

A Brief History of Woodland

Before the settlement of the area by Europeans, the Woodland area was populated by the Poo-e-win, a dialect group of the Hill Patwin native Americans. Like most Patwin groups, the Poo-e-win occupied the major river courses and tributary drainages of their territory, such as the Sacramento River, Cache and Putah Creeks, and in some cases, springs. Only places high enough to keep them above the rising waters of seasonal floods were selected for permanent villages, or tribelets. The Poo-e-win tribelet of Yodoi at one time occupied the present site of Knights Landing. The Poo-e-win probably occupied the Woodland area in seasonal camps for hunting and seed gathering. Of special importance to the Poo-e-win and their neighbors was a main trading trail which followed the course of Cache Creek. This trade route served as an important means of cultural and social interchange in addition to a vital economic supply line for the Patwin and their neighbors, the Nomlaki to the north, the Nisenan to the east, and the Pomo to the west.

Information about the Poo-e-win is limited compared to what is known about neighboring native groups. The proselytization and enslavement of the Poo-e-win by the Spanish missionaries had rapidly and dramatically reduced their numbers through hardship and disease. A malarial epidemic in 1830-33 and a smallpox epidemic in 1837 decimated much of the surviving population. One historical document notes that the first laborers used by the earliest farmers of Woodland in the 1850's were the native Patwin peoples.

Woodland's modern historical development was the result of several factors: its rich soil and climatic conditions, good transportation systems, and its function as the county seat. This combination of natural and man-made influences are still the critical influences in Woodland's growth and development.

The origins of Woodland as an agricultural community can be traced to the early 1850's. In the winter of 1853, Henry Wyckoff settled in a dense grove of oak trees and opened a small store. Soon other businesses located in the area, including a store owned by Major F.S. Freeman. Major Freeman offered free lots to those who would clear the land and build homes. Before long the settlement of Yolo City was established around what is now the central part of Main Street. Yolo City soon became an important agricultural center. Irrigation was a major contributor to the agricultural success of the region. The first irrigation canal was developed in 1856 by James Moore, who owned exclusive water rights to Cache Creek.

Yolo City also grew as a community. In 1861, Major Freeman gained permission to build a federal post office in the town and Yolo City was renamed Woodland. In 1862, the Yolo County seat was transferred from Washington (in what is now the city of West Sacramento) to Woodland. One year later, Major Freeman recorded the first plat of the city. The northern portion of present-day Woodland was divided into blocks, lots, and streets. Sixth Street was designated as the eastern boundary; College Street was the western boundary; North Street was the northern border, and South Street (now Main Street) was the southern boundary. By 1870, the population of Woodland was an

estimated 1,600 and most of the oaks for which the town was named had disappeared. Woodland incorporated in 1871.

Money earned in the gold fields of California financed the purchase and cultivation of much of the farmland around Woodland. A variety of crops were grown, including tobacco, peanuts, grapes, rice, sugar beets, various grains, and row crops. Wineries and livestock were also important agricultural operations. In the 1880's, citizens organized the Woodland Creamery to provide dairy products for local residents.

As with most communities in the Central Valley, railroads played an important role in the development of Woodland since they made it so much easier to transport agricultural crops to market and bring in goods needed by local residents. In 1869, the California Pacific Railroad Company constructed a line between Davisville (now Davis) and Marysville with a Woodland station in the vicinity of College Street and Lincoln Avenue. The rail line expanded and was eventually acquired by Southern Pacific Railroad. The mainline track was relocated from College Street to East Street, then the eastern edge of the city.

Warehousing and industries requiring rail service developed along the railroad tracks, creating the industrial area that still remains in the area between East and Fifth Streets. The Sacramento Northern Railroad began direct freight and passenger service from Woodland to Sacramento in 1912.

The late 1800's ushered in the development of urban services, including construction of an electric lighting plant and a locally-run telephone system. In 1891, the City acquired the water works system, built a sewer system, and completed a city hall. The city hall building was reconstructed in 1936, enlarged in 1960 and 1975, and still serves the City today.

While many of Woodland's earliest buildings were destroyed by fire or demolished, Woodland still has a rich stock of historic buildings, particularly in the Downtown area. The Opera House, which was destroyed by fire in 1892 and rebuilt in 1896, was the source of great local pride and became the center for recreation and culture in the Woodland area. It closed in 1913 and remained unused until it was purchased in 1971 by the Yolo County Historical Society. It has since been restored and is now a part of the State Park System.

William H. Weeks, one of Northern California's foremost architects of the late 1800's, designed many buildings in Woodland, including the Yolo County Courthouse, Hotel Woodland, Elks Lodge, and the Bank of Woodland.

Over time, modern highways replaced the railroads as the critical transportation corridors. Alignments for State Route 113 and Interstate 5 were adopted and acquisition of the rights-of-way began in 1959. Interstate 5 opened in 1973, and construction of SR 113 connecting I-80 with I-5 was completed in 1990. The City is currently undertaking a study to complete the connection between SR 113 and I-5.

(Excerpted from the 1996 Woodland General Plan.)