

To The Commissioners
Historic Design Review Commission
Auburn, California

With regard to a recent request to approve a salmon sculpture in Central Square.

Such a structure is incompatible with and a misrepresentation of Auburn's unique history. It is without historic basis and will only serve to further mislead and misinform the public and lend credibility to those already misinformed. I would urge the Commissioners to reject this request.

Hello, my name is John Knox and I am a long-term Auburn resident, a retired history teacher, and for the past 10 years a volunteer researcher at the Placer County Archives. In this latter capacity I have worked on a wide variety of subjects related to the history of Auburn. I am often reminded that water had, and has, a rather special and significant role in the history of this area. A lengthy chronology of annotated sources on the subject is available at the Placer County Archives. I will draw on a few of these annotations to illustrate the reason for my request.

The basic argument is: From documented sources we learn there was no "natural" water for seven or eight months, hence no stream and therefore no fish, salmon or otherwise, in Auburn Ravine. Here with a bit more detail.

Time and again early visitors here noted the absence of water, hence the "dry diggings" name in its several forms.

1849-Jun 19 "We passed the 'dry diggings' and witnessed the operations of some of the miners, ... The whole bed of the stream was torn up about 8 feet wide, and the little water that remained were dammed up in small pools of reddish water (the color of mining earth) for the purpose of panning out the gold." George H. Baker.

1849-Aug "These mines were not being worked to any extent, owing to the scarcity of water. There were a few, however, engaged in carrying dirt, a mile on their backs, and washing at a puddle in town." John M. Letts.

1849-Sep 28 "I arrived in Wood's Dry Diggings on the North Fork. ... At that time there was a store kept by ... Elliott & Bailey. I went up to Elliott and asked him for a drink of water. "Water's too scarce," he said, "take whiskey." John C. Boggs.

The rainy season was of short duration and the water in Auburn Ravine Creek flowed westward only as far as where ...

"Walkup and Wyman took possession of a large and fertile tract of land (present day Turkey Creek Golf Club) where Auburn Ravine debouches upon the plain near the present site of Lincoln." Thompson and West, 1882.

This statement is absolutely consistent with the maps of George Derby -1849, T. H. Jefferson - 1849, James J. Jarvis - 1849 and William A. Jackson - 1850 which depict neither an Auburn Ravine or Coon Creek.

The absence of water in the diggings was a serious problem for miners and worsened as the scarcity of “easy” gold became more pronounced. You didn’t mine without water. Improved mining techniques required greater and greater amounts of water.

1851-Feb 16 “SACRAMENTO INTELLIGENCE. - The Index says that the miners are leaving the dry diggings in the vicinity of Auburn for the want of water.” Daily Alta California.

The solution was to move the dirt or bring water to the diggings. The former had proven impractical and the latter was exceedingly expensive. In spite of the expense, in early 1851 a plan was “on foot” to bring water for mining to Auburn Dry Diggings. This was the creation of the Bear River and Auburn Water and Mining Company canal (Bear River Ditch for short) . On June 19, 1852, Bear River waters arrived in Auburn and the surrounding region.

1852-Jun 19 “Sirs - we were getting a little dull here until the events occurred which I am about to relate ... the arrival of the Bear River water ... took us by surprise yesterday. It reached the town from three points about the same instant. Rushing thro’ the big ravine, it made a clean sweep of the slaughter house, carrying away two butchers ... The wasted water rushing like a cataract down Rich and Baltimore Ravines ... some parties above reduced the torrent to a harmless stream, ...” Tarantula in Sacramento Daily Union.

Thus began Auburn’s reliance on Bear River water, a reliance that’s grown ever greater over time.

One of the outcomes of the introduction of Bear River Water into Auburn Ravine was that the ravine which had been dry for seven to eight months in the year was now transporting surplus and waste waters westward. Frederick Birdsall testified in 1880 that the “*discharge of surplus waters into Auburn Ravine ... had continued uninterrupted since 1853 ...*” As a consequence a tule swampland was created east of the junction of the Feather and Sacramento Rivers. This area, later known as the Auburn Sink, appears in the J. T. Pennington map of 1873. It is this area that the Notomas Reclamation District addressed in 1914.

1914-Apr 29 “NATOMAS PLANS TO BE RUSHED TO COMPLETION ... Reclamation and Drainage Plans Will Be Completed before Winter Floods... a third dredger will commence the digging of the cross canal (into which Auburn Ravine Creek flows and became the first ever connection with the Sacramento River) within a few days ... The completion of this work will be of vast importance to Sacramento. The (reclaimed) 60,000 acres in the basin have been practically unproductive in the history of the state.” Sacramento Union.

With drainage canals in place the next relevant event in the history of water and salmon in Auburn Ravine is the following.

1917-Mar 10 “POWER HOUSE DEDICATED. - Last Sunday marked another epoch in the history of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company’s Placer County system. ... Mrs. Clara B. Wise pulled the button (at the Wise Power House) . Placer Herald.

1917-Nov 10 "SALMON RUNNING IN RAVINE USUALLY DRY. - Big Fish Find New Route to Spawning Grounds and Spearing is Popular Sport. The fall run of salmon is at its height, ... The (Auburn) ravine has received an added supply of water by reason the entrance of the Pacific Gas and Electric company's power ditch, and looks a typical stream. ..." Sacramento Union.

This is the first recorded appearance of salmon in Auburn Ravine. In the years following, when conditions were favorable (meaning unusually large volumes of water), salmon occasionally reappeared in the Ravine near Gold Hill.

A number of the salmon sculpture supporters have now changed their line of argument and are promoting the notion that salmon were of some significance in the rivers below Auburn. To this end a portion of a paper (Yoshiyama, et al) is being distributed in support of this argument. A few observations for consideration regarding this partial abstract:

1. There is a notable absence of any Gold Rush primary sources (diary, journal) mentioning salmon in either the North and Middle forks of the American River near or above Auburn. This is consistent with the historical record. An obvious possibility is that there were no salmon to describe.
2. Their secondary sources are far from credible. Consider the Norman Wilson reference and statement that salmon runs entered lower-elevation streams around Auburn. The absence of water in the streams of the "dry diggings" area is well documented. This account is inconsistent with that record. The M. Angel account about Indians at Murderer's Bar is not to be taken seriously and for a reliable account see Stephen Powers extensive interviews with the locals in 1871 and 1872 which appear in his *Tribes of California*.
3. The information on the South Fork and Folsom only muddy the waters. Pun intended. For the uninformed this information is only misleading as conditions in that area were very different from the area below Auburn. That is one reason there are primary sources that are given for the Folsom region and not for Auburn.
4. Although the authors of this abstract are well aware and have written about the optimum river conditions for spawning salmon this information barely gets a mention for this area and is a major deficiency in this abstract. We know from historic photo collections that the waters of the North Fork were and are often reduced to a trickle in late summer and early fall. And so it has been for some time as in "*When we reached Horse Shoe Bar early in August, 1849, we crossed and re-crossed the river by stepping or jumping from rock to rock, dry shod.*"
5. Also pertaining to water levels, the authors fail to mention that the gold miner of 1848, Edward Buffum, was able to shot salmon because of the low water levels in the American River where their backs were exposed "*about 2 inches above water.*" This was about 7 miles from Sutter's Fort. Another miner, Dr. James Tyson, wrote about the same location nearly a year later when he "*forded it when the water was warm and unpleasant to the taste, and scarcely covered my horse's fetlock.*" If it was that low near Sacramento what was it like below Auburn?
6. The next item is pretty shocking. While acknowledging that dams were often a major impediment to salmon runs the authors display a stunning ignorance about dams below Auburn. They state there was a 16-foot high dam built in 1899 by the North Fork Ditch Company. In fact

they are seriously incorrect and are referring to the (Birdsall) dam which was 30-foot high and built in 1880. The 1899 date was for repairs and a retrofit. It then remained in use until 1954. It was the last in a series of 7 dams, the first dating to 1854. The 1870 version was said to be a 42-foot dam and 14 feet higher than the 1867 dam.

A hundred years of crucial history and the authors hadn't a clue. What are we to make of their abstract? Credible or not? Rodi Lee, retired State Park Naturalist who previewed this paper comments that the portion related to the North Fork "is very fragmented with few references to early documentation." She finds the abstract, in the Placer County section, to be "full of misinformation and suppositions."

7. In addition there is a crucial subject which was barely mentioned and hardly explained. Ditches and canals. And nothing about the North Fork Dam and Ditch which removed substantial amounts of water from below Auburn for mining and later agricultural purposes. One of the effects of this water removal was greatly diminished water flows in the American River below the dams in Auburn, especially in the fall months.

8. Absent any awareness by the authors of these last two major impediments to salmon migration, dams and ditch, nor any explanation on how these obstacles might have been overcome one can only view their salmon sources, especially from the early 1900s, with a large degree of skepticism.

It appears that the salmon sculpture supporters may be moving from one fiction to another.

I can't imagine you approving a misleading sign or inappropriate tile. I would expect no less for artwork which would mislead and misrepresent Auburn's history.

Thank you.

John Knox