

Draining and Filling the
Laguna de Santa Rosa

by

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INTRODUCTION

It would be grossly inappropriate to use any of the information in this historical sketch of draining and filling of the Laguna to impugn any named participant or their descendants. While it is common today to bemoan the fact that the few remaining wildlife habitats of the Laguna are highly fragmented (the complex of open water, fresh water marshes, riparian forests, oak savannah and vernal pools), all uncultivated but potentially productive agricultural lands were considered worthless for many decades following the formation of the state. Overflowed lands (wetlands) especially were considered useless. Society generally assisted and rewarded the reclamation of wetlands for productive agriculture. Industrious farmers needed no incentive to drain or fill their mosquito infested wetlands. Not once in 70 years of *Sebastopol Times* articles on the Laguna were pesky mosquito problems mentioned, but old-timers confirm that there were often clouds of mosquitoes in the Laguna and tell stories of being invaded by the pests as they crossed the Laguna on Guerneville Road in old open touring cars – events that dwarf the current mosquito problem in the Laguna (but not the potential major public health consequences of the current situation).

While there were a undoubtedly a few exceptions, the local community did not become significantly aware of the importance of the Laguna to the remaining wildlife and began to promote and lobby for its preservation, restoration and enhancement until the early 1970s. Writing over 10 years ago, Gay LeBaron, the notable local historian, reviewed the possibilities of bringing back the old Laguna – but not the grizzlies (or other inappropriate former resident animals). She probably could have also called for “... and please, no mosquitoes.”

BALLARD LAKE

According to the U.S. government topographic map, the Laguna de Santa Rosa and Windsor Creek officially empty into Mark West Creek, and it's the latter creek that empties into the Russian River at Mirabel – not the Laguna. But since the lower reach of Mark West Creek has been moved southward about two miles from its historic location north of what is now River Road, and since the biological and physical characteristics of the lower Laguna are essentially the same as much of the rest of the Laguna, most people today would consider that the Laguna runs from Cotati/Rohnert Park to the Russian River at Mirabel. Mark West Creek, like Santa Rosa Creek and numerous other creeks, empties into the Laguna.

The history of the lower Laguna is intimately involved with over 100 years of operation of the Denner family ranch. The Denners literally made much of their ranch by filling in the “low spots” with the alluvial sediment for Mark West Creek. The first Russell Denner came to the area in the late 1800s and began to farm the property on the east side of the Laguna south of Oakwild Lane (now part of River Road). But only a small portion of ranch was farmable since most of the ranch was wetland swamp.

According to the 1887 map of the area, the original Denner ranch appears to have been on John A. Brown’s 187 acres.

The historic location of the confluence of Mark West Creek with the Laguna was about 0.6 miles north of what is now River Road. According to Stan Denner, born in 1920 – the first Russell Denner’s grandson, the San Francisco and North Pacific railroad diverted the lower reach of Mark West Creek southward to below the current Laguna bridge on River Road. The railroad’s actions were to prevent Laguna flood damage to the railroad’s property caused by the plug formed in the Laguna by the sediment inflows from Mark West Creek.

Pre-1900 maps of the Laguna show only a southern tributary branch of Mark West Creek, with the creek’s main branch still entering the Laguna at its historic location. The railroad’s creek diversion must have occurred either in the very late 1800s or in the early 1900s.

A soil survey map dated 1915, shows that the lower reach of Mark West Creek was now entirely diverted to the south of River Road. Most of the Denner ranch is designated as swamp in the old soils map.

Ballard Lake, a former deepening and widening of the lower Laguna between Guerneville and River roads formed by the sediment plug from Mark West Creek (a permanent body of water said to have been about 40 acres and up to 25 feet deep in places), was named after the Ballard family. Although less popular than Lake Jonive near Sebastopol, Ballard Lake was a well visited local destination place. For example, Santa Rosa’s *Press Democrat* reported in June 1889 that the Sunday school and members of the Congregational church had filled three large wagons for a pleasant day of picnicking on the Laguna at the Ballard place. The newspaper article noted that boating was a favorite pastime at the church’s picnic. The Ballards operated the resort, Laguna Farm, on the shore of the lake until about the 1920s. Henry Ballard’s resort is described in a 1903 booklet of the California Northwestern Railroad as being 1_ miles from the Mount Olivet station on the rail line from Fulton to Guerneville, and offered bass fishing, boating and bathing, plenty of shade and fruit, large airy rooms, a telephone and daily mail – at \$1.25 per day (or \$7.00 per week) for adults. The Ballard property of nearly 300 acres apparently became a major part of the current Denner ranch in the mid-1930s.

Aerial photographs taken in 1942 show Mark West Creek emptying into about the middle of Ballard Lake, over 3/4 of a mile south of River Road. According to Stan Denner, the unusually heavy sediment load of Mark West Creek, following the emergency building of the Santa Rosa Army Air Field at Fulton beginning in the early spring of 1942, filled in most of Ballard Lake (the former Army air field in now the county airport). The final demise of Ballard Lake was also about this time and the Denners, with the assistance of Frank Doyle of Santa Rosa, used dynamite and a backhoe to remove the Laguna sediment plug forming Ballard Lake. Outdated county Assessor's Parcel Maps confirm that the confluence of Mark West Creek and the Laguna was moved further south in at least two jumps of approximately 0.4 miles each, and the lower reach of the creek was moved east on the Denner ranch. The creek's current confluence with the Laguna is about 0.4 miles into the Denner ranch's neighbor to the south – the LaFanchi ranch, Rancho Laguna – about 0.6 miles north of Guerneville Road and about two miles south of its historic location. The creek is now apparently about as far south as the grade will permit and the creek is artificially kept in its present location by a small, private gravel mining operation in the creek. Ballard Lake is gone and all of the former wetlands adjacent to the Laguna north of Guerneville Road are now cultivatable and have been filled in with, according to Stan Denner, up to seven feet of alluvial sediment (but not gravel) from Mark West Creek.

LAKE SEBRING – LAKE JONIVE

Little is yet known of Lake Sebring. The lake most likely refers to an historic permanent body of water in the Laguna south of Santa Rosa Creek to about Sebastopol. The northern portion of the historic lake appears to have filled in with sediment from the upper Laguna by the early 1900s when the southern portion of the lake became locally known as Lake Jonive (see page 6 and note, page 7).

Numerous articles in the *Sebastopol Times* indicate that the Laguna was an important feature of the early town of Sebastopol. Articles in the late summer of 1895 report that a thief stole pantaloons on Main Street, but was caught by the town constable while making straight for the “hobo's jungle” on the Laguna. Another article describes successful coon hunting in the Laguna with Otis Allen's hound. Four capitalists were reported in March 1898 to have visited the “lagoon lake” below Gannon's hopyard while searching for a location for a summer resort. A month later in April 1889, one of the suggestions to guard the town from a potential invasion by the Spanish was to station gunboats with “torpedo destroyers” at exposed points along the

Laguna. Many other stories in the late 1800s and early 1900s report on deaths by drowning in the Laguna, call for the cessation of fishing for bass in the Laguna with “giant powder,” report on a visitor fancifully describing the “crystal laughing waters” at the feet of the town, and describe a story about fishermen meeting the “Laguna terror” – “ a sea-faring monster,” while fishing for cat fish near the Scammon place.

Gannon’s farm is now the dairy ranch immediately north of Sebastopol’s Youth Park and the city’s Laguna Wetlands Preserve on Morris Street. Scammon’s place was immediately north of Gannon’s hop yard. Carp appear to have been accidentally introduced into the Laguna in the late 1870s or in the 1880s following storm damage to carp rearing ponds near Forestville. Bass, another non-native fish, were placed in the Laguna in the late 1890s in an unsuccessful attempt to get rid of the carp. Both carp and bass are common in the Laguna today.

As well as attesting to the Laguna as being an important feature of the early Sebastopol, the old newspaper articles also provide many clues to the nature of the Laguna at the time.

About six months after the town incorporated in the spring of 1902, the *Sebastopol Times* published major promotional articles on Analy Township and on the new Town of Sebastopol. The first article, entitled “The Best Part of the County,” described for the first time “the Laguna or Lake Jonive – a beautiful body of water a mile long, 150 feet wide, and from 20 to 30 feet deep, bounded by oaks, willows, etc., is situated within a mile from town and is a favorite place for bathing, boating and fishing.” The companion article in the same addition of the newspaper was entitled “Metropolis of the Thrifty Gold Ridge – Sebastopol Making Vigorous Growth” repeats the previous description of Lake Jonive, and added that vast hop fields extended along both sides of the lake, that fishing in the lake was good and that “from the clear waters of this body have been caught salmon-trout that filled the sportsman’s heart with joy.”

Sebastopol’s population at the time was fewer than 1,000 people – triple the 1897 population. Photographs of boating on the Lake Jonive in the early 1900s show that eucalypts were also prominent trees along sections of the lake banks. Most of the boats on Lake Jonive would have been apparently rented at the Joe Moran ranch (the property on the west side of the Laguna immediately south of what is now Occidental Road). The report of catching “salmon-trout” in Lake Jonive indicates that anadromous fish (salmon and steelhead) were transiting the lake on their way to spawning grounds in tributaries of the upper Laguna.

Unfortunately, the newspaper articles, like the available old maps of the Laguna area, provide only a general description of the size and extent of the Laguna as a body of water. For example, the Laguna back of Gannon’s hopyard – apparently the southern portion of Lake Jonive – is only about mile from Main Street, not the mile from town described in the article. While indeed it’s a little over one mile from the southern end of the “big lake” north to what is now Occidental Road (formerly Molino Road ?), the use of “a mile” in the newspaper articles appears to be only a general description of distance and is not an accurate unit of measurement.

Six maps of the Laguna area dating from 1867 to 1908, tend to show a very generalized Laguna –

a wide Laguna north of Guerneville Road, and a very big widening south of Santa Rosa Creek. None of these maps show the permanent water bodies of Ballard Lake, Lake Sebring, or Lake Jonive, and give no indication of time of year the maps represent. A seventh map, a soils map prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1915, appears to provide the most accurate description of the Laguna at the time, but this map also does not clearly indicate the time of year depicted. The soils map shows a relatively small body of open water surrounded by swamp in the position of Ballard Lake and a much larger body of water in the southern portion of Lake Jonive. The map uses the swamp symbol for much of the land on the east bank of the Laguna by Sebastopol and an extensive swamp area for the Laguna north and south of Occidental Road. It would appear that most of historic Lake Sebring and the north end of Lake Jonive had become filled in with sediment and designated as swamp by 1915.

The “swamp” designation in the 1915 map probably indicates only saturated soils, not necessarily trees in standing water as the term is commonly used today.

Sebastopol Times articles provide more clues to the apparent dynamic history of Lake Sebring and Lake Jonive. The Moran family ranch was sold in August 1920 and the new owner declared his intention to plant grapes, but the newspaper article reporting the sale made no mention of a former boat rental business on the property. The Laguna drainage project proposed in March 1924 included the possibility of developing an artificial lake for recreational purposes where an old lake once existed, about two miles north of Sebastopol. L.(Louis) C. Cnopius and E.(Ernst) L. Finley reported completing a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile ditch between their two properties adjacent to the Laguna in the fall of 1929, and their ditch was said to have lowered Lake Jonive 18 inches. The caption of a circa 1908 photograph of boating on Lake Jonive, published in the *Sebastopol Times* in March 1955, comments that newer citizens of Sebastopol might not believe that Lake Jonive once existed by the Joe Moran ranch. Chester Moran is quoted about what happened to the lake – “when [Sebastopol] put in the sewer plant it encouraged weeds to grow and silt filled it in.”

Chester’s memory of the size of the former lake exaggerates by three times the lake’s width and depth reported in 1903. Development of the resorts on the lower Russian River and improvements in transportation probably also contributed to the decline in popularity of the Lake Jonive as an important local recreational site for Sebastopol. From mid-July to the fall, cannery wastewater would also have been a major source of nutrification of the Laguna at the time.

These apparent discrepant tidbits of historical information cannot be readily explained. An unlikely possibility is that the widely photographed Lake Jonive of the early 1900s essentially disappeared about 1910 and reappeared again in the late 1920s. Another possibility is that the Laguna plug formed by the sediment inflows from Santa Rosa Creek broke and most of Lake Sebring disappeared. A more plausible scenario is that most of historic Lake Sebring had become filled in with sediment from the upper Laguna by the time the lake by Sebastopol became known as Lake Jonive in the early 1900s. The northern portion of Lake Jonive (the southern portion of

Lake Sebring) was probably relatively shallow and also filled in with sediment by 1915 – giving credence to references to an historic Laguna lake. Reference made in the late 1920s to Lake Jonive simply identifies the remnant southern portion of the lake, much of which exists today. Evidence to support the more plausible explanation is indicated by the braided Laguna channel-brush area north of Occidental Road. and by the ditch seen in the 1942 aerial photographs of the Laguna immediately above and below Occidental Road – probably the ditch reported in 1929 which lowered Lake Jonive 18 inches.

Save to note that in 1909 the rainfall recorded in the region was about 67 inches or about twice the yearly average, resolution of the Lake Sebring/Lake Jonive situation is a complex sedimentation and hydrological problem – well beyond the scope of this historical investigation.

Unfortunately, there are only scattered and incomplete issues, and many years of totally missing issues in the microfilm files of the *Sebastopol Times* for the period of interest in solving the Lake Sebring/Lake Jonive situation.

LAKE AT CUNNINGHAM

The 1980 USGS Sebastopol quadrangle map shows a relatively small lake in the Laguna east of Cunningham, however, this permanent body of water does not clearly show on any of the historical maps consulted. Blucher Creek could be a possible source of a sediment plug in the Laguna forming an upstream lake by Cunningham. The *Sebastopol Times* routinely included a section of Cunningham news, but no specific reference was located to indicate that there could have been a Laguna lake near Cunningham. For example, a mid-August 1901 tragedy involved the drowning of a 12-year-old boy in the Laguna south of Sebastopol. The boy's family was camping at the Hughes place to pick berries on S. D. Thrift's farm. The boy and six other lads went bathing in the Laguna and found an old boat, which capsized and resulted in the drowning. According to the 1897 map, the Hughes farm was northwest of what is now the corner of Highway 116 and Llano Road and Thrift's berry farm was near the Hughes place. While intriguing to note that there was adequate water in this section of the upper Laguna in mid-August to permit bathing and boating at the time, a suspicion of a possible lake, unfortunately the old newspaper article did not state exactly where in the Laguna the tragic accident occurred. The only specific reference located to the Laguna at Cunningham was a report at the end of March 1936 that a six and 3/4 pound fish had been giggered in small pond near Cunningham's business center. Apparently the fish had been stranded in a pond when the flooded Laguna receded.

DRAINING THE LAGUNA

Parties interested in devising ways and means to drain the Laguna met in Ridgway Hall in Santa Rosa at the end of December 1877. Participants at the meeting determined to form a company, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Reclamation Company, to render arable “several thousand acres of the richest land in the county.” The corporate body was to continue for a period of twenty years. Messrs. John Baillif, L. Meyers, H. Clark, A. Gomble and J. H. Haun were elected directors of the new company and were instructed to file the necessary papers with the Secretary of State.

The Laguna reclamation company does not appear to have accomplished anything since in mid-August 1879 another meeting of residents near the Laguna was called to take steps toward having an outlet for the surplus Laguna water since the obstructions were said to be increasing each season. Press Davis was reported a month later to have surveyed the ground and pronounced feasible the plan to reclaim 600 acres of rich bottom land by draining the Laguna four miles above the railroad bridge and discharging the surplus water into “Lake Sebring” (that is, draining the Laguna between what is now River Road south to about Sebastopol). The long talked about project could begin this fall.

The exact location of Lake Sebring is as yet unknown. The lake appears to refer to a permanent body of water in the Laguna formed by a sediment plug from Santa Rosa Creek. T. Sebring was an early settler in the Sebastopol area and owned in 1867, a relatively large tract of land northwest of Sebastopol on the road to Green Valley, east of Ragles property. It appears most likely that the southern portion of the historic Lake Sebring would become locally known as Lake Jonive in the early 1900s.

In November of the same year (1879) seventeen property owners along the Laguna petitioned the county supervisors to form a Laguna drainage district for 561 _ acres of overflowed land unfit for agricultural purpose and drained by one project as per the requirements of a state Act approved April 1, 1872 (J. H. Archer, 70 acres; John Molloy, 32 acres; John Bailiff, 108 acres; – Ward, 40 acres; J. Howland, 5 1/4 acres; A. J. Peterson, 40 acres; A. Peterson, 46 acres; Otis Allen, 30 acres; J. Morrison, 13 acres; G. N. Sanborn, 36 _ acres; S. Talmadge, 20 _ acres; L. Meyer, 32 acres; A. Gamble, 22 acres; J. C. Scudder, 4 acres; D. Giovanini, 30 acres; C. Cejeiri, 7 acres; and H. Clark, 31 acres). John Bailiff, H. Clark and A. Peterson were proposed to be the initial trustees of the drainage district. The supervisors moved to approve the motion of Supervisor Crane and formed of a Laguna Drainage District. The trustees of the new drainage district reported to the county supervisors the next day that the cost of repairs and other expenses amounted to \$1,500. Again on motion of Mr. Crane, the supervisors appointed F. G. Hahman, J.

P. Clark and Preston Davis to assess the amount proportionately upon the lands in the district.

The individual acreages add up to 567 1/4 acres and not 561 _ as totaled in the petition. Note that all of the directors of the Laguna reclamation company signed the petition to form a Laguna drainage district. Also note that the spellings of Bailiff, Meyer and Gamble are different than the spellings in a 1877 *Sonoma Democrat* article.

Over a decade later in early February 1889, Samuel Jewell and unnamed others presented the county supervisors with another petition to form a Laguna drainage district. For the second time and again on motion of Supervisor Crane, the supervisors granted the petition to form a Laguna Drainage District and appointed S. K. Jewell, I. R. Jewell and John Murphy as trustees of the district for the first three months.

At the time the county supervisors approved the formation of the second Laguna Drainage District, the supervisors also received, but did not approve, a petition to form a drainage district in the southern portion of Sonoma County and in the northern portion of Marin County.

While the 19th century proposals to drain the Laguna north (downstream) of Sebastopol did not materialize, the old Santa Rosa newspaper articles are too fragmentary and incomplete to understand the exact nature of the early Laguna drainage proposals or to clearly understand the overall process – especially why a drainage project was not implemented in the late 1800s. According to a long article in the *Sebastopol Times* in May 1915, proposals to drain the Laguna had been taken up again and again over some 40 years of occasional agitation. The article noted that “a few progressive farmers” had completed surveys, had acquired the signatures of the majority of land owners within the proposed drainage district, and had gained the approval of the county supervisors. But state law at the time permitted one man to be a holdout and stop the implementation of the 19th century Laguna drainage proposals.

It is possible, for example, that the 1879 proposal to put the surplus Laguna water into Lake Sebring involved pumping. About six months before the county supervisors approved forming the first Laguna drainage district, William Bihler published a proposal in the *Sonoma Democrat* to reclaim considerable acreage of overflowed salt marsh lands adjacent to San Francisco Bay, east of Petaluma Creek. Reclamation projects to increase the total acreage of agricultural lands was an early California priority.

Santa Rosa’s council created a new position and appointed a Preston R. Davis as the city’s first City Engineer in September 1885. City Engineer Davis was appointed shortly after Santa Rosa began to sewer the city and he held the position until May 1890. P. R. Davis was also the county surveyor in 1890.

In the spring of 1915 a group of prominent Sebastopol citizens formed an organization to bring to reality the preliminary Laguna surveys and drainage plans of J. E. Williams, a Santa Rosa engineer (A. B. Swain, chairman; Hugh C. Ingle, vice-chairman; Frank P. Doyle, treasurer; William Evans, secretary; and L. C. Cnopius, auditor). Engineer Williams estimated that the proposed Laguna drainage project would cost about \$29 for each acre reclaimed – a small fraction of the increase in value of the land reclaimed. Chairman Swain explained to a representative of Santa Rosa’s *Press*

Democrat that similar projects in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys had led to numerous prosperous towns and districts, but that it was entirely up to the Laguna property owners involved to invest a few dollars today in order to gain many more dollars tomorrow. Like the 19th century proposed drainage project(s), this attempt to organize a district and drain the Laguna did not materialize. It was not until after the end of the economic depression that followed the Great War that another attempt to drain the Laguna was proposed.

“RECLAMATION OF LAGUNA SWAMP IS PLANNED” was the title of article in the *Petaluma Daily Courier* in early 1924. The article stated that several thousand acres of practically valueless land along the Laguna was going to be surveyed by Professor W. W. Weir, a noted drainage engineer with UC Berkeley’s extension services. The survey would determine the feasibility and estimated cost of a plan to drain the Laguna. It was reported that considerably rich soil could be reclaimed from overflowed lands to produce “banner crops.” Follow-up articles in the *Sebastopol Times* indicated that Farm Advisor Henry Weinland would assist Professor Weir. Preliminary surveys confirmed that the proposed Laguna drainage project was feasible. A new 1923 state law made forming a drainage district direct and relatively simple in California. The next step was to define the boundaries of the proposed district and to gain local support for the project. The Sebastopol Chamber of Commerce held a meeting to discuss the proposed project, which now included forming an artificial recreational lake in the Laguna to replace a former lake within two miles of Sebastopol. The Sebastopol chamber formed a committee in March 1924 to promote, advance and fund the proposed drainage project (Chairman L. C. Cnopius, George Foreschler, Mrs. M. Fuller, Frank P. Doyle, and L. A. Frei).

One of the benefits claimed for the 1924 Laguna drainage proposal was to remove the barrier between the Sebastopol ridge and the Santa Rosa Valley, making possible more intensive development of the entire section. About this time the Laguna would have become locally famous for quite another reason. The January 3, 1924 addition of *Petaluma’s Argus Courier* carried an article titled “BOOZE RAID ON LAGOON” which reported that Deputy Sheriffs Dickson, Robinson and Wells had made the most sensational booze discovery in the history of the county in their raid of Joe Garayalde’s place on Guerneville Road on the “lagoon.” The deputies were reported to have seized hundreds of gallons of wine, “jackass brandy,” sugar, stills and other alcohol manufacturing equipment.

Survey work in the Laguna was completed by the end of August 1924, and it was estimated that the proposed drainage project would cost about \$12,000 and would reclaim 650 acres of normally submerged land. The more rapid drainage would allow about an equal acreage of adjacent land to be cultivated in the spring. Except for the lower portion of Ballard Lake, the fall of 11 feet in the 6.5 miles between the Sebastopol Road and the Trenton Road bridges was considered adequate for the project. Most of the necessary channel work would be in the lower Laguna. But progress was slow in forming a drainage district. Apparently it was difficult to make the boundaries of the proposed district sufficiently large enough to pay for the project and to convince numerous landowners that they would benefit from improved Laguna drainage. Nearly three years later in

1927, the Sebastopol chamber reformed its Laguna drainage committee and specifically instructed the reformed committee to make the boundaries of the proposed drainage district large enough to meet all of the drainage needs in the Laguna (L. C. Cnopius, Henry C. Noonan, L. A. Frei, O. F. Leppo, and E. L. Finley).

Louis Cnopius' wife, Birdie, had inherited from her father, John A. Brown, considerable land in the Laguna. On the southern one third of one of the inherited parcels, a 300-acre parcel on the east side of the Laguna north of what is now Highway 12, Cnopius had built an airplane landing field in the summer of 1925 – the first nationally recognized airport in Sonoma County.

In July 1927 Professor Weir told those attending a meeting at the Santa Rosa Farm Center that all of the central county should join hands to solve the Laguna drainage problems since drainage of the entire area depended on the Laguna. Professor Weir contended that all of the drainage problems in the central county should be handled in one large project and stated that in order to comply with state law, assessments should be based on the actual benefits received. At the same meeting at the farm center, L. C. Cnopius reported on his experiments and observations he had made in drainage improvements on his land in the Laguna.

In September 1927 L. C. Cnopius reported to the Sebastopol chamber that property owners along part of the Laguna had excavated a ditch in the previous year and had demonstrated that hundreds of acres of surrounding land drained much more quickly than usual, but that lack of funds had prevented them from making permanent drainage improvements. E. L. Finley explained to the chamber that the county supervisors had been requested to permit the drainage improvement work to proceed as a emergency measure early next year, or to at least make available idle county equipment for drainage improvements in the Laguna. .

At the end of June 1929 a famous landscape architect from Oakland, Howard Gilkey, gave a talk at a luncheon meeting of the Sebastopol chamber entitled “Making Our City Better.” As well as making many suggestions to beautify Sebastopol, Gilkey pointed out that the Laguna east of town was a valuable potential park site which could augment the already overcrowded resort section of the Russian River. All that was necessary to produce a valuable asset for Sebastopol was to dredge the stream (the Laguna) for several miles for boating and other recreation, and to clean-up and beautify the stream banks.

In November of the same year, an article in the *Sebastopol Times* reported on the success of a private drainage project in the Laguna – an example of what a complete drainage system could mean to ranches along the Laguna. L. C. Cnopius of Sebastopol and E. L. Finley of Santa Rosa had blasted a one-half mile ditch between their properties, lowered Lake Jonive 18 inches, and had made available for agriculture a number of acres of valuable land. The article noted that the private project had aroused interest in a movement to ditch the now obstructed entire Laguna

area.

The 1929 Cnopius and Finley ditch is probably the ditch showing in the 1942 aerial photographs running south of Occidental Road to the remnant of Lake Jonive and for some distance north of Occidental Road, disappearing into a braided stream and brush area about ½ mile north of the Laguna bridge. On the east side of the Laguna, Cnopius owned the land to the south of Occidental Road and his wife's daughter, Emma Baker, owned at the time what is now the City of Santa Rosa's Stone Farm immediately north and east of the Occidental Road bridge. The holdings of the Finley Ranch and Land Company at the time downstream of Occidental Road have not yet been identified, although in 1965 the company granted the county water district much of right-of-way for the district's Laguna pilot channel between Occidental Road and Guerneville Road, OR 2253.

At a luncheon meeting of the Sebastopol chamber in July 1933, L. C. Cnopius stressed the importance of a county drainage project as an important development measure and as a partial solution to the county's unemployment problem. Ernest Finley stressed the need for a county-wide drainage program – a need supported by many others at the meeting. H. M. Weeks and Archie O'Leary were appointed to work with the Sebastopol chamber's old Laguna drainage committee to determine if the National Public Construction program recently approved by Congress, would fund a county-wide drainage improvement program.

About a year later the county supervisors accepted the Sebastopol chamber's recommendation to make the Laguna drainage proposal a county SERA project (State Emergency Relief Administration). Also at this time the Sebastopol chamber appointed E. L. Finley to update the existing Laguna drainage project information. Proponents of Laguna drainage stressed to the county supervisors that their project affected a very large area of the Santa Rosa Valley and that private landowners in the Laguna had already spent large sums in recent years to ditch and clear a better Laguna channel, but needed relief of some of the necessary heavy expense to make further improvements. At the time the Laguna drainage project was estimated to be \$30,000 – an increase of \$18,000 in 10 years. The Santa Rosa and the county associated chambers supported the Sebastopol chamber's Laguna drainage project. Improved drainage of the entire Santa Rosa Valley was estimated at the time to cost about \$70,000 and the county supervisors were also urged to approve a large county-wide SERA project to employ a large number of men. But about a week before Christmas 1934 the supervisors approved only the Laguna drainage project under SERA and appointed L. C. Cnopius and Anthony Azavedo to succeed Henry D. Noonan and O. F. Leppo on the board of directors of the proposed Laguna drainage district – a necessary initial step for securing assistance under SERA. The supervisors also reappointed Louis A. Frei to the Laguna drainage board.

Major flooding of the Russian River and the Laguna occurred in early December 1937. In the following late August Congress authorized a preliminary examination of the flood control problems of the entire watershed of the Russian River. Major flooding of the Russian River and the Laguna occurred again in late April 1940. About a year later voters overwhelmingly approved

the formation of the Gold Ridge Soil Conservation District (roughly the area from the Laguna to the coast north of the Estero and south of the Russian River). A polio epidemic broke out in California in the summer of 1943. The incidence in the county, centered around Santa Rosa, was considered to be more severe than elsewhere in the state. County health authorities declared that the “Laguna creek” at Sebastopol was unsafe for swimming. The numerous recommendations made by a sanitary engineering consultant to the county’s health department in February 1944, included a recommendation to expand the Gold Ridge Soil Conservation District to include properties on the east side of the Laguna, and a recommendation to channelize and improve drainage of the Laguna in order to more rapidly drain sewage polluted storm water from farms along the Laguna.

Sebastopol’s sewage treatment plant was next to the Laguna at the time and discharged year-round into the Laguna. However, the plant became non-functional during major Laguna flood events and Sebastopol’s raw sewage was discharged directly into the flooded Laguna. Sebastopol’s garbage dump was next to its treatment plant and until 1966, the city’s garbage also dissipated along the Laguna in any significant flood.

About four months after the sanitary consultant’s critical report to the county was released, the directors of the Gold Ridge district accepted a petition of landowners of the east side of the Laguna to join the district (Denner, Fraser, Matteri, Whitlach, and unidentified others) – the soil district’s first annexation. The State Soil Conservation Commission had already granted a petition from the Gold Ridge district for an improved Laguna drainage project. About six months after World War II ended the local soil district had completed preliminary plans for a Laguna channel project designed to drain 1,000 acres of normally flooded land in three days and by the first of May. At the behest of the soil district, twenty two landowners along the Laguna met in early February 1946 to discuss the proposed Laguna drainage project. John C. Peryam, the engineer for the conservation district, described the details of the proposed project, explained how much could be cheaply built with blasting powder, and stressed the need for a long-term maintenance program that would be required to keep the Laguna channel functioning properly. Farm Advisor Henry Weinland pointed out the necessity to form an organization to undertake the project and suggested that many of the landowners in the recently formed Central Sonoma Soil Conservation District could quite possibly support and cooperate with the proposed Laguna project. Harry Sheldon, a Gold Ridge soil district conservationist, outlined the ways in which landowners could organize. Given the interest at the meeting, President Ezra Briggs of the Gold Ridge board appointed a special committee to determine the best type of organization required to implement the proposed Laguna drainage project and also to determine the extent of the area that would benefit (Carson Whitlach, James Baxman and C. C. Van Vlake).

Russell Denner was a board member of the soil district at this time and his younger brother, Stan, attended the meeting in which the district’s Laguna drainage plans were announced. Russell and Stan Denner are the 3rd generation of Denners to farm their family ranch in the north Laguna. Russell Jr., who represents the 4th generation of Denners in the Laguna, also attended the meeting of the soil district.

Unlike numerous previous attempts to organize and implement a Laguna drainage project, the post-WW II proposal proceeded quite rapidly. By the end of July 1946, Carson Whitlach and Ezra Briggs described the proposed project and presented a petition to the county supervisors of 18 property owners along the Laguna who supported the drainage project. Within weeks the county supervisors adopted a master drainage plan for the Laguna downstream of Cotati, adopted a resolution of intention to form a Laguna storm water district, and scheduled a public hearing on the formation of such a surface water district. (The county master drainage plan for the Laguna was based on the surveys and recommendations of a bay city engineer, Donald R. Warren.) The scheduled public hearing was delayed several weeks while the legal description of the proposed boundaries of the district was corrected and recirculated. The fulfillment of many years of interest occurred at the end of October 1946 when the county supervisors, sitting in the Court House at Santa Rosa, accepted formation of the Laguna Storm Water District and scheduled an election for the trustees of the new district. The county board's decision, however, was not unanimous. One of the supervisors, James F. Lyttle of Sonoma, agreed with several protesting property owners in the lower Laguna near the Russian River that the new water district would not benefit them, and voted against the motion to form the district. (The drainage district boundaries included all of the lands in a greater Laguna area north of Sebastopol, but project costs were to be prorated according to the benefits received, after detailed surveys of the district area were completed.)

Alvin Frati, Carson Whitlach, and Russell Denner won a write-in election in late November 1946 to become the first trustees of the Laguna Storm Water District. (There were 12 write-in candidates. One, Emma Baker, the owner at the time of what is now Santa Rosa's Stone Farm, came in fifth but was declared ineligible since she resided outside of the district.)

The Laguna Storm Water District was controversial from its beginning. Four months after the first board was elected, the board received a petition from a majority of property owners in the district to dissolve the district. While the directors of the new district and the officials of the Gold Ridge Soil Conservation District unanimously opposed dissolving the Laguna drainage district, the new directors were forced to call a special election on the proposal to dissolve the district.

The arguments for a "no" vote not to dissolve the district were signed by four directors and the secretary of the Gold Ridge conservation district (W. K. Heathorne, E. W. Schock, E. Briggs, Charles C. Goodale, and D. H. Fouts). They were: (1) the Laguna had drainage problems that were beyond the capabilities of individual landowners to solve; (2) the proposed project would reclaim many acres of swamp, allowing profitable use for agriculture through more rapid drainage and early spring cultivation; (3) project costs would be more than offset by the predicted increase

in land values; (4) the drainage district would be eligible for outside funding through county, state and federal grants; (5) project costs were to be only charged to landowners within the district according to the benefits received; (6) the proposed project would improve the poor sanitary conditions of the Laguna as recommended by the county's sanitary consultant in 1944 by more rapidly draining sewage polluted flood water; and (7) the proposed project would benefit wildlife by having fewer fish floating "bottoms up" in the Laguna during the late summer.

Opponents urging a "yes" vote to dissolve the district argued; (1) that the proposed project would do more damage than benefit to their properties since only a small number of properties adjacent to the Laguna would benefit from more rapid drainage and early spring cultivation, but a much larger area of adjacent and more upland properties would lose their present subirrigation and would actually be harmed by the proposed channel project; (2) the project could make the district vulnerable for damages for polluting one of the most popular resort beaches on the Russian River; and (3) the opponents were not convinced of the claimed sanitary benefits of the project because the flood area of the Laguna was mostly farms and there was very little human exposure to sewage polluted flood water.

While only property owners had previously been involved in the Laguna drainage district, county District Attorney Charles J. McGoldrick ruled that all registered voters in the district were entitled to vote in the special election toward dissolution of the district. 87 registered voters within the district boundaries voted in an election in late April 1947. The election results were: 49 "no" and 38 "yes" – an 11 vote majority not to dissolve the district (27:27 at the Frei ranch and 22:11 at the Luers ranch). But the vote of registered voters did not end the controversy.

A news article reporting on the results of an early June 1948 election for the directors of the Laguna Storm Water District noted that the district "has had a stormy life during its tenure." Incumbent director Russell L. Denner and two candidates running on the same ticket won (Millie S. Kobler and Lloyd L. Rickman) – the later two candidates beat the two other incumbent directors (Alvin Frati and Carson Whitlach) by a nearly two to one margin. Mrs. Eleanor Luers also lost by a considerable margin. The proposal to drain "the water soaked lands" in the Laguna took another step forward, but the controversy was not yet over.

In April 1949 the Santa Rosa and the Sebastopol Chambers of Commerce both went on record in their opposition to a new bill introduced by the local state senator (F. Pressly Abshire) which provided for the dissolution of storm water districts. Senator Abshire responded to the chambers that while he had no interest in dissolving the Laguna district, current state law provided only for incorporating a storm water district and did not provide any means to disincorporate such districts once they were formed. (Senator Abshire's bill would require a 2/3 voting majority of

the landowners within a district to dissolve a district). F. L. Manker, the attorney for the Laguna Storm Water District had already reviewed the proposed state bill and had submitted his comments to the state Senate Committee on Water Resources. Interested parties in San Benito county had also submitted recommended amendments to the state senate committee. Four months later the county supervisors took under advisement a petition of a majority of landowners within the Laguna Storm Water District to withdraw from the district. The supervisors were again confronted with the battle between the supporters and the opponents of the Laguna drainage district.

The state Assembly Interim Committee on Conservation, Planning and Public Works held a public hearing in the Santa Rosa Court House in early August 1950 on drainage districts in general and specifically on the pros and cons of the Laguna Storm Water District. About a year later the directors of the Laguna district acknowledged the new state law providing for dissolving the district if a 2/3 majority of landowners within the district opposed to the district. The acting meeting chairman, Lawrence Meredith, urged the group to quickly spend the districts remaining funds (\$7,000) on as many projects as necessary so that the district's unspent funds would not revert to the county treasury if the district was abolished. But apparently the Laguna drainage district survived and the subsequent absence of news articles in the *Sebastopol Times* about the district suggests that the controversy surrounding the district also quickly waned. A November 1954 article in the Sebastopol newspaper covering the agenda for an upcoming meeting of the Gold Ridge Soil Conservation District, included the district responding to a requests from the Santa Rosa Soil Conservation District to co-sponsor an application for a flood control program for the area drained by Windsor, Mark West and Santa Rosa creeks, and a request from the Laguna Storm Water District for advise on where to put the Laguna channel, which was currently being dredged.

Major flooding from a very heavy rainstorm occurred throughout the region in December 1955. Flood damage in the Russian River, in the Laguna and in Santa Rosa was extensive. The Santa Rosa City Council passed a resolution in mid-December 1957 to sponsor the Laguna Storm Water District's application for federal assistance under the Water Protection and Flood Prevention Act administered by the Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture (now the Natural Resource Conservation Service, NRCS). (Since no further mention of federal assistance for the Laguna flooding was located, the Laguna drainage district's grant request appears not to have been awarded.)

The Sonoma County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (now the county water agency, SCWA) prepared a reconnaissance study for a Laguna pilot channel project between the Trenton Road and the Sebastopol Road bridges in 1960. The study recognized that while the

Laguna Storm Water District had been building a Laguna channel for a number of years, the relatively small district could not complete the entire channel quickly enough and debris and siltation filled in a completed section of the channel prior to the completion of another section of the channel. The county water district at the time was heavily involved in implementation of the Central Sonoma Watershed Project, which combined local (Zone 1A, Laguna-Mark West Creek), state and federal funds to alleviate the flood problems of the central county (that is, channelizing almost every creek in the region). The county district's study clearly stated that there were no flood control benefits to be derived from their proposed Laguna channel project. Even though farming practices on lands adjacent to the Laguna were to plant late (6 to 8 weeks) and harvest early (4 weeks or more), crops adjacent to the Laguna were said to be severely damaged by growing season floods about once in every three years. The cost benefit analysis showed that it was economical to construct a Laguna pilot channel which would improve drainage and reduce or eliminate damage to crops during the growing season. Installation costs, excluding right-of-way acquisition costs and engineering costs were estimated in 1960 to be nearly \$350,000 – nearly 29 times the estimated cost in 1924 and more than 10 times the estimated cost 26 years earlier in 1934.

The expected increase in crop land (90 acres) from the Laguna channel project was about equal to the reduction in acreage of "brush and waste," which was considered to have no value. Most of project benefit was expected to result from the conversion of natural pasture (377 acres) to permanent pasture with improved, flood sensitive pasture species. Comparison of 1960 aerial photographs with the old 1942 aerials showed that 210 acres of brush and waste had been cleared by farmers along the Laguna north of Sebastopol in the 18-year period – more than twice the acreage expected to be cleared after the pilot channel project was completed.

Construction of the Laguna channel project began in 1964. The crooked pilot channel generally follows the property lines (a 60 foot wide channel in a 100 foot right-of-way, from 6 to 8 feet deep when constructed). The lower reach of the channel downstream of Guerneville Road was completed by the late summer of 1965 and terminated about 3,000 feet south of River Road at the channel dug earlier by the Laguna Storm Water District rather than continuing on to the Trenton Road bridge as originally planned. The section between Occidental Road and Guerneville Road was completed in the summer of 1966. Although the county water district acquired much of the right-of-way ownership for the southern section between Sebastopol Road and Occidental Road containing the remnant portion of historic Lake Jonive, this section was not channelized. (The City of Sebastopol granted the county agency ownership of four parcels totaling about 6.6 acres in 1968, but the water district did not acquire a continuous right-of-way for the southern section.) Some of the southern section was probably only cleared of brush obstructing the water way and was likely completed by the late 1960s. It also appears to be quite likely that the connection of the pilot channel north of Occidental Road with the permanent water body south

of Occidental Road probably lowered the surface level of the remnant of Lake Jonive by several feet in order to establish a constant grade between Sebastopol Road and Trenton Road.

Nearly 90 years after an agricultural reclamation project was first proposed in the Laguna, a drainage channel was finally completed in the mid-1960s – a few years before the values and potential uses of the Laguna would rapidly change. The communities surrounding the Laguna would soon express their urban needs and desires for the area, and the wishes of a few agricultural landowners would no longer solely determine the uses of the Laguna.

In late 1968 a consultant to the state water pollution boards established that while previously agricultural pumping from the Laguna had kept wastewater discharges (treated sewage effluent) to the Russian River negligible, the summer discharges of wastewater to the Laguna were now making the Laguna eutrophic and were degrading the water quality of the lower Russian River by causing excessive algal blooms. After reviewing the wastewater disposal alternatives for the Laguna dischargers, the consultant concluded that the most cost effective alternative was to construct a 35-foot high dam at the lower end of the Laguna with control gates which would permit winter flood waters from the Russian River to enter the Laguna, but which would limit the summer discharges of the Laguna to the river. The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (NCRWQCB) subsequently ruled that all summer discharges of wastewater to the Laguna cease by May 15, 1974 – a target date that was met about three years later. A potential water shortage in the Laguna alarmed many farmers, who routinely irrigated their land with water pumped from the Laguna. Although it would take another decade to realize, tentative plans by the late 1960s also called for all wastewater treatment plants discharging to the Laguna to be consolidated at Santa Rosa's new Llano Road treatment plant.

Had such a Laguna wastewater dam been constructed, the Laguna north of Sebastopol would have gradually become over the years a large predominantly wastewater lake in the late summer – quite the opposite of improved drainage for agriculture! Sebastopol began year-round discharge of its septic tank effluent to the Laguna in 1906. Sebastopol treated its sewage in the "latest in design," secondary treatment plant before discharging its effluent year-round into the Laguna after 1930. Cotati residents began to connect to their new sewer and treatment plant in late 1954, which discharged year-round into the upper Laguna. Rohnert Park's new sewage treatment plant was built shortly after the Cotati plant and also began discharging year-round to the upper Laguna. Santa Rosa had been discharging its sewage effluent to the Laguna (via Santa Rosa Creek) from its sewer farm since the spring of 1890 (an improvement over discharging the city's raw sewage directly into Santa Rosa Creek). Santa Rosa's new Laguna sewage treatment plant was completed in the late 1960s, but the open house for the consolidated Subregional Wastewater Reclamation System was not until September 1978.

Documentation and awareness of the natural resource values of the Laguna began in the early 1970s. The county's 1973 amended General Plan for the greater Sebastopol area recognized the need to protect the endangered plant species in the Pitkin Marsh, but only generally recognized the resources of the Laguna (open space, flood plain, agricultural, etc.). The plan, however, called for a detailed ecological and biological analysis of the Laguna as a precursor to establishing a

laguna park adjacent to Sebastopol. (Sebastopol's City Council subsequently concluded that Ragle ranch was a higher immediate priority for the city and the county purchased the Ragle property for a county park in November 1975.)

Santa Rosa's 1973 EIR for its wastewater disposal alternatives cited a 1972 survey by the NCRWQCB and the state Department of Fish and Game (DFG) that showed that the high chlorine residual in the wastewater discharges appeared to be the cause of the Laguna being virtually devoid of typical stream life (very few fish and very few species of fish). (In the public hearing to approve Sebastopol's EIR on the Alternative Wastewater Management Plans in April 1975, Sebastopol's consultant cited the same aquatic Laguna survey, but simply concluded that there was no significant biotic life in the Laguna.)

The *Sebastopol Times* published an article in late March 1974 entitled "Laguna Drying Up Problem" which extensively quoted Allan Buckmann, DFG's terrestrial wildlife biologist for the region. While Allan described the Laguna as being "a puddle of its former self," he stressed the tremendous importance of Laguna to wildlife and stated that there was an immediate need to restore and preserve the remaining valuable wildlife habitats of the Laguna. The Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board (now a county commission) was established by the supervisors in September of the same year and immediately recognized that the Laguna was one of the most important wildlife area in the county. By the spring of 1976, Buckmann was describing the Laguna as a "biological goldmine" and was actively promoting the need for a Laguna management plan as a major resource and potential recreational area – a multipurpose opportunity for the community. Sebastopol's council minutes about this time indicate that there was an unexpected citizen concern for the impact to the fish and wildlife resources of the Laguna from the proposed ball field and Boys Club building on the city's old garbage dump next to its wastewater treatment plant. The council minutes also record that the "public was upset" about the potential adverse impacts to the Laguna of the proposed Route E highway bypass route along the 76-foot contour south of Highway 12.

The 1974 newspaper article quoting Buckmann was accompanied by a early 1900s photograph of three well dressed women wearing hats in a rowboat on historic Lake Jonive. Buckmann continued with his enthusiastic optimism for Laguna preservation for many subsequent years and met with any individual or group willing to listen to his ideas.

There was a growing public awareness of the high biological values of the Laguna many years before the five Sonoma State University students (a state college at time) in Environmental Studies and Planning completed their Laguna management plan in May 1977 – the first major study of the biological resources of the Laguna (115 pages plus 10 plates). The students documented that the Laguna was "a unique living museum" of biological diversity. Their study included many recommendations to preserve and enhance the wildlife resource values of the

Laguna. The students noted in particular that SCWA's routine maintenance of its Laguna pilot channel was very disruptive to wildlife habitat and called for a re-evaluation of the costs and benefits of the agency's maintenance. A subsequent article in the *Sebastopol Times* quotes Allan Buckmann suggesting that a pilot restoration program "of the biological goldmine" should begin immediately on county land in the Laguna – SCWA's Laguna pilot channel and the agency's Cotati-Russian River water pipeline right-of-way properties.

The summer of 1977 followed an extremely dry winter with less than 25% of the average annual rainfall for the region. The sewage discharges in the lower Russian River via the Laguna were estimated to be in excess of 25% of the flow in the river, far exceeding the allowable maximum of 1%. Alarmed lower river residents unsuccessfully instigated the county district attorney to file criminal charges against the cities discharging their wastewater to the Laguna under the county's clean water ordinance. By the early spring of 1977 the NCRWQCB required all of the cities discharging wastewater to the Laguna to take emergency measures to prevent the sewage pollution of the Russian River since Santa Rosa's pond storage and wastewater irrigation system (LEDS) was not yet completed. Sebastopol arranged for irrigation of its sewage effluent on the dairy farm to the immediate north of its treatment plant. Temporary dams were built on the Laguna east of Palm Avenue and next to Rohnert Park. While the ponds of wastewater behind the dams were considered to be a boon to wildlife, most waterfowl had already had their broods before the dams were finished. The dams broke in the heavy rains and flood of November of the same year, which preceded a very wet winter with over 60 inches of rain. The sewage situation in the Laguna and in the Russian River was widely reported in the local newspapers and established the urban needs for proper sewage disposal via the Laguna versus the sewage pollution problems of the lower Russian River. The sewage situation set-off the so called "sewer wars," which would continue periodically for decades to come. With the exception of a few relatively minor projects, major proposals to enhance and restore the Laguna were invariably strongly opposed by lower river residents for decades on the grounds that the proposals were actually a disguise for Santa Rosa to increase its discharges of wastewater to the Russian River. To implement the Laguna Effluent Disposal System (LEDS), Santa Rosa used Clean Water Grant funds to become the largest land owner in the Laguna and acquired ownership of about 1,500 acres of reclamation farms. Santa Rosa currently owns over 1,900 acres in the Laguna, all of which have been annexed to the city and are not in county jurisdiction.

About four months after the university student report was presented, the county supervisors appointed a citizen study committee to investigate the multiple use resource values of the Laguna and to make recommendations to the board on how to preserve its wildlife values. The first of 15 recommendations made by the committee in their July 1978 report to the board was that SCWA's annual use of \$10,000 to maintain its Laguna pilot channel was destructive to wildlife habitat, was a benefit to only a few private landowners, and should be reviewed. (The county supervisors are also the board of the SCWA.) The local appreciation of the importance of the Laguna to wildlife continued to grow in the early 1980s. An informal group of citizens took every opportunity to promote the importance of the Laguna and worked diligently to incorporate preservation of the Laguna in the county's process for a new General Plan. One of the more notable projects of this period was Peter Vilms' slide show entitled "Laguna de Santa Rosa – Treasure in Peril," which was widely shown to innumerable audiences for many years.

Sebastopol's council formed a Study Session/Laguna Scoping Committee in the fall of 1988 to seek ways to implement the recommendations made by an earlier citizen committee, the Laguna

Advisory Committee formed in November 1986. (The citizen committee had focused on recommendations that the City of Sebastopol could implement and were very much in keeping with the university student report.) One of the activities of the Scoping Committee was to submit a draft management and restoration plan for the Laguna (prepared by Marco Waaland, a local ecologist) to many agencies with an interest in the Laguna for their review and comment. One of the plan's objectives called for the discontinuance of vegetation removal from SCWA's Laguna pilot channel. Bob Beach, the director of SCWA at the time, responded that there was no significant flood control benefits from removal of vegetation from the Laguna channel downstream of Llano Road and that, while such removal could be of marginal benefit to some landowners, the agency did not maintain this area of waterway. Apparently the SCWA had quietly re-evaluated the expenditure and ceased maintenance of the Laguna channel sometime in the decade before 1988 – a recommendation of the Laguna Study Committee made in 1978.

Other notable activities in the late 1980s included: (1) a proposal to make about 9,000 acres of the Laguna core area a National Wildlife Refuge; (2) the holding of the first State of the Laguna Conference on September 23, 1989; (3) the adoption of the Sonoma County General Plan in March 1989 which recognizes the biological sensitivity of the greater Laguna area, contains numerous policies designed to protect the multiple resources of the Laguna, and calls for a comprehensive Laguna Conservation Program for a critical area near Sebastopol; (4) the DFG purchase of properties for its Laguna Wildlife Area (currently DFG is the second largest landowner in the Laguna with about 600 acres owned in fee and with another about 50 acres under conservation easements); and (5) the preliminary meetings of what was to become the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation (the foundation held its first official meeting after incorporation in November 1990).

The SCWA Quit Claim deeded (OR 011328, dated February 9, 1995) its 26 Laguna pilot channel parcels to the state DFG, adding about 78 acres to the state agency's Laguna Wildlife Area – essentially eliminating any future attempt to maintain the agency's former Laguna pilot channel. Although the state department will undoubtedly continue to cooperate with any proposed wildlife enhancement project on their lands, DFG has apparently no plans at present for its Laguna properties other than to let the areas revert naturally.

ADDENDUM

As Allan Buckmann was quoted as saying in the *Sebastopol Times* in 1974, the Laguna today is indeed “a puddle of its former self.” Gone are hundreds of acres of known Laguna lakes and their adjacent swamp lands, said to have been about a mile wide in places. Gone also are over 90 percent of the Oak Woodland/Vernal Pool habitat complex, over 90 percent of the Riparian Forest community which was once extensive along the Laguna, and nearly 60 percent of the Laguna’s Emergent Wetlands. Minuscule in size relative to the millions of acres of overflowed land in the state that have been “reclaimed,” the Laguna today is still the second largest wetland area in coastal Northern California.

Yes but, many generations of families were, and are, being raised on farms in the Laguna.

Degradation of the Laguna undoubtedly began at least by the mid-1850s when Europeans first significantly began to settle the area, but major and final degradation of the Laguna was relatively recent. Current supporters of wildlife habitat would very likely be pained if they saw the diverse habitats that remained among the developed agricultural areas in the 1942 aerial photographs of the Laguna. As late as the mid-1960s, when the county water district constructed the Laguna pilot channel, public funds were used purely for private landowner gain with no demonstration of public benefit and with considerable environmental degradation. About 210 acres of lower Laguna land was cleared of natural vegetation for agricultural purposes between 1942 and 1960. The Laguna pilot channel project itself required the clearing of around an additional 100 acres of riparian vegetation north of Sebastopol. The county water district’s pilot channel was optimistically predicted to result in a further clearing of 90 acres of worthless “brush and waste,” leaving less than 30% of the 263 acres of uncleared land downstream of Sebastopol in 1960. (The “brush and waste” north of Sebastopol was actually cleared soon after the pilot channel was completed, essentially a nearly total agricultural clearing on the east side of the channel. One of the root problems of the current mosquito problem in the Laguna is probably the result from the near total removal of trees for shade of the waterway).

This historical sketch is primarily based on newspaper articles in the *Sebastopol Times* and undoubtedly omits major Laguna drainage events that were not reported in the local newspaper. For example, the previously reported story of the removal of the Mark West Creek sediment plug of the Laguna in the early 1940s which formed Ballard Lake, is said to have lowered the Laguna all the way to Sebastopol, but was not reported in Sebastopol’s newspaper. In addition, many small drainage improvements on private land were also undoubtedly not reported in the local newspaper. While relatively small in themselves, the private drainage projects could well have been collectively significant. The spelling of names obtained from old newspaper articles attempts to faithfully follow the spelling in the newspaper article at the time, even though many names are not spelt the same way over the years in different newspaper articles.

Anecdotal stories of replacing fencing in the Laguna buried by sedimentation have circulated for many years. The first phase of a recent sedimentation study of the Laguna sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) confirms that sediment is indeed accumulating in the Laguna, but until the final report is released it is premature to cite sedimentation rates or identify areas in the Laguna which are subject to the accumulation of sediment.

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POST CARDS

1. Boating of Lake Jonive, Sebastopol, Cal. March 12, circa 1905.

Courtesy of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation.

2. Lake Jonive, near Sebastopol, California. July 2, circa 1905.

From the post card collection of the late Ed. Mannion of Petaluma.