

Waterfront Promenade

A Peek Into the Past on the Path

By Jim Wheeler & Phil Pezzaglia Photos by Discover Rio Vista Photo Contest Finalists

Take a walk along the promenade, bordering the Sacramento River, starting at the Rio Vista Bridge (officially known as the Helen Madere Bridge) and steep yourself in Rio Vista history. Thanks to local author and curator of the Rio Vista Museum, Philip Pezzaglia, for providing the historical facts in this article.

Take a walk along Rio Vista's new promenade, and take a peek into Rio Vista's history. If your journey begins at the bridge, (officially known as the Helen Madere Bridge), look out toward the water. This is the Sacramento River, a major waterway that ships from around the world and still used to transport goods to Sacramento. Rio Vista is the largest town on the river between San Francisco Bay and Sacramento. In the early days before all the highways were built, commerce took place on the river. Steamships would dock in Rio Vista, transporting both passengers and cargo between the main cities of San Francisco and Sacramento.

The remains of piers from days gone by can still be seen in the water. It made sense to have warehouses and canneries located close to the transportation. Pears and asparagus were major crops here then.

Notice a well-used fishing pier and fishing boats bobbing in the water. Fishing has long been a part of Rio Vista's history. The community is home to the annual Bass Festival held in October of each year.

Looking away from the river, you see an example of the type of buildings that used to line this area of the river. As a tribute after 9/11, a mural was painted on the back of the building, joining the landscape murals painted earlier on the side.

Rio Vista was originally placed a little bit up river but, due to several floods, relocated to its current site in 1862. The move wasn't the last of the changes however. If you are standing by the fishing pier, looking across the river, you see the southern tip of Sacramento County, half a mile away. In the early days of the town, there was no bridge, and if you had visited town then, you would have had a nice view of an island in the center the river. Wood Island was removed by suction dredging in 1927.



Photo by Greg Mitchell.

The original bridge, a bascule type bridge (similar to the one still in use up river in Isleton), was constructed in 1919 and engineered by Joseph Strauss, who was also chief engineer of the Golden Gate Bridge. A portion of the Helen Madere Bridge was completed in 1945, while the old bridge was still in use.

As you head west along the promenade, you are walking a part of the promenade that was built in 2009, adding on to an existing park. Just last year, a 900-foot extension was added to this promenade. Along your walk, notice the large, older concrete slabs in the walkway. These slabs are the remains of two buildings that once stood on this site.

As you continue to walk along, transport yourself back almost a hundred years when the road on your right, North Front Street, didn't exist. Instead, a road located where you stand now led to the bridge under construction. The relocation of the road in the twentieth century made this land available for the promenade. In the twentieth century a number of businesses were located here; among these businesses were a Ford dealership, a blacksmith and a farm equipment sales office.

Some of those buildings still remain but with different uses. The blacksmith shop still exists. It is 16 North Front Street and is now the home of the Rio Vista Museum. If you have time, stop in and see a wonderful collection of historical items that illustrate Rio Vista's rich past.

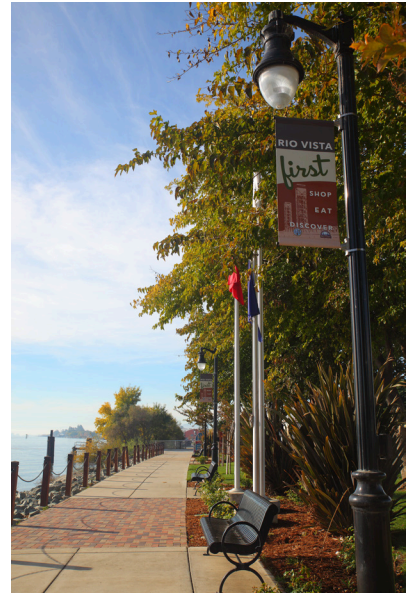


Photo by Phyllis Valiquette.



Photo by Doris Noriega.