. Sediments washed down from hydraulic mining sites in the Sierra Nevada altered the Bear River's pre-existing course near Wheatland for several miles, filling the river's original 25- to 30-foot deep channel and creating a new channel ½ mile south of the old bed. From 1866 to 1869, the Bear River almost ceased to run except on Sundays, the only day of the week on which water was not being used by the miners.¹⁴⁵ Hydraulic mining was finally curtailed by a court order in 1884 because of the massive environmental damage it caused. Meanwhile, many settlements and much agricultural land had already succumbed to the effects of the mining industry. Many farmers were forced to move to higher lands.¹⁴⁶ Along the Bear River, all the bottomland was destroyed except a small strip near Wheatland that had been protected by a levee constructed by A.W. VonSchmidt. This proved to be the protection that saved Wheatland and the adjoining lands.¹⁴⁷

Beginning in 1862, a brief copper rush occurred in the vicinity of what is now Beale Air Force Base. Spenceville housed a smelter which processed ore from the San Francisco Copper Mine.¹⁴⁸ The Spenceville copper mines in Nevada County shipped their product, copper cement, out of Wheatland.¹⁴⁹ Copper was also extracted from mines at Dairy Farm and Valley View near the community of Sheridan.¹⁵⁰ Another copper mine operated near McCourtney Crossing, also in the Spenceville area.¹⁵¹

Bucketline and dragline dredging was carried on to a limited degree in the creek channels east of Wheatland. Soon after the turn of the century, Wendel Hammond operated an unprofitable and short-lived bucketline dredging enterprise along the Bear River.¹⁵² During the 1930s, dragline

¹⁴⁰Gudde, E.G. 1975. *California Gold Camps*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹⁴¹ Clark, W.B. 1970. *Gold Districts of California*. California Division of Mines and Geology Bulletin 193. San Francisco.

¹⁴² Nilsson et al. 1995. Op cit.

¹⁴³Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 77.

¹⁴⁴ Gudde, 1975. Op cit. Page 57.

¹⁴⁵ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 137

¹⁴⁶Ibid. Page 130.

¹⁴⁷Ibid. Page 130. and 137

¹⁴⁸ Hoover, B., H.E. Rensch and E.G. Rensch. 1966. *Historic Spots in California*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹⁴⁹ Neyens, Juanita. 1974. *Wheatland: 1874-1974*. Wheatland Historical Society. Wheatland.

¹⁵⁰ Wells, John. 1996. Personal communication. Consulting Mining Engineer. El Dorado Hills.

¹⁵¹ Neyens, 1996. Op cit.

¹⁵² Wells, 1996. Op cit.

dredges were operated in some of the ravines by outfits such as the Bear River Mining Company.^{153, 154} Dredging also occurred from the late 1930s until 1942 on the Horst Ranch.¹⁵⁵ During 1936-37, Wells¹⁵⁶ sampled ground for its potential gold content in the vicinity of Wheatland; low yields did not warrant further mining.

Transportation

Roads

Travel along the Emigrant Trail during the 1840s and the discovery of gold in 1849 brought thousands of people through the Wheatland region. Some of these travel routes are depicted on early maps of Johnson's Rancho and early General Land Office (GLO) Survey Plats dating from the 1850s. Of special mention is the Sacramento and Nevada Road, shown on the 1856 GLO plat as trending northeast-southwest through the Study Area. The Spenceville Road (Wheatland-Smartville Road) accessed Johnson's Rancho and Camp Far West. The Wheatland Road accessed communities west of Wheatland. A number of other secondary and tertiary roads are shown on early USGS quad maps (1949 and 1953) as crossing through the Study Area, including Highway 65. Highway 65 was elevated during the 1930s. Neyens describes early routes to Marysville, Lincoln, and Nicolaus through the Study Area:

“Roads to Marysville and to Lincoln or to Nicolaus were not in the same location they are today. To go to Marysville before 1915 you had three routes. You could go out Wheatland Road to Oakley Lane, down Oakley Lane to Bradshaw Road, up Ostrom Road to Ostrom Station and then on in to Marysville. Or you might go up Jasper Lane to Ostrom Road and on in. The other route took you out Oakley Lane to Dairy Road and up to Forty-mile Road from the Plumas School. To travel to Sheridan you would go out Malone Ave., cross the Bear River and head toward the old Brock Ranch in Sutter County, turn and go toward Sheridan; or you could continue on past the Brock Ranch to the old road into Lincoln.

The main route between Wheatland and Sacramento was the old county road along Malone Street. In the 1930s the route was changed over to D Street.”

¹⁵³ Clark, 1970. Op cit. Page 130.
Gudde, 1975. Op cit. Page 368.
Wells, 1996. Op cit.

¹⁵⁴ *Appeal*. August 11, 1910.

¹⁵⁵ Neyens, 1996. Op cit.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

Railroads

The original line of the California Central Railroad (also known as the California and Oregon Railroad, Southern Pacific Railroad, and now Union Pacific [UPRR]), transects through the heart of the Study Area, bisecting the City of Wheatland with the main business district formed around the depot. The railroad commenced construction of a line from Folsom to Marysville in 1858, and by 1861, track was laid as far as Lincoln. The terminus was changed to Wheatland in 1866 and stage and teaming business was transferred there also.¹⁵⁷ Around that time, the railroad's name was changed to California and Oregon Railroad, and by 1879 it went under the title of the Oregon Division of the Central Pacific Railroad.

The building of the California Central Railroad northward from Folsom did away with staging and teaming up and down the Sacramento Valley. Millions of dollars of freight passed through the Wheatland depot before it was torn down in 1960. Freight was brought to Wheatland on the railroad and then transferred to wagons with huge teams of horses to be transported to Spenceville, Smartsville, Rough and Ready, Grass Valley, and other mountain towns. The merchants in the City of Wheatland brought large loads of supplies to Wheatland by railroad, as this was the shopping center for the Erle districts and the foothill area between the Yuba and the Bear Rivers. As an example of business done by the rail line, the freight hauled in 1878 was 11,984 pounds forwarded from Wheatland and 6,295,590 pounds received from Wheatland.¹⁵⁸ The line hauled more than freight. At the turn of the century seasonal hop workers arrived and departed by train, as special trains were scheduled to carry migrant workers.¹⁵⁹ When the agricultural industry switched to peaches, the Wheatland depot was a leader for produce shipment.¹⁶⁰ The depot closed in 1957 after 75 years of operation.

Settlement

Placer gravels along the lower reaches of the Bear River were not very productive and the Wheatland area was more suited to those industries supporting gold mining. Located adjacent to major routes to the gold fields and falling within a favorable climatic zone, the area quickly became a center for farming and ranching.

Claude Chana was one of the earliest farmers along the Bear River. Chana worked as a cooper for Sutter and then left for the gold fields. He discovered gold in Auburn's Ravine, the second major gold discovery. Chana returned to the Wheatland area and invested his mining profits into vineyards, orchards, and gardens along the Bear River. Chana erected the earliest grist mill in Yuba County, using the river for water power. His holdings were ruined by mining-induced floods along the river. Chana lived in the district until his death in 1882. He is buried in the Wheatland Cemetery. The Wheatland parlor of Native Daughters of the Golden West has marked his grave, and there are statues of Chana in Auburn and Colfax.

¹⁵⁷ Hoover et al. 1966. Op cit. Page 268.

¹⁵⁸ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 111.

¹⁵⁹ *Appeal*, September 20, 1947.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

Another unsuccessful attempt establish a community on Johnson's Rancho along the Bear River near Johnson's Crossing occurred in 1849 when lots were laid out for the town of Kearney. The town was never settled.¹⁶¹

Another settlement, Kempton's Crossing, was successfully established along the Bear River southeast of Wheatland in 1849. In that year, a miner named Robinson settled on the Bear River and established a river crossing. A crude bridge was constructed in 1850. In 1852, Nathan Kempton took a section of land on the river and raised and cut hay. The community developed into a prosperous town until it was plagued by flooding in the early 1860s caused by hydraulic mining upstream. The river widened and became shallower, completely flooding the town in 1874. The ending of Kempton's Crossing signaled the beginning of the City of Wheatland.¹⁶² Residents abandoned Kempton's Crossing and relocated to nearby Wheatland.¹⁶³ The entire life span of Kempton's Crossing covered a period of not more than 30 years.

The town of Wheatland derived its name from the vast amount of wheat grown in the vicinity in its early history, which was shipped by rail from that point.¹⁶⁴ (Delay 1924:199; Gudde 1974:362). The town was often referred to as "Four Corners," due to its proximity to the junction of Yuba, Sutter, Placer, and Nevada counties. The Wheatland Post Office was established as Johnson's Ranch in Sutter County on November 21, 1853 and was moved to a Yuba County location in 1866.¹⁶⁵ In 1866 the Central Pacific Railroad was completed to Wheatland and a post office was established. That same year the town was surveyed and laid out by George Holland. The chain of title to the town lots is enumerated in Thompson and West's¹⁶⁶ and Delay's¹⁶⁷ county histories. Neyens¹⁶⁸ has produced a detailed history.

The first building in the town was a saloon. A store, blacksmith shop, hotel, and a few residences were constructed in the first year. Not until 1871-72 did the sale of lots boom. The town incorporated in 1874.

At the time of incorporation in 1874, the population was 900, 300 of which were Chinese. Most all Chinese came as workers on the railroad. They worked in support industries (laundries, restaurants) and later were employed as hop workers.¹⁶⁹ A thriving Chinatown existed from the 1860s through the early 20th century. Anti-Chinese sentiment forced its relocation several times.¹⁷⁰ The center of the Chinese burial rite was a ceremonial pyre near the Wheatland Cemetery, where final meals were cooked for the deceased. The Chinese were buried nearby until they could be shipped back to China for final internment.

¹⁶¹ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 778.

¹⁶² Neyens, 1974. Op cit.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Delay, 1924. Op cit. Page 199.

Gudde, 1974. Op cit. Page 362.

¹⁶⁵ Gudde, 1975. Op cit. Page 362.

Neyens, 1974. Op cit.

¹⁶⁶ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit.

¹⁶⁷ Delay, 1924. Op cit.

¹⁶⁸ 1974

¹⁶⁹ *Appeal*, June 10, 1888.

¹⁷⁰ *Wheatland News*, March 30, 1973.

Thompson and West in 1879 described Wheatland as a “flourishing” town situated in East Bear River Township. By 1879 Wheatland supported a railroad depot, warehouses, a flour-mill, winery, lumber yard, numerous hotels, stores and shops, a bank, one newspaper, post office, Well Fargo & Co. express office, a city hall, Odd Fellows Hall, churches, a school, and about 80 dwellings. The Wheatland telephone exchange was one of the first in California, commencing service in 1893, 17 years after Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone. Wheatland’s telephone service boasted of being the “best in the state.”¹⁷¹ By 1900 the population of Wheatland had reached 1,000.¹⁷² There were milling and grain warehouses, livery and feed stables, downtown stores and SPRR depot, bank, newspapers, churches, schools, hotels, and a theater. The town suffered three disastrous fires, one in 1880, another in 1898, and another in 1903.¹⁷³

Wheatland’s first subdivision was built in 1953 when Charles Nichols developed his property bordering the northeastern part of the city. Ten homes were built in the first project that led to the first housing development within the city of Wheatland. The city’s rate of commercial and residential development has been slow relative to the growth rates of nearby areas such as Marysville/Yuba City and particularly south Placer County. Over 78 percent of the city’s housing was built prior to 1960 and only 14 percent has been built since 1975. The rate of development is expected to increase significantly as a result of the 1995 Specific Plan, which was adopted in 1990. The 1995 Specific Plan, if fully built out, will provide an additional 850 housing units, the vast majority of which are single-family units. The plan also allocates approximately 15 acres of land for commercial development along Highway 65.

Historic landmarks in the city of Wheatland are shown in Figure 6-7.

Agriculture and Ranching

The Wheatland area was one of the first regions in Yuba County to be agriculturally developed, due to its rich land along rivers and creeks. Initially, the transient mining populations caused little interest in agriculture. Rather, all agricultural products were imported and fortunes were to be gained in the mines. However, after 1852, many failed miners turned to agriculture.¹⁷⁴ Lands surrounding the present day Wheatland proved to be fertile ground for early agricultural and ranching pursuits for vineyards, orchards, grain, and beef stock.¹⁷⁵ Early settlers cut timothy grass and red clover that grew in abundance along rich river bottoms. Eli A. Harper settled on the Johnson grant in 1852 and cut hay where Wheatland now stands. Hay was hauled up to the mines in exchange for lumber.¹⁷⁶ The chief crops were wheat, barley, potatoes, and hay. Grain (barley) was first harvested in 1852 below Camp Far West. Early on, Johnson and Kyser had a small field of wheat and Indians assisted in the harvest.¹⁷⁷ Before 1855 there was not much

¹⁷¹ *Appeal*, June 10, 1888.

¹⁷² *Appeal-Democrat*, January 23, 1960.

¹⁷³ *Appeal*, September 20, 1957.

¹⁷⁴ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 130.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Pages 77 and 130.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Page 77.

¹⁷⁷ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 130.



LEGEND

Historic Site ID



- Parcels
- ▭ City Limits
- +++ Union Pacific Railroad



Figure 6-7 Wheatland Historic Sites

Source: EIP Associates,
and Minter & Associates



wheat raised.¹⁷⁸ However, when it was established that wheat could be shipped abroad without spoilage, the state focused on farming. The crops of wheat, potatoes, and barley grown between the early 1860s and the 1880s made Wheatland a trading center and a vital food supplier. Hops were the chief crop between the 1890s and 1920, when Wheatland was known for having the largest independently owned hop ranch in the world. During the 1930s and early 1940s, peaches overshadowed the hop industry. The peach industry has since given way to almonds, walnuts, and rice.

The bottomlands along the Bear River, Dry Creek, and Grasshopper Slough were especially fertile, as they were continually subject to flooding. Dry Creek and Grasshopper Slough were reported to be miles wide and the adjacent country was flooded to a depth of from one to four feet.¹⁷⁹ In extreme instances, the downtown area was flooded, but usually floodwaters did not inundate the town.

Hop raising on a small scale was carried on in Yuba county in 1859.¹⁸⁰ D.P. Durst planted the first hops in the Wheatland area in 1874. This ranch was the largest privately owned hops field in the world. Soon the hops industry caused Wheatland to be known as the "Hop Center."¹⁸¹ Migrant workers throughout the region were drawn to Durst's ranch. Indians from Nevada were also procured as hop pickers.¹⁸² The Durst hop ranch was the scene of one of the first labor disturbances in California. In 1913, violence erupted at a meeting organized by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) to protest low pay and intolerable living conditions of the hops pickers. The confrontation ended in four deaths (there is a marker that still stands near the Hop Kilns just south of the city (see Photo 6-1). The California state militia had to be called in to break up the riot,¹⁸³ in which the sheriff, the district attorney, and two workers were killed. The organizers of the strike were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. In the wake of this tragedy, the governor created a commission to investigate the condition of migratory farm laborers, and some reform legislation was passed. However, no substantive improvements occurred and influence of the IWW in the Central Valley waned.¹⁸⁴ By 1925, Wheatland, then with a population of about 450, was listed as the second largest hops producer, employing 4,000 during harvest seasons.¹⁸⁵ Later in the 1920s, frequent slumps in the hops commodity caused the landowners and growers to turn to fruit and vegetables with marked success. Fruit and nut orchards soon replaced hops in importance. Four abandoned kilns at the E. Clemons Horst Ranch and the Damon Estate are reminders of a exciting period of Wheatland history.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 77.

¹⁷⁹ Neyens, 1974. Op cit.

¹⁸⁰ Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 131.

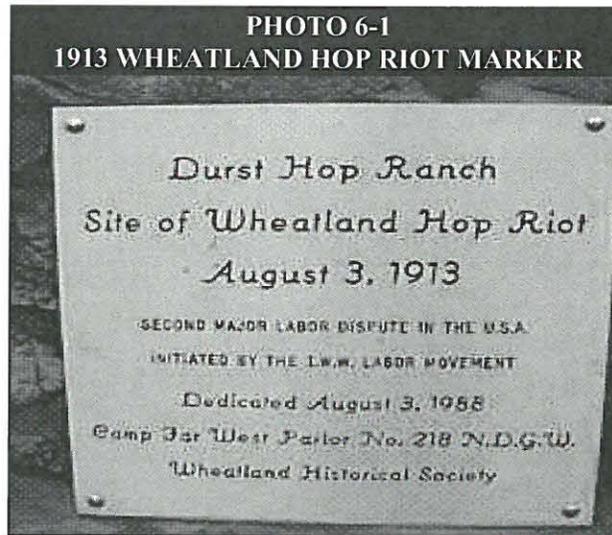
¹⁸¹ Delay, 1924. Op cit. Page 199.

¹⁸² Neyens, 1974. Op cit.

¹⁸³ *Appeal*, September 20, 1957.

¹⁸⁴ Hoover et al. 1966. Op cit. Page 596.

¹⁸⁵ *Appeal-Democrat*. January 23, 1960.



Source: Wheatland Union High School, 2004. Available at: www.wheatlandhigh.org

Military Activities

Camp Far West

Soon after the Donner tragedy, the U.S. government established Camp Far West, a military post located four miles east of Wheatland. The camp was established for the protection of American settlers in the Yuba region. Camp Far West was located on the Bear River and occupied one square mile on the north side of the river, in addition to a strip of 200 yards on the south side. The camp was located a few miles east of the Johnson Rancho house, and was in operation between 1849 and 1852.¹⁸⁶ Two companies of soldiers were stationed under the command of Captain Hannibal Day.¹⁸⁷ The army post had many problems – short supplies, deserters to the mines, etc.¹⁸⁸ Captain Hannibal Day lived out a miserable existence, being too much engrossed with fighting malaria and like ailments to give much aid in protecting settlers against hostile Indians, which was the designated purpose of the post.¹⁸⁹ “In common with the whole Sacramento Valley, this post is very sickly from June till October.” No trace of the old log fort, barracks, and officers quarters remains today, but the site has been marked by the Native Sons of the Golden West.

¹⁸⁶ Appeal, February 27, 1908.

Hoover et al. 1966. Op cit. Page 589.

State of California, 1976. Op cit. Page 139.

State of California, 1982. Op cit. Page 159.

Thompson and West, 1879. Op cit. Page 79

¹⁸⁷ Hoover et al. 1966. Op cit. Page 589.

¹⁸⁸ Van der Pas, Peter. 1989. Early Sawmills in Nevada County, Part One. *Nevada Historical Society Bulletin* 43(3). Nevada City.

¹⁸⁹ Neyens, 1974. Op cit.

Beale Air Force Base

In 1942, the U.S. government selected 86,000 acres of land in Yuba and Nevada Counties for the establishment of an Army base, Camp Beale, seven miles east of Wheatland. Today, families of personnel at Beale Air Force Base (Beale AFB) rely on support services in Wheatland.

As part of the acquisitions to form Camp Beale, some 150 landowners relinquished their farms, houses, and ranch buildings to the War Department. These structures, spread out over the area between the communities of Linda, Smartville, Indian Springs, and Wheatland, were abandoned and many were dismantled by the government.¹⁹⁰ With the formation of Camp Beale, the small communities of Erle, Waldo, and Spenceville declined. Camp Beale was used as a training base for armored and infantry divisions, as a personnel replacement depot, and as a German prisoner of war camp. Following World War II, the camp was declared surplus, and 70% of the buildings were removed.¹⁹¹ Remaining features constitute a potential National Register District.¹⁹²

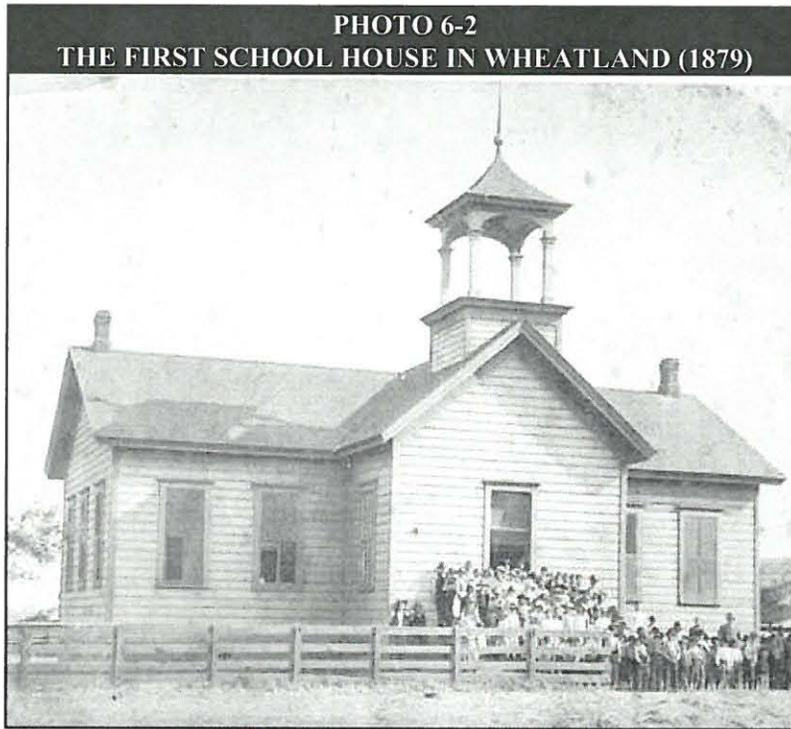
Schools

The very first public school near the town of Wheatland was established in the kitchen of the Roddan home in the late 1850's. Mr. Hollowman was the teacher and held school one term. The Hugh Roddan home at that time was located on Oakley Lane near Wheatland Road. The first official school house was constructed in 1879 (see Photo 6-2). Addition information on Wheatland's school system can be found in Chapter 5, Public Facilities and Services.

¹⁹⁰ Nilsson, 1995. Op cit. Page 51.

¹⁹¹ Nilsson et al. 1995. Op cit. Page 18

¹⁹² Nilsson et al. 1995. Op cit.



Source: Wheatland Union High School, 2004. Available at: www.wheatlandhigh.org

Edward P. Duplex

Another significant event in Wheatland's history was the inauguration of Mayor Edward P. Duplex in 1888. Mayor Duplex was the first African-American man to be elected mayor of a western United States city. His barbershop still stands today on Main Street in downtown (shown in Photo 6-3).