

# AMERICAN RIVER Messenger

## Fair Oaks Recognizes 125th Anniversary

Fair Oaks, CA (MPG) | Story by Shaunna Boyd



Members of the Fair Oaks Historical Society honor the community’s 125th anniversary. Seated left to right: Vice President Terrie O’Donnell and President Bob Sours. Standing left to right: Ken Steen, Lynn Steen, Janet McWilliams, Warren McWilliams, Ralph Carhart, Bob Vogel, and Pat Vogel. Photo by Shaunna Boyd

FAIR OAKS, CA (MPG) - Although the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily shuttered the Fair Oaks Historical Society and canceled its quarterly potluck meetings, Society President Bob Sours was still determined to recognize a significant milestone—the 125th anniversary of the Fair Oaks community.

The Society will be releasing a special anniversary newsletter detailing the history of Fair Oaks, which can trace its start to November 1895, with the arrival of several “Homeseekers

Excursion” trains in Sacramento. More than 100 well-off Midwesterners arrived to inspect land in a new “Sunset Colony,” marketed by the Howard & Wilson Publishing Company of Chicago. The land was owned by prominent Sacramento businessmen Frederick Cox and Crawford Clarke, who were intent on growing the region.

Today, that land is occupied by Fair Oaks Village and its surrounding bluff-side residences. But in 1895, it was a thickly wooded, sparsely populated wildland—accessed primarily from Sacramento by a wagon trail paralleling the American River.

When their trains arrived in Sacramento on November 18, 1895, the visitors were received at the Crocker Art Gallery by Sacramento Mayor Bernard Steinman, who read a letter of welcome from California Governor James Budd. The next day the excursioners traveled by train to Folsom, viewing orchards and vineyards along the way. In Folsom, they inspected the new dam and powerhouse recently built to supply electricity to the City of Sacramento.

From Folsom, they traveled by carriage through the orange groves of the newly subdivided “Orange Vale,” which was establishing a foothold among the blue oak woodlands. They soon arrived at the Fair Oaks townsite on the bluffs above the American River. The visitors had supper in the Fair Oaks Hotel, a temporary building recently built near the bluff edge. Their evening concluded with a bonfire under the massive blue oaks on the bluff.

The next day, on November 20, 1895, the visitors scouted their preferred parcels in the soon-to-be officially subdivided Fair Oaks. On December 24, 1895, the subdivision maps were officially recorded with Sacramento County. By the following April, approximately 2,000 acres of Fair Oaks land had been purchased, and the building of homes and businesses began immediately. By the summer of 1896, more than 600 acres of Fair Oaks woodland had been cleared with the help of hundreds of Japanese and Chinese laborers. That land was planted with citrus and fruit trees, followed not long afterward by orchards of olive trees.

Although it was almost another decade before roads, water lines, and schools were constructed, the new residents immediately created a community spirit that still exists today. Fair Oaks Historical Society newsletter editor Ralph Carhart explained the importance of remembering our past: “Fair Oaks is such a unique community in the Sacramento region, and knowing about its history reinforces just how special it is.”

Although the Historical Society is currently closed to the public, some of their services are available on the patio every Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to noon. And the Society’s premier fundraiser, Soup Night, will go virtual this coming February.

To learn more about Fair Oaks history, visit <http://fairoakshistory.org/>. The Society also plans to post the anniversary newsletter on the website for public viewing.

*Source: Ralph Carhart, newsletter editor and past president of the Fair Oaks Historical Society*