

January - April 2020

# discover Rio Vista

**FREE**

Photo – Linda Solomon

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This magazine is a volunteer effort. We always need distributors who are willing to drop our magazines off to merchants in the Delta area. To volunteer, call RioVision at (707) 360-5244.

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**ON THE COVER:** Photographer Linda Solomon captures a sheepdog at McCormack Ranch, in a rare moment of repose, overlooking the 2020 trial site.





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# Frozen Bun Run 40th Annual Event

Story by Susan Whitesell

The 40th annual Frozen Bun Run kicks off with sign ups at 8:30 am New Year's Day at the Rusty Porthole Restaurant and Marina on Bethel Island at 3893 Willow Road. This is one of the most unique events on the Delta, and a great way to ring in the New Year!

According to Rusty Porthole owners Rob and Kim Brunham, "About 40 years ago, a group of people [on Bethel Island] decided to ring in the New Year in a different way." The event originally began at the Sugar Barge just down the road, but within a few years, moved to the Rusty Porthole with its almost direct access to fast water, along with the ability to handle the crowds that watched the event. As Rob tells it, the early event featured skiers "in costume and some with no clothes on."

The Brunham's have hosted the Frozen Bum Run for ten years, however, they've been involved in one aspect or another for well over 20 years. According to Rob, "It's grown quite a bit and a lot of spectators come to see it. It's become an annual thing for people to start their new year."

If you're hearty, or crazy enough, join in the skiing. Costumes are optional. Awards are given for a variety of categories such as sexiest costume, best buns, best couple, furthest traveled, and so on.



Wes Brandau, of San Diego, participates in the 39th annual Frozen Bun Run, Jan 1, 2018. Photo: Jose Carlos Fajardo, Bay Area News Group.

For the less daring, watch the brave souls water ski in the cold Delta waters from the comfort of the levee. Food and refreshments are served all day, beginning at 8:00 am. Enjoy breakfast burritos and beverages for sale. Hot drinks and Bloody Marys are served too. Lunch items are available after 11:00 am.

The party never stops on this special day and event. For more information, go to [www.rustyporthole.com](http://www.rustyporthole.com).

Happy New Year!

# Rio Vista CARE's Kitchen Royale

Story and photos by Doris Noriega

Saturday, February 29, 2020 from 5:30 pm until 7:30 pm at the Veteran's Hall at 610 St. Francis Way, join CARE for the 4th annual "Kitchen Royale" (aka King of the Kitchen).



2019 Kitchen Royale Winners Mark Stokes, Naomi Walker and Matthew Brown.

This is a fundraising event for Rio Vista CARE, an important local nonprofit that provides individual and family mental health and counseling services.

Ina Garten or Wolfgang Puck wannabees — this is your opportunity to showcase your cooking and baking skills. Prepare a dish to be sampled by attendees who vote for their favorite creations. It can be desserts, appetizers, salads, breads, soups, casseroles, meat, fish, and chicken dishes. A "sample" or taste is about a tablespoon. Expect up to 120 tasters. Volunteer to be a chef and you may be the crowned winner!

Have fun with your family and friends sampling wonderful food, listening to music, and of course there are exquisite raffle baskets. At the end of the evening two winners of "Kitchen Royale" are crowned, a lady and a gentleman, plus second runner ups.

Monies raised benefit CARE's much needed programs that are provided to the entire Delta region. CARE offers youth services such as crisis intervention, school site counseling, a mentoring program and support groups. The family resource center offers services for children and families in meeting their basic needs, parenting programs, obtaining medical insurance, and a wide variety of county services. CARE has served the community for over 34 years.

Join CARE for a fun filled evening! BYOB. Tickets are \$30 or \$25 with a donation of a non-perishable item for the Rio Vista Food Pantry.

Call (707) 374-5243 for tickets or get them at the CARE office at 628 Montezuma Street. Tickets are sold by board members, Pets 4 All, Robin's Nest, and Books Rio V. Call the office at (707) 374-5243 if you would like to be one of our celebrity chefs!

# “A place of special Delta Designated National Heritage

Story by Tony Kukulich    Photos from [www.thepress.net](http://www.thepress.net) & Jan Vick

*This article is reprinted with permission from Brentwood Press & Publishing Corporation. The article originally ran April 4, 2019 on The Press website at [www.thepress.net](http://www.thepress.net).*

of the land encompassed within an NHA and no land-use restrictions are placed upon landowners.

A 10-year effort to obtain federal recognition of the Delta as a place of special significance recently culminated with President Trump’s signing of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, and the establishment of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area (Delta NHA).

“National heritage areas are National Park Service recognized places where people have made an important contribution to the landscape,” explained Erik Vink, executive director for the Delta Protection Commission (DPC). “Unlike a national park or a national monument where it’s all about the natural features, a national heritage area is about the interplay of the landscape with the role of people, the culture and the local economy where (people) have made a significant contribution, and where they tell an important story.”

The Delta NHA is one of 55 NHAs in the country and the first to exist entirely within the state of California.

“From our perspective, the real importance of it is that it draws greater attention to the cultural and heritage components of the Delta region,” said Vink. “We think that can be an important springboard for promoting the Delta as a tourist destination, for bringing people to the region, and supporting the tourism and recreation economies within the Delta.”

Administered by the National Park Service (NPS), NHAs are defined by NPS as a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. They differ from national parks in several significant ways. Primarily, NPS does not take ownership



A panoramic view of the Delta. Photo: [www.thepress.net](http://www.thepress.net).

With its new designation, the Delta NHA is eligible to receive up to \$1 million a year over a term of 10 years, though the distribution must be matched by local contributions. Vink said that the use of the federal funds has broad applicability and the money can be used to staff the NHA effort, make improvements to facilities, develop plans, promote the area or any other use deemed

appropriate by the local coordinating entity — the DPC in this case.



The Paintersville Bridge. Photo: Jan Vick

“I have been at the table from the beginning of the process to bring this important designation to fruition, and I’m very excited that the Delta will be recognized nationally as the natural, historical and cultural treasure that we have always known it is,” said Contra Costa County Supervisor Diane Burgis. “The millions of dollars that come with this designation will allow local governments and nonprofits to preserve and enhance this area’s natural beauty, allowing it to be enjoyed for generations to come.”

The effort to establish the Delta NHA has its roots in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009. That act charged the DPC with developing a proposal to protect, enhance and sustain the unique cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural and economic values of the Delta as an evolving place. Seeking a federal designation for the Delta was part of that charge and led the DPC to complete the Delta NHA Feasibility Study. NHA designations can only be established by federal law. The legislative effort was then championed in Congress by Rep. John Garamendi and Sen. Dianne Feinstein. Rep. Jerry McNerney cosponsored the House bill authored by Garamendi.



# significance” Area

“The Delta is the lifeblood of our community and our economy, and I’m proud to have been an original cosponsor of the legislation that designated the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta as California’s first national heritage area,” said McNerney. “Under this new designation, local governments, historical societies and nonprofit organizations will have access to critical federal funding to use in support of the preservation and conservation of our most precious resource.”

As the local coordinating entity, the DPC has three years to develop a management plan for the Delta NHA, but Vink said their goal is to complete it more quickly than that. The approach to completing the plan was discussed at the DPC meeting, held May 16, 2019 at the Jean Harvie Community Center, in Walnut Grove.



A breathtaking Delta sunset. Photo: Jan Vick.

It may appear incongruous to some, obtaining a federal designation that recognizes the Delta’s unique culture and heritage, while simultaneously considering the Delta tunnel project — an initiative viewed by many in the area as a serious threat to the Delta’s heritage and culture — a point that isn’t lost on Vink.

“I think the more people know about this region and the more people care about this region, probably the less likely that it becomes the site of a giant infrastructure project like the proposed Delta tunnel,” said Vink. “But having said that, there’s nothing in the designation itself that would prevent that type of activity from occurring.”

For more information, visit the Delta Protection Commission at [delta.ca.gov](http://delta.ca.gov) or the National Park Service’s NHA site at [www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/heritageareas).

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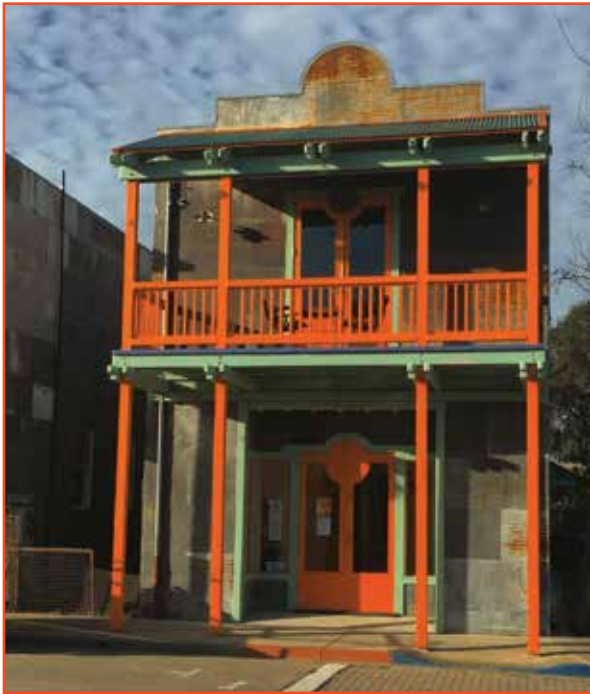


# Spotlight On Mei Wah Beer Room

By Laurie Oleksiewicz    Photos by Iva Walton

Welcome to "Spotlight On," your chance to learn about some of the unique businesses in and around Rio Vista, and the people who own and staff them.

One such establishment is located just a short five minute drive north of Rio Vista along the beautiful Sacramento River via highway 160 in the little delta town of Isleton. In Isleton you find a small town vibe. The strong Chinese influence found along the Sacramento River can be seen here in some of the buildings.



Site of the Mei Wah Beer Room, the Mei Wah building was a gambling hall, brothel and Opium Den until 1957. It is in this building that you find the Mei Wah Beer Room.

The Mei Wah Beer Room has been open for more than two and a half years at 35 Main Street in Isleton. The beer room is the brainchild of Iva Walton, the owner of this fun



and welcoming establishment. "I have been a lover of craft beer since the mid 80's and it has been a dream to serve



people amazing local craft beverages for some time. We are the first business in the California Delta to bring amazing beers of the Bay Area and Sacramento area in one place."

Indeed, Mei Wah Beer Room offers 24 rotating selections of fantastic craft beers, along with Kombucha and Nitro Coffee. Beer samplers are a good way to have a taste of several different brews since there are so many that are

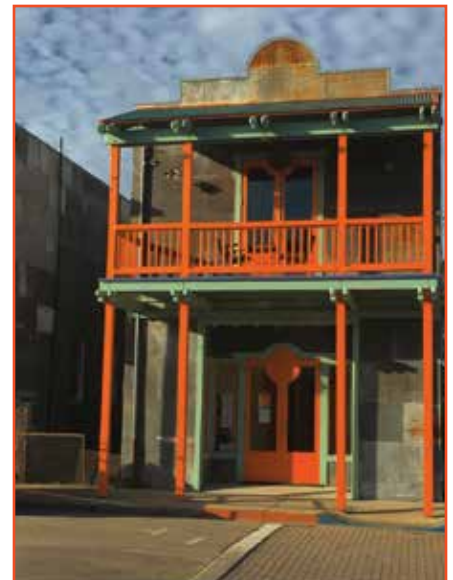
just so good.

In addition to the wonderful beers to enjoy, the beer room itself is an escape from the typical beer establishments.


There are no televisions or wi-fi. Instead you can enjoy your beer in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and enjoy the company of the people you are with as well as the fellow patrons. Often on weekends there is music in the afternoon/evening.

The Mei Wah Beer Room is a popular destination already, but Iva still has dreams and plans for the future. "As our business grows, we hope to offer a beer garden and at some point a brewery."

So, if you would like to wet your whistle and enjoy yourself in a friendly unique atmosphere, be sure and pay Mei Wah Beer Room a visit. Iva sums it up perfectly, "It has been an honor to start a tap room in the historic Mei Wah building in Isleton and bring a piece of the past to the present. We welcome folks to come sample the 24 rotating taps and snacks. Kids and dogs are welcome."







# LIGHTS. CAMERA. CHANGE.

Story by Stacia Olson    Photos from [www.lunafest.org/filmmakers](http://www.lunafest.org/filmmakers)

LUNAFEST® is back for its 5<sup>th</sup> year! Soroptimist International of Rio Vista hosts an entertaining and enlightening afternoon at the movies! This amazing traveling film festival arrives in Rio Vista April 25, 2020. LUNAFEST® is hosted in approximately 200 cities worldwide with a mission of raising funds for local women's causes. The 2020 LUNAFEST® showcases seven short inspirational films about women, by women, for women.

LUNAFEST® has been working for the last two decades at equalizing the film making industry, where women have been painfully

under-represented. From the beginning, makers of the LUNA bar knew women had a role to play in shaping the future of the film industry, so in 2000, the first all-women traveling film festival, LUNAFEST®, was born.

Since then, LUNAFEST® and Chicken & Egg Pictures have opened the doors of opportunity for more than 150 female filmmakers, putting them in the long-awaited and well-deserved spotlight. LUNAFEST® founder, Clif Bar owner and Co-CEO, Kit Crawford, insists they are “telling stories that have to be told.”

So far, LUNAFEST® festivals have raised over \$4.1 million and 100% has gone to charity supporting women!

The 2020 circuit boasts films that are as diverse as they come. Seven short films highlight the work of an array of talented female filmmakers with intelligent, funny and thought-provoking themes.

Visit <http://siriovista.org> and following the LUNAFEST® link to see detailed film descriptions and director bios.

LUNAFEST® is held April 25, 2020 at the Vista Club Ballroom at Trilogy at 1201 Clubhouse Drive, Rio Vista. Tickets are limited for this exclusive event and are not sold at the door. Tickets go on sale for \$40 December 1, 2019 at <http://siriovista.org>.

Doors open at 1:00 pm for a no host cocktail hour with the films showing at 2:00 pm. The standard movie-goer's diet of popcorn and candy is offered for all to enjoy. The intermission features a fashion show by Chico's of Brentwood as well as Soroptimist International of Rio Vista honoring various local women of distinction.

Soroptimist International is a global women's organization whose members work tirelessly to improve the lives of women and girls through access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment.

The club focused on providing access to education, which is one of the most effective ways to end social issues disproportionately affecting women and girls.

The proceeds from this event help fund local Soroptimist projects and scholarships. Soroptimist International of Rio Vista proudly partners with LUNA, the first nutrition bar for women. LUNA has always believed in the power of women.

Don't miss these amazing films, recognizing women and celebrating our community, while having a great time! Learn more about LUNAFEST® at [www.lunafest.org](http://www.lunafest.org). Look for more details closer to April 25, 2020 at <http://siriovista.org>, or visit Facebook at [www.facebook.com/Soroptimist-International-of-Rio-Vista](http://www.facebook.com/Soroptimist-International-of-Rio-Vista) or on Instagram at [https://www.instagram.com/si\\_riovista](https://www.instagram.com/si_riovista).

**“It's about giving women the opportunity to tell their stories and opening the door for filmmakers who might not otherwise be given the chance to show their art.”**



- Kit Crawford,  
Clif Bar Owner & Co-CEO





**How to Swim**

Award-winning filmmaker Noa Gusakov tells this story of a terrified mother-to-be in the last days of her pregnancy who kidnaps a maternal stranger for an afternoon of hijinks.



**Game**

Jeannie Donohoe, award-winning filmmaker, directs this film about new kid in town who shows up at the high school boys' basketball tryouts and instantly makes an impression. Will talent and drive be enough to make the team?



**Xmas Cake —This American Shelf-life**

Writer Petra Hanson and director May Yam tell this coming-of-middle-age story following a pop singer's journey from hot to not, and what ensues across cultures from New York to Tokyo.



**There You Are**

Lisa Donato, director, writer, and activist from Billings, Montana has directed six award-winning short films since 2014. Here, she tells the story of a trans woman who must dress like a man to say goodbye to her dying grandmother.



**Purl**

A lighthearted animated film by Kristen Lester, about a ball of yarn that gets a job at a fast-paced, high energy bro-tastic startup. Kristen Lester is known for her work at Pixar Animation Studios on the films "Finding Dory" and new upcoming film "Onward."



**Ballet After Dark**

Director B. Monet, known for her award-winning diverse film "Q.U.E.N", delves into the life of a young woman who finds strength after an attack by creating an organization to help survivors of sexual abuse and domestic violence through dance therapy.



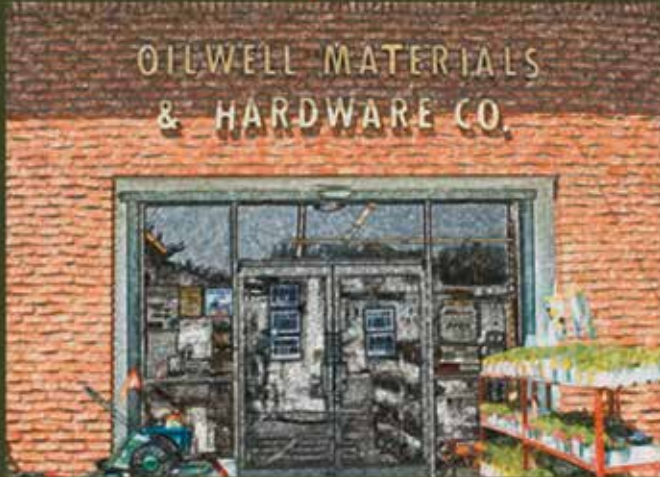
**Lady Parts**

Erin Rye and Jessica Sherif tell the story of a struggling actress that finally gets her big break, only to realize the glass ceiling can also be a camera lens.

**Please note: This event is for individuals 16 years of age and older due to mature subject matter.**



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# Peter Cook Story - Part 2

By Phil Pezzaglia Photos from the Rio Vista Museum

*This is the second part of the story about the former home of Peter Cook on the corner of Main and Fifth Streets. Part one of the story ran in our May - August 2019 issue.*

## Home Configuration, Modifications and Remodeling

Urban legend has it that several of the ornate modifications and remodeling on the home were due to a personal "competition" between Mr. Cook and another prominent

Rio Vista resident, John McCormack. John was remodeling his home on the corner of St. Gertrude Avenue and South Fourth Street.

Peter Cook's home had been enlarged to 8,326 sq. ft. It was a two-story brick home in the craftsman style sitting on a 6,969 sq. ft. lot. The main floor was 4,786 sq. ft., the second floor was 3,140 sq. ft. with a 400 sq. ft. attic and a small basement. The home was configured with five bedrooms, three bathrooms, sun room, "L" shaped dining room, living room (used as a grand ballroom), library, den, kitchen, pantry, breakfast room, and laundry room.

Mrs. Cook had purchased several oversized mirrors from prominent San Francisco hotels after the 1908 earthquake. One of the mirrors was secured to the landing wall of the grand staircase.

Located behind the home, at 30 South Fifth Street, is the companion brick two-story structure constructed to serve the Peter Cook family as a garage and upstairs chauffeur quarters. The building exterior was designed to match the Cook's home.

Once the remodel was completed, the fine stately home became the location of many black-tie dinners with noted members of prominent political circles, such as senators. The home was also opened to local school and church events, as well as meetings of the Rio Vista Literary Society.

## A Daring Robbery and Pearl S. Buck

The Cook home was the subject of a daring robbery. It occurred in the early hours of March 30, 1920, while Peter Cook, Sr., Peter Cook, Jr., Miss Barbara Shaw, a

guest, and Mrs. Flora Richards, the housekeeper, were all asleep. Mrs. Cook was in San Rafael at the time. After the residents awoke in the morning, they were shocked to find that the house had been ransacked. They summoned the Town Marshal, George Adcock. Upon arrival, Adcock and Mr. Cook performed a thorough search of the home. The preliminary investigation concluded that the systematic

actions of the criminals showed a well thought out plan, probably done by professionals. Mr. Cook estimated that the loss was in the thousands of dollars. After Mrs. Cook returned and looked through her personal possessions, she noticed that nearly all her jewelry was taken, including a highly prized cameo worth \$2000.



*Peter Cook Home, March 1929.*

On April 29, 1920, the housekeeper, Mrs. Richards, signed a confession stating that she was an unwilling participant in the robbery and that she had been coerced by two men, who threatened bodily harm to her or to her employers should she not assist them.

In a rather unusual turn of events, in late June Mrs. Flora Richards changed her plea from not guilty to guilty, appealing to the superior court for probation. This second confession had a few inconsistencies from her first one. Richards was arrested and charged for her involvement in the robbery.

Another urban legend regarding the Cook house is that during one of the Rio Vista Literary Societies book club meetings, Mrs. Cook had the author Pearl S. Buck as the featured speaker.



*Peter Cook, date unknown.*

## Peter Cook's Later Years

Peter Cook passed away on December 31, 1933, after a short illness. He was 74 at the time of his death. His wife Julia remained in the home for several years, eventually relocating to Marin County and passing away in 1942.

Peter Cook Jr. resided in the home until he sold the property to Henry Brown. However, another urban legend surrounds the transfer of ownership from Cook to Brown as occurring during a poker game. Henry and his wife Virginia moved into the home, and after Henry's passing, Virginia remained in the home until her passing in the 1990s. The home has only been on the market a few times. The current owner purchased the home in July 2000.



# The Ghost Wife Who

Story by Beth Ann Gallagher

On September 5, 1932, a butler discovered Hollywood director and producer Paul Bern sprawled naked in front of his bedroom closet, dead from a gunshot to the head. If he is remembered today, it is for the scandal surrounding his death, which threatened to end the career of his new bride, actress Jean Harlow. Less remembered is the role the Sacramento River Delta played in events that unfolded following his death.

Bern's common-law wife from New York City, Dorothy Millette, was a person of interest in his death. They had lived together for a decade until she developed schizophrenia. As his career took off, he moved away to Hollywood. For the next decade, he quietly supported her from afar, sending two checks a month totaling \$350 (about \$9,000 today).

As Millette's mental illness worsened, she began insisting she needed to move to San Francisco for her health, but Bern knew she really wanted to be nearer to him. She had become fixated on Bern putting her in pictures, and on his relationship with Harlow.

In May of 1932, Millette left New York and checked into San Francisco's Plaza Hotel. She signed the register as "Dorothy Millette" instead of her customary Mrs. Paul Bern. In July, Bern and Harlow wed. Millette's hotel room was strewn with movie magazines featuring the couple. She soon demanded a meeting with Bern.

On the Sunday evening before Labor Day, a neighbor saw a woman dressed in black getting out of a limousine at Paul Bern's Beverly Hills home, her face

covered by a veil. Later he overheard loud laughter, then shouting. A man and woman were fighting near Bern's outdoor pool. At almost 3:00 am a woman screamed. Shortly afterward, the limousine sped away. On Monday morning, Bern's body was found.



Actress Jean Harlow and Hollywood director and producer Paul Bern.

By Tuesday, September 6, Millette was seen in San Francisco buying shoes and asking for them to be re-heeled. She arranged for one of her trunks and a handbag to be stored at the hotel but didn't leave instructions for their handling. She checked out of the Plaza and took a taxi to Pier 3, where she bought a round trip ticket from San Francisco to Sacramento on the Delta King.

The Delta King was the perfect place to hide. The 285-foot riverboat took the Sacramento—San Joaquin River "Delta Route" nightly.

The 125-mile trip took ten and a half hours to complete. The vessel traveled across the San Francisco Bay through the San Pablo Bay and up the Sacramento River, attracting patrons with its bars, jazz bands, gambling, and fine dining. With the California State Fair in full swing, the ship was packed. Millette was one of many passengers, another face in the crowd.

The ship had three levels. The uppermost California Deck featured large stateroom suites, giving a hotel-like experience on the water. The middle level, the Observation Deck, had slightly smaller suites. The bottom Promenade Deck hosted the more budget-conscious staterooms. Millette lodged in stateroom #304 on the California Deck. She paid \$3.50 for her room (the equivalent of \$65.60 today).

**PREPARES FOR FUNERAL**  
HOLLYWOOD, Sept. 9 (UP).—As Jean Harlow, glamorous platinum blonde screen star, prepared today to attend the funeral of her husband, Paul Bern, the mystery of his suicide was overshadowed by the even deeper mystery of his past life—and of the woman, who were part of it. "I'll be seeing you, dear," the silvery-haired actress told her movie executive husband as she kissed him goodbye last Sunday night, less than 12 hours before his nude body was found before a mirror in his palatial home.

Article reporting Bern's suicide.



The Delta King around the 1930's.

# Vanished in the Delta

Photos by Beth Ann Gallagher and the Rio Vista Museum

While Millette was sailing, MGM was taking action to save Harlow's reputation at the expense of her late husband. Their disinformation campaign left Bern's former good-guy reputation in tatters. The man who had been dubbed "The Father Confessor of Hollywood," quick with advice or a handout for those down on their luck, was painted as a death-obsessed, impotent pervert. The former Hollywood lothario was alleged to be suicidal over his inability to consummate his marriage. An old, odd note left in a guest book became a suicide note under Louis B. Mayer's spin.

Meanwhile, Millette attracted the attention of Lorenzo O'Hare, a waiter on the Delta King. On a pleasure boat, someone ill, nervous, and solitary stands out. She took dinner at 8:30 pm in the dining room. She paid \$.75 (about \$14 in today's dollars) for a meal consisting of a fruit cocktail, spaghetti, and ice cream. She ate quickly and returned to #304. Her call for a porter was answered by Paul Cantor, who brought her bromide powder for a headache at 9:30 pm. He was the last crew member to see her alive.

The boat docked in Rio Vista at 2:00 am. A half hour later, a disembarking passenger looked up and noticed a woman on the Observation Deck. Walnut Grove lumberman Henry Karrick saw "a very beautiful woman" wearing a black dress with "pretty hair and pretty eyes, who seemed to be quite nervous." She walked "clear around the boat and didn't seem to notice anyone. She seemed to have her eyes off in the distance."

During his evening duties, steward John Lee checked the decks every hour. At 4:45 am he found a pair of shoes outside a room on the ship's stern—#304. The shoes were new and had been purchased from a San Francisco shop; their heels had been modified to have lifts. He spotted a black coat nearby. Someone had left it at the bottom of the stairwell leading to the lower deck. He didn't find any of this unusual. The Delta King was a pleasure craft serving alcohol during Prohibition.

When the ship docked at Sacramento on Wednesday morning, the crew alerted the River Line's general passenger agent about possibly losing a passenger overboard. The crew waited for the ship to empty. Then Captain W.J. Athog showed detectives the places the coat and shoes were found. They conjectured a jumper would have to go to a lower deck. The California Deck was inset by fifteen feet. The water was much more accessible on the lower deck with only one handrail to avoid.

At 9:30 am police inspected #304. The bed had not been slept in. Millette's clothes and personal effects were scattered about. Police searched her travel bag. They found expensive dresses from a high-end New York label that matched the stairwell coat, and an empty yellow bathing suit bag. Her purse contained \$38 (\$712 in today's money).

The Sacramento-based force searched for Millette as a potential suicide. They did not know she was a wanted woman in Los Angeles, where the Hollywood papers were writing about Bern's common law wife. His neighbor had continued talking about the mystery woman, and there was evidence of her visit: a wet yellow swimsuit, along with two glasses and a slice of chocolate cake. Bern hated chocolate. His brother Henry had confirmed Dorothy's existence to the press. Reporters conjectured Millette was Bern's mysterious visitor and possibly either a witness or a murderess.

By Thursday, the press tracked Millette to the Plaza, and were soon followed by the police. Both contingents learned she had checked out of the hotel and left for the Delta King. The hotel's manager, Ray Maxwell, would not allow access to

her checked belongings without a court order. While the police sought their order, reporters left for Sacramento to chase their lead.

Newspaper headlines called Millette "Mystery Girl," "Phantom Wife," and most poignantly "Ghost Wife." That last moniker captured both of her identities: as the left-behind, mentally ill wife whose existence had remained a secret to most, and as a woman passenger who had disappeared. On Friday, September 9, authorities attempted to make the ghost flesh again. They dragged and dredged the Sacramento River near Courtland, calculating the currents would

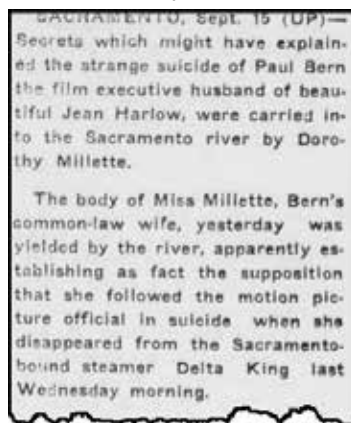
have deposited her body there. Bern's funeral was held the same day, his body guarded until taken away for cremation.

On Saturday, September 10, the police secured a search warrant for Millette's Plaza Hotel luggage. They had listed "foul play" as a factor. Bern biographer E.J. Fleming wrote, "Her large green wardrobe steamer trunk contained perfumes from Paris, expensive dresses and lingerie from Fifth Avenue shops like I. Magnin, a luxurious pair of beaded slippers, a dozen pairs of shoes with lifts in the heels and, curiously, a book on shorthand."

Her handbag yielded a bundle of letters from Bern's office. Of the three the police allowed the press to see, one asked



Dorothy Millette.



Article reporting Millette's death.





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# Sheep Dog Trial

*Hometown event returns after two years!*

Story by Robie Williams    Photos Kelsey Nicols & Susan Whitesell

Come check out our quaint town on Thursday, April 2nd, 2020 for the running of the sheep down Main Street to kick off the McCormack Ranch Sheepdog Trial 2020!

This event is the revitalization of historic events dating back to the 1930's. Drive through the Montezuma Hills to reach the event located at the McCormack Ranch. The Sheepdog Trial is Friday, April 3 through Sunday, April 5, 2020. The McCormack Ranch is located at 7680 Montezuma Hills Road west of Rio Vista.

The Sacramento River and Mount Diablo is the backdrop for the dogs and their handlers who come from across the United States converging in Rio Vista with the hope of winning a place in the United States Border Collie Handlers Association (USBCHA) Sheepdog Finals held in, Middletown, VA from October 6 through October 11, 2020.

The McCormack Ranch course is among the larger and more complex on the trialing circuit. This complexity resonates with handlers. Several nationally ranked handlers and dogs compete in this trial because of the course difficulty and challenge.

The McCormack Ranch course looks like the trial courses in Scotland, where the sport originated. This time of year, with lush green grass and huge rolling hills, the dogs really get to work. It's appealing to handlers to put that challenge before the dog and themselves to see if they can actually accomplish the task. Handlers all say the same thing, "There's a lot of terrain to cover."

And it's not only the size and complexity of the course that makes it challenging. It's the sheep, who often just don't want to cooperate. This is especially true of McCormack

sheep because they are not used for trialing other than at this event.

For judging purposes, the trial course is broken into sections, or phases and a time limit is imposed. Points are assigned to each phase based on the skills needed for competent stock work. Dog and handler teams begin with all possible points, and during each phase points are deducted for mistakes or forfeited for incomplete phases.

The event is open to the public Friday, April 3 through Sunday, April 5 from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Tickets go on sale January 1 at [http://](http://discoverriovista.com/events/sheep-dog-trials)

[discoverriovista.com/events/sheep-dog-trials](http://discoverriovista.com/events/sheep-dog-trials) and at the RioVision Gallery, 116 Main Street, Rio Vista. Tickets

are also available for purchase at the gate. The event takes place rain or shine so tickets are non-refundable. Bring your blanket or folding chairs and don't forget your binoculars!



The "sheep run" drew a huge crowd when the event debuted in 2017. Photo: Susan Whitesell.



Watching these talented dogs complete all the phases of a trial course is a thing of beauty. Photo: Kelsey Nicols.

This is an alcohol free event.

The only animals allowed at the dog trial are those dogs participating in the contest. No other dogs or pets are permitted to enter the gates, except for service dogs for disabled persons.

For information, please visit the RioVision web site at <http://discoverriovista.com/events/sheep-dog-trials> or follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/mccormackranchsheepdogtrial>.



# Ghost Wife Vanished in Delta

Continued from page 15

her not to come to Hollywood; another suggested which San Francisco hotels to stay at; and the third contained a check. Additionally, a writing pad displayed a baffling clue. Having been used as a blotter, a single word lay across it in reverse. When held up to a mirror, it read, "JUSTIFICATION."

Early Wednesday morning, the Sacramento River revealed Millette's fate. In the Georgiana Slough, about three miles south of Walnut Grove, a Japanese fisherman named Y. Ishino and his son were tending their lines. They spotted a body floating face down on the surface of the river against the rocks, half hidden by willows. They called the Sacramento police from Walnut Grove.

According to the Colusa Herald, "The body was dressed in a close-fitting dress of black, dark brown stockings rolled just below the knee and pink underwear bearing the label of I. Magnin and Company." The body was badly decomposed. Plaza Hotel clerk Edward Sullivan was asked to come and verify the corpse was indeed Millette. Her autopsy cited cause of death as "asphyxiation by drowning".



Dorothy Millette's grave. Photo: Beth Ann Gallagher.

She was slated to be buried in a pauper's grave, but MGM's and Harlow's attorney Mendel Silberberg paid for a ceremony and burial. On the morning of Saturday, September 17, five local women and a few reporters attended the funeral. A woman identifying herself only as "A Mother" sent the sole bouquet. Its gardenias and gladiolas were placed upon the white casket with silver handles. The presiding Reverend J.J. Evans simply stated, "No one living should judge the dead."

Harlow never parroted MGM's theories about her husband, and she never spoke publicly of what had transpired. When she learned the proceeds from an auction of Millette's belongings wasn't enough to pay for a grave marker, she called the funeral director and asked how much was needed. Coincidentally, the cost was \$350—the same amount Bern had been supplying each month for Millette's support. Harlow indicated how she would like the marker inscribed and to "Make it pretty." Today, one can visit the grave marked "DOROTHY MILLETTE BERN 1886-1932" at East Lawn Memorial Park in Sacramento. The fastest route from Rio Vista runs along the Sacramento River.

# EVENT CALENDAR

Wed, Jan 1, 8:30 am

## Frozen Bun Run

Rusty Porthole Restaurant and Marina  
3893 Willow Road, Bethel Island

See the article on page 5 for more info.



Sat, Jan 25, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

## Semi-Annual Children's Clothing Exchange

D.H. White School Tapella Auditorium, 500 Elm Way

Exchange your child's outgrown clothing for free usable garments at St. Brigid's Episcopal Church semi-annual Children's Clothing Exchange. For more info, please contact Karin Zilla at (925) 351-3771 or [zilla.kzilla@gmail.com](mailto:zilla.kzilla@gmail.com).

Sat, Jan 25, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm

## Isleton Asian New Year Celebration

Asian Historic District, Isleton

Celebrate Chinese and Japanese New Years with Lion Dancers, Taiko Drummers, Ukelettes, Asian food truck, origami demo, calligraphy, wine tasting, grand raffle prizes and more.



Sat, Feb 8, 5:00 pm

## Princess Ball

Veteran's Memorial Building, 610 St. Francis Way

Treat your little princess to an enchanting evening of dress up, dinner and dance. Limited tickets go on sale in January 2020 at Lira's.



Sat, Feb 29, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

## CARE Kitchen Royale

Veteran's Memorial Building  
610 St. Francis Way

See the article on page 5 for more info.



Sat, Apr 25, 1:00 pm

## LUNAFEST®

Vista Club Ball Room at Trilogy  
1201 Clubhouse Drive

See the article on page 10 for more info.

## 3rd Annual Easter Egg Hunt

City Park

The Rio Vista Leo Club, a high school community service organization sponsored by the Rio Vista Lion's Club, hosts an Easter egg hunt for children ages 2-13.





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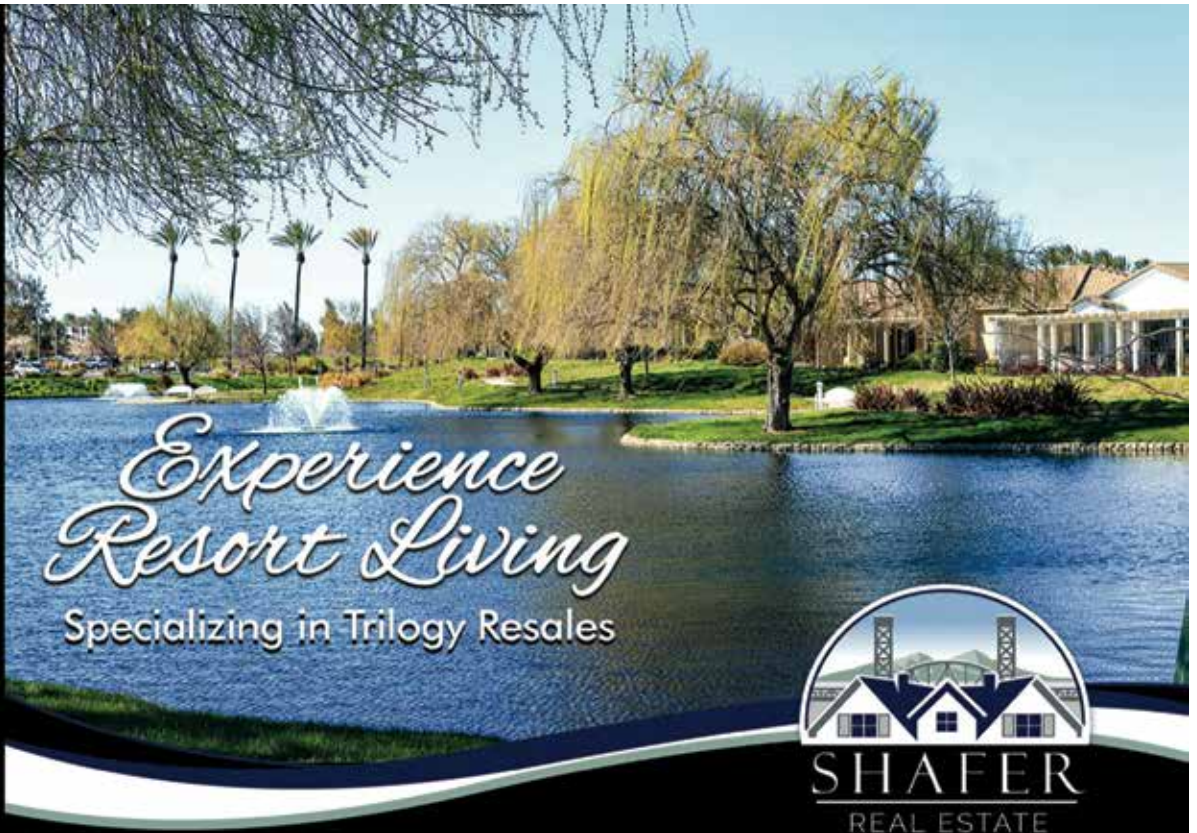
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