

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder): Raised Streets & Hollow Sidewalks District

D1. Historic Name: N/A

D2. Common Name: Downtown Sacramento

***D3. Detailed Description** (Discuss overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.):

The Raised Streets and Hollow Sidewalks (RSHS) District is a *historic vernacular landscape* resulting from modifications made to the historic downtown area between 1862 and 1878. The RSHS District is located on the east side of the Sacramento River and includes parts of Old Sacramento and downtown Sacramento, which are divided by Interstate 5. The District is bounded by Front Street to the west, the western sidewalk on 12th Street to the east, the edge of the southern sidewalk on H Street to the north, and the southern sidewalk on L Street to the south. The northern boundary does not include that portion of downtown historically called “China Slough” on the north side of I street and to the east of H and Fifth Streets as citizens chose not to improve it during the street-raising project. The boundaries represent that area of Sacramento which citizens chose to raise to avoid flooding in the 1860s and 1870s and include the changes in elevation, raised streets, and hollow sidewalk segments that characterize the District. (Continued on page 2-5)

***D4. Boundary Description** (Describe limits of district and attach map showing boundary and district elements.):

The Raised Streets and Hollow Sidewalks District is bounded by Front Street to the west, 12th Street to the east, the edge of the southern sidewalk on H Street to the north, and the edge of pavement at the southern sidewalk on L Street to the south. The boundaries represent that area of Sacramento which was raised in the 1860s and 1870s to avoid perpetual flooding and include the visual changes in elevation, raised streets, and hollow sidewalk segments that characterize the District. (See maps on page 6)

***D5. Boundary Justification:**

The raised streets are the framework for the district. The boundaries represent the area in which raised streets and dipping alleyways are visible, indicating the possible presence of hollow sidewalk segments. Taken together, these character-defining features create a cultural landscape that conveys the district’s historic significance and integrity of location, setting, feeling and association and the site of a massive street-raising project meant to protect Sacramento’s business district and role as the state capital in the 1860s and 1870s. While character-defining features, such as hollow sidewalk segments, may remain or at one time existed outside these selected boundaries, the RSHS District is defined by how the raised streets, dipping alleyways, visual changes in street elevation, and hollow sidewalk segments work together to form a district, and not by simply their individual existence, whether current or historic.

***D6. Significance/Theme:** Community Planning & Development, Social History, Commerce, Politics/Government, Engineering **Area:** Downtown Sacramento **Period of Significance:** 1864-1878 **Applicable**

Criteria: A,C,D (Discuss district’s importance in terms of its historical context as defined by theme, period of significance, and geographic scope. Also address the integrity of the district as a whole.)

(See page 7-19)

***D7. References** (Give full citations including the names and addresses of any informants, where possible.):

(See page 19-22)

***D8. Evaluator:** Heather Lavezzo Downey, M.A.

Date: December 2010

Affiliation and Address: SOCA, 2620 P Street, Sacramento

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D3. Detailed Description (Continued)

The District is centered on J and K Streets, which were historically the business district's primary thoroughfares. The District is set up as a grid with lettered streets running east-west and numbered streets running north-south. Streets are paved with asphalt, except for Front Street in Old Sacramento, which has cobblestones. Alleyways divide city-blocks and run east-west throughout downtown and north-south as well as east-west in Old Sacramento Historic District. Alleyways in Old Sacramento are paved with concrete and cobblestones, while those in downtown are paved with concrete. Sidewalks in Old Sacramento are made up of concrete and topped with wooden planks. Sidewalks in downtown are paved with concrete. The District has three parks: Old Sacramento (located on Front and Second Streets between I and L Streets); Rosa Lima Park (located on the northeast corner of Seventh and K Streets); and Cesar Chavez Park or the City Plaza Park (located between Ninth and 10th Streets and I and J Streets). The RSHS District is characterized by above-ground features such as raised streets, dipping alleyways, starred manhole covers, granite curbs, and cast-iron and quartz skylights, as well as its unique, below-ground landscape. This hidden landscape is characterized by hollow sidewalk segments which may possess street retaining walls, building walls, corbelled buttresses, timber and concrete supports, elevator access, original storefronts, end walls, water tanks, as well as brick-barrel and lintel vaults. Taken together, these features work to create a cultural landscape that maintains its connection to the ways early citizens interacted with the environment in the 1860s and 1870s. Emphasis should be given to the way the character-defining features convey the district's integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association.

Today, the changes in street elevation that came to define the area after the street-raising project help to distinguish it from those parts of downtown that citizens did not raise in the 1860s. Visible from downtown alleys, the raised streets are roughly graded to the same level. However, slight elevation changes not only distinguish the District from its surroundings, but also remain detectable as one walks or drives upon them. While heading east on J Street, for example, a glance down any numbered street between Third and Twelfth Streets will visually demonstrate the dramatic drop off that occurs near L Street to the south and H Street to the north, since workers filled the thoroughfares to accommodate the new street grade and improved drainage system. Likewise, numbered streets, running north-south, are graded up to meet J Street, the highest point of the District. This change in elevation is seen most clearly on Fifth Street between J and K Streets. The raised streets define the district in that they distinguish it from its surrounding areas, outline where property owners might have raised their buildings, and help identify the presence of hollow sidewalks. The streets are bounded by below-grade, brick retaining walls constructed by 19th-century property owners. The original street grade remains buried beneath roughly 10 feet of fill, which was then covered with various 19th-century paving materials, including Nicolson paving and cobblestones. Today, raised streets between Second Street to the west, 12th Street to the east, I Street to the north and L Street to the south are paved with asphalt and many possess light-rail tracks. Within the RSHS District, a section of historic cobblestone paving remains intact beneath the existing asphalt paving (near Seventh and H Streets) as recorded by Tremaine & Associates in 2008. Within Old Sacramento Historic District, the raised section of Front Street, running north to south between J and L Streets, is paved with cobblestones. This paving is not historic, but rather a historic recreation of nineteenth-century paving implemented in the 1970s during the redevelopment of Old Sacramento. The west side of this section of Front Street is paved with asphalt. Dirt and gravel, as well as railroad tracks set in cement, characterize Front Street from the foot of J Street

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extending northward to the foot of I Street. Crosswalks at the J and Front Street intersection, as well as those at K and L Streets, are composed of granite and cobblestone. Granite curbing dating from the time of the street improvements remains within the RSHS District, most notably on the west and east side of Ninth between I and J Streets, and well as the south side of I Street between Eighth & 10th streets. This historic curbing is six inches wide, and typically four inches high from gutters which are roughly two to five feet wide. Throughout the downtown portion of the RSHS District, sidewalks are between 20 and 30 feet wide. Curbs and gutters within Old Sacramento are different in size that those throughout the rest of the RSHS District. On Front Street between J and L, and on I, J, K and L Streets between Front and Second Streets, gutters are cobbled to represent historic paving methods and are four feet wide. Sidewalk height within Old Sacramento ranges from six and one-half inches to two feet, creating “rolling sidewalks” that denote the various elevations to which 19th-century property owners raised their boardwalks. Old Sacramento sidewalks are roughly 14 feet wide and planked. Streets within the RSHS District vary in width and are characterized by two to four driving lanes, bike lanes and parking spaces. Parking spaces are seven feet wide, and bike lanes are three feet wide. Lanes are between 10 and 17 feet wide, depending on the street. As such, street widths range from 30 to 70 feet wide.

Dipping alleyways (bisecting certain city blocks and extending east-west throughout downtown and north-south as well as east-west in Old Sacramento Historic District) as well as a number of parking lots, parking garages, and stores located below the current street level remind us of the city’s original elevation and help to provide a sense of the modified landscape. A sub-grade parking lot is located on the southeast corner of L and Front Streets at 1121 Front Street. Dipping alleyways may contain “disappearing windows,” or bricked-in windows at the original first story of buildings. These nineteenth-century entryways were cut off where workers brought the alleyway up to meet the new street grade. The I/J Street and K/L Street alleys dip to their original street grades at Eighth and Ninth Streets, providing a dramatic example of the discrepancy between the old and new elevations of the streets.

Hollow sidewalk segments are formed by six structural elements: the street retaining wall, the brick building wall, two end walls (constructed to denote property lines and keep unwelcome intruders out of buildings), the ceiling, and the floor. Building walls in the hollow sidewalks often feature barrel or lintel vaults. These vaults support those buildings whose owners decided to raise them to the new, higher street grade. In those cases where building owners chose not to raise them to the new street level, hollow sidewalks may showcase original storefronts. Other features of a hollow sidewalk segment may include: building entrance thresholds; granite stairs; and, on the surface level, cast-iron grids with quartz lights embedded into sidewalks, elevator doors, starred manhole covers and/or granite curbs.

Redevelopment efforts in downtown Sacramento in the 1970s, including the construction of Interstate 5 between Second and Third Streets, as well as the construction of Westfield Downtown Plaza in 1998 amid Third, J, Seventh and L Streets, resulted in the demolition and infill of many segments of the hollow sidewalks. Page & Turnbull surveyed the area and documented a number of accessible segments, and other segments are known to exist. Of those surveyed by Page & Turnbull, forty hollow sidewalk segments contain brick buttressed street retaining walls. At 1000 Second Street, the retaining wall stands on raised,

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corbelled bases and at 715 Merchant Street the brick street retaining walls feature corbelled piers. Seven of those hollow sidewalk segments surveyed feature brick support walls under the building, while 37 original facades were recorded. Approximately half of those original storefronts featured doors and window openings. Some, such as those at 111-113 K Street, were filled in with brick. Hollow sidewalk segments had one of two types of ceiling systems: a wood post and beam system or a brick barrel vault system. Only one hollow sidewalk segment surveyed featured the brick barrel vault system: 831 K Street. Nearly all segments featured end walls of brick, concrete block, or poured concrete.

Some hollow sidewalk segments possessed other features not related to their structural make-up, but instead provide evidence of how they were utilized after the high-grade construction ended. In some hollow sidewalks located at the corner of blocks, cylindrical, brick waters tanks (which likely held water in case of fire) exist. Two corner properties, 1125 Ninth Street and 729-731 J Street, feature these tanks. Cast-iron and quartz skylight, embedded into the new sidewalks, metal elevator doors, and starred manholes are all featured within the RSHS area as components of various hollow sidewalk segments. Examples of skylights are located in the hollow sidewalk segments at 927-931 J Street, 801 K Street, and 1015 Seventh Street. Metal elevator doors, installed into the surface of the sidewalk, provided access to the hollow sidewalks as storage for goods. The properties at 924 and 1005 12th Street retain evidence of their elevator access points. Starred manhole covers were likely installed as access points for water and sewer systems and are present at 910 J Street, 801 K Street, 1030 J Street and 923 Seventh Street. Finally, certain hollow sidewalk segments feature granite curbing, most likely installed during the street raising project when granite was being hauled into the business district on the Sacramento Valley Railroad from Folsom and Rocklin. Examples of granite curbs are found at the southeast corners of Ninth and J Street and Seventh and J Streets.

[See next page for list of Architectural Survey A Forms \(Page & Turnbull, 2009\)](#)

State of California — The Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
CONTINUATION SHEET

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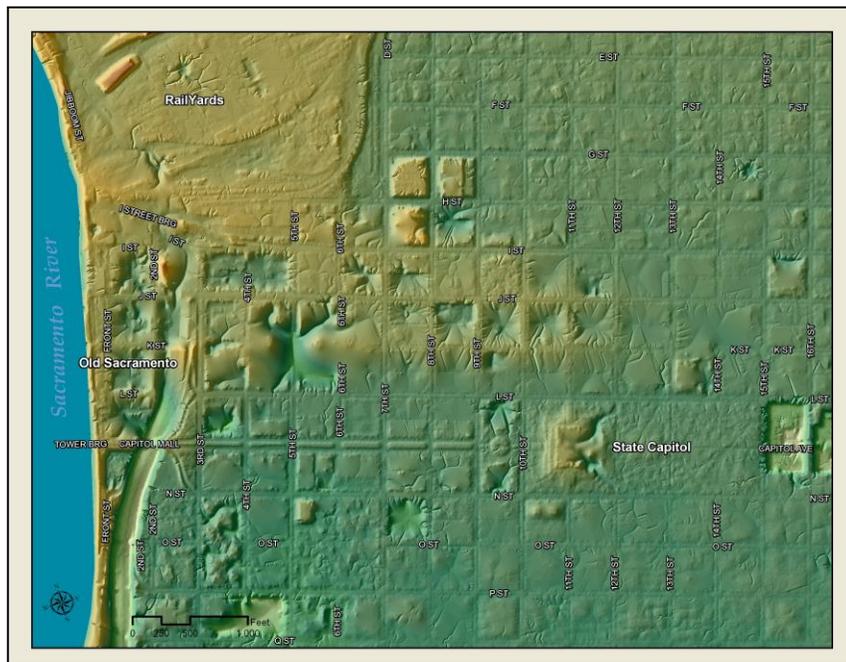
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APN	ADDRESS
00600120210000	910 2 nd St.
00600710220000	1000 2 nd St.
00600730400000	1009 2 nd St.
00600730470000	1021 2 nd St.
00600730450000	1023 2 nd St.
00600710550000	1028 2 nd St.
00600910010000	1007 6 th St.
00600940010000	1015 7 th St.
00601020160000	1125 9 th St.
00601010150000	1016-1020 10 th St.
00600470090000	924 12 th St.
00600111002000	1005 12 th St.
00600710350000	1013 Front St.
00600720250000	1121 Front St.
00600710330000	114 J St.
00600120310000	117 J St.
00600710450000	122 J St.
00600120290000	123 J St.
00600710270000	128 J St.
00600320120000	629 J St.
00600340140000	707 J St.
00600940040000	712 J St.
00600340100000	725 J St.
00600340080000	729-731 J St.
00601010030000	900 J St.
00601010060000	908 J St.
00601010070000	910 J St.
00601010100000	918 J St.
00601030020000	1000 J St.
00601030190000	1012 J St.
00601110030000	1208 J St.
00600710560000	111-113 K St.
00600710560000	115-119 K St.
00600720480000	116 K St.
00600720320000	126 K St.
00600960030000	704 K St.
00600960040000	708 K St.
00600960070000	718 K St.
00600960080000	724 K St.
00600960090000	726 K St.
00600960100000	730 K St.
00600970130000	801 K St.
00600970120000	831 K St.
00601030110000	1011-1013 K St.
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D4. Boundary Description (Continued)

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Bare Earth Map, demonstrating those parts of downtown, including raised streets, which were filled during the street-raising project in the 19th-century, permanently modifying the landscape. Courtesy of the City of Sacramento, 2003.

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D6. Significance/Theme (Continued)

National Register Criteria: The RSHS District is significant under National Register Criterion A within the contexts of Social History, Commerce, Politics/Government, Community Planning & Development and Engineering for its association with Sacramentans' decision to raise the streets in their business district in the 1860s and 70s. Furthermore, it is significant under Criterion C for its association with the method of construction by which Sacramento and other cities, such as Chicago, were raised in the 1850s and 60s. Finally, the District is significant under Criterion D for its potential to yield potential information about 19th-century vernacular design and construction of retaining walls and bulkheads to raise the street, on average, nine and one-half feet above the grade, yet retain hollow sidewalk spaces.

Historic Context

After the discovery of gold in 1848, opportunistic settlers, led by Sam Brannan, selected the site of Sacramento at the confluence of the Sacramento and American rivers to build a city. They chose the site because of the rivers' transportation potential and their desire to transform the area into a hub of Gold-Rush commercial activity. The rivers served them and their business interests as highways, transporting people and goods during the Gold Rush and beyond. In response, Sacramento grew rapidly as a transportation and trading hub throughout the 1850s, earning the title of California's permanent state capital in 1854. The realities of its physical location, however, challenged Sacramento's prosperity, stability, and growth in the mid-nineteenth century. After 1850 and extending through the winter of 1861-62, seasonal flooding of the Sacramento and American Rivers became problematic for those who chose to settle the low-lying area. Unwilling to relinquish their claim upon the land and sacrifice their economic and political interests, Sacramento property and business owners spearheaded multiple construction projects to eliminate flooding in the heart of Sacramento – the business district. Early flood-control efforts in Sacramento included constructing a levee, altering the course of the American River, and raising the streets in the business district above high-water. The business class's passion for profit and desire to remain the state capital motivated these decisions, resulting in a permanently altered landscape that remains recognizable in downtown Sacramento.

Community Planning & Development and Social History: Man vs. Nature in Early Sacramento

Settling Sacramento City during the Gold Rush and beyond required that new arrivals carve out a piece of the wilderness for themselves. Gold-Rush era journalist, Bayard Taylor, offers a picture of interactions between new arrivals and Sacramento City's natural landscape in 1849. He writes, "Many of the streets are lined with oaks and sycamores, six feet in diameter, and spreading ample boughs on every side. The emigrants have ruined the finest of them by building camp fires at their bases, which, in some instances, have burned completely through, leaving a charred and blackened arch for the superb tree to rest upon."¹ Edward Kemble – an early visitor to the area and eventual editor of Sacramento's first newspaper – observed that the land was an "almost unspoiled wilderness" before the advent of Western settlement. Kemble described the land as inhabited by "a forest of noble sycamores, dense and deep . . ."² Paintings and lithographs of Sacramento's Embarcadero in 1849 demonstrates the rapidity with which early

¹ Bayard Taylor, 1849; quoted in *Eldorado: Adventures in the Path of Empire* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000), 176.

² Mark Eifler, "Taming the Wilderness Within: Order and Opportunity in Gold Rush Sacramento, 1849-1850," *California History* 79, no. 4 (Winter 2000/2001): 193.

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Sacramentans redesigned the landscape: while some trees remain, Edward Kemble's description of a pristine wilderness has been exchanged for one being managed by those individuals identified by Bayard Taylor. As early as 1849, ideas about the manageability of nature, combined with early Sacramentans' powerful vision for the site as an economic and political center, set the agenda for Sacramento City's physical development.

Almost immediately after Sam Brannan selected the site and began selling lots in Sacramento City, new residents came face to face with the realities of the physical location. On January 8, 1850 the American River overflowed its banks and within hours, four-fifths of the city was under water.³ In a boomtown quickly erected of canvas and wood, flood waters rushed into the city and swept away structures as well as tents, wagons, livestock and merchandise.⁴ Looking for ways to continue earning money, some Sacramentans sold "bona fide boats for as high as \$1,000 or rented for \$30 per hour."⁵ The *Daily Alta California* newspaper reported that there was an "estimated loss of one million dollars; other estimates ran to three times as much."⁶

Property owners' investment in the land prohibited them from abandoning the site. Instead, they chose to rebuild their city, this time with disaster-resistant materials such as brick and granite. Additionally, Hardin Bigelow, Sacramento's first mayor, led the community in its effort to construct a levee to protect the business district in 1850.⁷ Even still, some Sacramentans chose to abandon the site in favor of high ground after the city flooded again in 1852 and 1853. Rival towns such as Sutterville and Hoboken emerged as safe alternatives to Sacramento's perilous landscape. John Sutter had founded Sutterville two years before Sam Brannan began selling lots in Sacramento. Located about three miles south of Sacramento City, the discovery of gold and rapid merchant-settlement on the Sacramento River caused Sutterville to fall into decline.⁸ Still, it enjoyed sporadic booms at the expense of Sacramento. After a fire in 1852 and the floods of the early 1850s, Lansford Hastings, Sutterville's land agent, began offering free lots to those who experienced loss in Sacramento.⁹ Additionally, Hoboken sprang to life on the American River near the present-day site of California State University, Sacramento.

Less than 10 miles from Sacramento City, Hoboken served as the temporary business hub for Sacramento while the flood waters receded. According to Steven Avella, "For six weeks about 1,000 people found refuge there" while flood waters of winter 1852 receded in Sacramento.¹⁰ While Hoboken was not as readily flooded as Sacramento, most residents planned to return to Sacramento City, as described by Luke Richardson. In a letter written to his aunt during his stay in Hoboken he reports, "You will find enclosed a view of the place I am living in, it has been built in the last three weeks. I shall probably be back in Sacramento in about a week – please tell Mother to direct my letters to Sacramento City."¹¹

³ Marvin Brienens, "Sacramento Defies the Rivers 1850-1878," in *California History* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 3.

⁴ Joseph McGowan and Terry Willis, *Sacramento, Heart of the Golden State* (Woodland Hills, Windsor Publications, Inc., 1983), 36.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Brienens, "Sacramento Defies the Rivers 1850-1878," 4.

⁷ Samuel Colville, *City Directory of Sacramento for the Year 1854-55* (San Francisco: Monson & Valentine, 1854), Center for Sacramento History, Eleanor McClatchy Collection.

⁸ Steven Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2003), 26.

⁹ Center for Sacramento History, Eleanor McClatchy Collection (Caroline Wenzel Notebooks, Volume 30), 41.

¹⁰ Avella, *Sacramento*, 39.

¹¹ "New Jersey Had Better Luck than California with Hoboken," *Union*, July 13, 1957.

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Even though they had the option of relocating to either Sutterville or Hoboken, many remained in Sacramento during the floods. Rather than scare property owners away from Sacramento, the continued inundations by water seemed to inspire merchants to not only strengthen the levee, but also to grade a small portion of the business district to improve drainage. Early in 1853 a group of property owners from J Street met at the Orleans Hotel on Second Street to discuss the improvements. They raised \$3,600 to complete the emergency work. Suddenly in April 1853 the city was again under water and it stayed that way for nearly two months. Merchants began to discuss more earnestly the option of actually raising the streets to “get commerce back in Sacramento.”¹² By then end of the year, private property owners and their hired contractors lifted I, J, and K Streets as high as five feet as far back from the levee as the public square on high ground at 10th Street.¹³

By the mid-1850s, the business district was physical proof of its residents’ vision for the place: a permanent, safe place to do business. The many brick and granite buildings were physical symbols of Sacramentans’ tenacious commitment to the place, no matter the natural obstacles. The levee was a source of pride within the community. As Samuel Colville writes, “A well-grounded hope is indulged by the citizens of Sacramento, when they gaze upon this apparently impervious piece of workmanship, that the day of her affliction is over, at least so far as related to the probability of future overflow.”¹⁴

Modifications to the environment completed in the 1850s kept Sacramento safe from flooding until the winter of 1861-62. In the *1860 Sacramento City Directory*, on the eve of the most destructive floods the city would come to know, D.S. Cutter boasted, “Eleven years ago where Sacramento stands was an unclaimed wilderness; today by that indomitable energy and perseverance which characterizes the American people, we stand as the second City on the Pacific Coast and there we will stand forever . . .”¹⁵ The winter of 1861-62 challenged these sentiments when over 30 inches of rain fell over a two-month period.¹⁶ On December 8, 1861, the American River rose nearly 20 feet, an alarmingly high level for so early in the rainy season.¹⁷ In the morning hours of December 9, flood waters from the American River overwhelmed the levee in the northeastern part of Sacramento, inundating the city.¹⁸ The water rose rapidly, bringing with it a current that was strong enough to imprison many people in their homes, unable to be rescued by mules, horses, wagons or even boats.¹⁹ As one local newspaper reported, “The flood came with the rapidity of a hurricane . . . The levee is now an injury instead of a benefit, as it confines the water in the city, and causes it to rise higher by probably two feet than it would have done had no levee existed.”²⁰

¹² Barbara Lagomarsino, *Early Attempt to Save the Site of Sacramento by Raising its Business District* (Sacramento City College: Master’s Thesis), 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ D.S. Cutter, *Sacramento City Directory for the Year A.D. 1860* (Sacramento: H.S. Crocker & Co., Book and Job Printers, 1859). Center for Sacramento History: Eleanor McClatchy Collection.

¹⁶ Karen M. O’Neill, *Rivers by Design: State Power and the Origins of U.S. Flood Control* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 75.

¹⁷ Thompson and West, *A History of Sacramento County* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1960), 69.

¹⁸ Brienens, “Sacramento Defies the Rivers,” 13.

¹⁹ “A Great Calamity,” *Union*, December 11, 1861.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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The city charged a chain gang with the dangerous task of breaching the R Street levee to relieve Sacramento of the excess flood water.²¹ Once the chain gang did so with explosives, the force of the rushing water was so strong that it took 25 homes with it, some of which were two stories tall.²² The chain gang probably did not survive, along with many others who drowned, contracted diseases, or starved following the inundation. As the year 1861 came to a close, flood waters effectively cancelled all Christmas festivities in Sacramento. On Christmas Eve the *Union* reported that:

“The prospect is that it will be the most gloomy Christmas Eve ever experienced in Sacramento since California became an American property. The usual Sunday School celebration and other festivities incident to the season seem to have been forgotten, or swept away by the flood; and taken altogether ‘Merry Christmas’ so far as Sacramentans are concerned, appears to have lost its distinctive character as the annual time of rejoicing.”²³

While Sacramentans grappled with this disaster, another storm visited the capital city. Heading north from Southern California, this “great storm” dumped over twenty-four inches of rain on the already flood-soaked city. The flood overwhelmed the entire central valley, turning the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys into an “inland sea 250 to 300 miles long and 20 to 60 miles wide.” Sacramento received over 400 percent of its normal rainfall that January. The American River levee in the northeastern part of the city finally broke and residents found themselves subject to hurricane-force winds, and five feet under muddy, ice-cold water.²⁴ Sacramento historian Joseph McGowan writes that “dead animals [floated] about the streets, houses were washed off their foundations and the town lost all communication.”²⁵ Four hundred Sacramento families were left homeless and five thousand individuals were in need of aid while the city remained under water for three months.²⁶

While the exact number of deaths following the back-to-back floods is unknown, accounts from the event suggest destruction akin to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana in 2005, in terms of loss of life and property, as well as relative shock and dismay. While in San Francisco during the flooding, federal land surveyor William Brewer described the scene in his journal: “Benevolent societies are active, boats have been sent up [to Sacramento], and thousands are fleeing to this city.” In March 1862, Brewer traveled to Sacramento. After witnessing the destruction in the capital city, he wrote, “I don’t think the city will ever rise from the shock, I don’t see how it can. Yet it has a brighter side. No people can so stand calamity as this people. They are used to it.”²⁷

²¹ Joseph McGowan, *A History of the Sacramento Valley*, Vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1961), 10.

²² *A Capital Neighborhood: The Archeology of the Capital Area East End Complex* (Sacramento: A Report Prepared for Department of General Services, 2003), 6.88.

²³ “Christmas Eve,” *Union*, December 24, 1861.

²⁴ W. Leonard Taylor and Robert W. Taylor, “The Great California Flood of 1862,” *The Fortnightly Club*, www.redlandsfortnightly.org/papers/taylor06.htm.

²⁵ McGowan, *History of the Sacramento Valley*, 186.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ William Brewer, 1862; quoted in *Up and Down California in 1860-1864: The Journal of William H. Brewer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 242, 249.

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As in the 1850s, Sacramentans chose to remain at the confluence of the flood-prone rivers after the back-to-back floods in the winter of 1861-62. Beginning in 1864, citizens supplemented their earlier attempts to control the rivers (the levees) by re-routing the American River and by implementing a decades-long street-raising project. All three of these early flood-control measures, as well as citizens' decision to rebuild with "disaster-proof" materials like brick and granite, were motivated by popular 19th-century thought about the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Western historian Patricia Limerick articulates the mindset of those who sought life anew in the West when she writes, "White Americans saw the acquisition of property as a cultural imperative, manifestly the right way to go about things."²⁸ In settling towns in the West and participating in this contest for property, many settlers saw nature as valueless until improved upon. City-builders in Sacramento felt this way, believing that nature should work to advance their vision for the place. In their minds, if and when the realities of the natural environment interfered with Sacramento's growth, they could manage those challenges. As the street-raising project gained momentum in 1866, the *Sacramento Bee* boasted, "Less enterprising men would have left the beautiful ruin of a city to moulder away and decay, but the Sacramentans could not be induced to forego the work of a decade for just the disasters of a month."²⁹ Sacramentans felt that their changes to the landscape, no matter how expensive or dramatic, would positively progress their city as a place to live and do business.

In 1866 a Sacramento newspaper reported, "Many have often regretted that Sacramento had not been originally built elsewhere – on higher ground. It would not have been Sacramento. It is not the object of engineering to place your strong works in a place of safety, but to locate them where the danger is to be combated – at the point which it is desired to hold."³⁰ Sacramentans desired a permanent city, even if that meant doing battle with nature to dramatically alter the landscape.

Protecting Commerce by Raising the Streets

After the discovery of gold at Coloma in 1848, Sacramento's population and physical size erupted. Opportunistic and business-savvy individuals like Sam Brannan and Peter Burnett set the agenda for Sacramento's growth as a Gold Rush commercial and trading locale. Intense land speculation swept the city and during 1849 lot prices rose from \$250 to \$8,000.³¹ Those who settled in Sacramento literally invested all they had in the land. The Sacramento and American rivers were the city's life blood, serving land owners and miners as the highways to the gold fields.

²⁸ Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 26.

²⁹ "City Improvements," *Sacramento Bee*, October 3, 1865.

³⁰ *Sacramento Bee*, October 27, 1866.

³¹ Mark Eifler, *Gold Rush Capitalists: Greed and Growth in Sacramento* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 54.

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In the 1850s and 60s, the business district was the heart of Sacramento City. Centered on J Street, it extended nearly 12 blocks east from Front Street (historically known as The Embarcadero) and four blocks south of China Slough, an easily-flooded tract of land on I Street, to L Street. Set up as a grid, the business district was home to a diverse group of business owners who served thousands of locals and visitors each day. Sacramento boasted first-rate hotels, restaurants, and shops. Its streets buzzed with life as shoppers and merchandise crowded the sidewalks. The Embarcadero on the Sacramento River served as an important transfer point for goods and passengers, congested with shipping docks, warehouses, a ferry, as well as the Sacramento Valley Railroad freight depot and passenger station.³²

For those whose lives and wealth were tied to Sacramento's lucrative business district, moving the city in response to the flooding of the winter of 1861-62 was unthinkable. Merchants, landowners, and local officials based on and around J Street desired a permanent and safe city in which to conduct their businesses. To do so, they had to overcome many challenges, including a massive clean-up effort following the back-to-back inundations by water. Additionally, the floods disrupted commercial activities and created fear of Sacramento in the minds of those living throughout California. People began to question whether or not Sacramento was a good place to invest and conduct business, given its propensity to flood. One San Francisco newspaper claimed that "it is simply an act of folly for the people of the town of Sacramento to endeavor to maintain their city on its present location."³³ As Sacramento historian Barbara Lagomarsino points out, "The question was not whether to admit that Sacramento was located on an untenable site for activity and leave, but rather to make sure that the site was, indeed, tenable."³⁴ Property owners in the business district did not waste any time in attempting to quell fears and revive business in Sacramento. Sacramentans were determined to manage the natural environment in ways that would simultaneously diminish the threat of future inundation by water and promote the city's growth.

Private property owners set the high-grade project in motion when they voted to raise and grade the business district above high water in March 1862. Supporters of the "high grade," as it was called, believed that it would not only improve public health but also raise property values.³⁵ Those who opposed the construction called themselves "low-graders." Lorenzo Hamilton, a long-time Sacramento resident and property owner, feared that property owners could not afford the recommended improvements and felt that the levee was enough to protect the city. Most property owners disagreed with Hamilton's opinion, as demonstrated in a letter to the *Union* from someone called "A Taxpayer." After refuting the notion that few Sacramento property owners supported taxation to finance street improvements, the author names many people "in favor of raising and grading our streets to a liberal height." The writer concludes by stating that those listed "are people who have made their property [in Sacramento], and who have been personally present with us and passed like heroes through all the adversities of the city."³⁶

³² Stephen G. Helmich, "K Street Landing, Old Sacramento and the Embarcadero," in *Golden Notes* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 2.

³³ Thor Severson, *Sacramento: An Illustrated History: 1839-1874 From Sutter's Fort to Capital City* (California Historical Society, 1973), 109.

³⁴ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "High Grade," *Union*, February 18, 1863.

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Once high-grade construction got underway, Sacramento began to attract new investments. In 1863 Sacramento became the western terminus for the transcontinental railroad. In 1864 the city deeded a section of particularly flood-prone land just north of the business district, called China Slough, to the Central Pacific Railroad.³⁷ Sacramentans were sure that the high-grade construction would help to secure this and other commercial opportunities in the future. Financially, Sacramentans' efforts paid off: as early as 1867, the value of those properties on the higher grade had skyrocketed 200 percent since 1865, while residential lots, located on the periphery of the business district and extending eastward away from the Sacramento River, had not.³⁸ Property owners and merchants most clearly benefitted from this and other flood control efforts. They did so not only because the projects protected and enhanced commerce in the business district, but also because they often lived above their stores. By the end of the project, while Sacramentans had rallied behind lifting the business district, most residential lots had been left at their original elevation.³⁹

Politics & Government: Protecting the Capital by Raising the Streets

In 1854 Sacramento earned the title of permanent state capital, having offered the legislature meeting space in the county's newly-constructed courthouse on Seventh and I Streets. Legislators came from all over California, including places that wished to replace Sacramento as the capital. In addition to the meeting space in the courthouse, elected officials found Sacramento's bustling business district full of many favorable amenities, such as restaurants, hotels and places of entertainment. In 1860, Governor John Dewey signed a bill to begin construction on the state capitol on 10th Street between L and N Streets, allowing Sacramentans to add the ultimate symbol of permanence to their expanding urban landscape.⁴⁰

To protect the capital and the economic benefits that accompanied it after the floods of the early 1860s, property-owners advocated for improvements to the business district's elevation and grade. Indeed, Sacramentans used the high-grade construction as further evidence of the city's ability to safely host the political center of California. As one observer of the construction reported:

“The work on the state capitol is progressing finely . . . the new granite, from the Rocklin quarries on the Pacific Railroad, is of the most dazzling purity of color, and will lend much to the elegance of the edifice. Three of the windows are already closed in and the cornices put up . . . We have cited these instances to show how much confidence in the permanence of Sacramento her principle property owners possess. The high grade in this business portion of the city is but an extension and an additional strengthener to the levee, rendering the inundation of the city an impossibility . . . We have no fears of the future of Sacramento, while her present property holders are her residents and rulers. She is the Phoenix of cities. Yesterday a fire and today a flood, and she rises from the wreck stronger and more powerful than ever. Her citizens are indomitable, and are determined to make her worthy of the title of capital of so great a state as California.”⁴¹

³⁷ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 112.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Appendix A.

⁴⁰ Avella, *Sacramento*, 42.

⁴¹ Center for Sacramento History, Eleanor McClatchy Collection (Caroline Wenzel Notebooks, Volume 29), 19.

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The street-raising project worked to secure the capital for Sacramento. In 1869 the state legislature “formally took possession of its respective chambers” in the newly-constructed capitol in Sacramento.⁴² Lucinda Woodward explains that “to ensure against the potential future flooding problems, the ground line [at the capitol] was . . . raised six feet so that it would be thirteen feet above the adjacent streets. The basement (first) floor was . . . three feet above the established ground line and from the line of the basement floor to the line of the principle (second) story, twenty-one feet six inches.”⁴³ As Sacramento historian Steven Avella notes, even though Sacramento had fallen victim to multiple floods, “Legislators admired the city’s willingness to rebuild.”⁴⁴

Politics & Government: Changes in Local Government

In the 1850s, Sacramento’s local government was not only incredibly cash-poor, but also paralyzed both by state laws that limited its taxing ability, and the will of its citizens, who opposed being taxed. In response, in April 1858 the California State Legislature approved a bill to consolidate the city and county governments in Sacramento as a means to tackle inefficiencies in local government and pay down debt incurred to protect the city from earlier floods and fires.⁴⁵ This new “consolidated” government allocated authority to a Board of Supervisors that continued to take a “hands off” approach to city improvements. The Supervisors, fearful of adding to the pre-existing debt, left such endeavors to property owners and other private citizens. The flood of the winter of 1861-62, however, demonstrated the flaws in this system. After being flooded for the first three months of 1862, citizens demanded that the streets within the business district be raised to avoid such destruction in the future.

In March 1862 a group of men who owned and operated business along J Street met privately to discuss the future of Sacramento.⁴⁶ Among them were Dr. R.H. McDonald, a druggist whose store had been in operation on J Street since 1850, and James McClatchy, editor of the *Daily Bee* newspaper and soon-to-be sheriff.⁴⁷ Frustrated by the lack of official action taken by the local government after the floods, the men took matters into their own hands. They voted to raise and grade the business district above high water. Before local government had a chance to adopt any official ordinance in support of or opposition to the high grade, many property owners began raising and grading streets on their own.⁴⁸ These early improvements were done haphazardly and never in accordance with existing ordinances. Dr. McDonald, for example, raised his sidewalks 10 feet above their original level, creating a levee of sorts around his building. The Board of Supervisors, the governing body at the time, asked him to lower them to three feet above their original level, and he complied.⁴⁹ Spurred on by such actions from within the business community, the Board of Supervisors authored Ordinance #124, “Fixing the Grade of the Streets.” Although it was not officially adopted, the ordinance

⁴² Avella, *Sacramento*, 42.

⁴³ Woodward, *A Documentary History*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁵ Nellie May Henderson Cole, *Consolidation of Sacramento City and County Government, 1858-1863* (Sacramento State College, Master’s Thesis, 1958), 3, 7, 10.

⁴⁶ “Meeting of Property Owners,” *Union*, March 18, 1862.

⁴⁷ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 38.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

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identified the new high water mark at 22 feet nine inches above the Sacramento River and set up a fixed grade for the business district in relationship to it.⁵⁰

In addition to the adoption of this street-improvement ordinance, property owners called for a new form of government in Sacramento. The destruction wrought by the floods of 1861-62 and property owners' desire to expand upon earlier flood-control measures brought to the surface the insufficient amount of power allocated to the Board of Supervisors to mitigate and manage city improvements. In early 1863 representatives from within the city met to discuss dismantling the consolidated system of government that they had adopted only five years prior.⁵¹ On April 25, 1863, the City of Sacramento approved a revised City Charter that effectively split the city and county governments once more.⁵² The Charter allocated considerable authority to a three-member Board of Trustees, a group of leaders that would promote business owners' plans to raise the business district. With this goal in mind, the new city seal proclaimed that Sacramento was *Urbs Indomita* – the “indomitable city.” The three original trustees were each wealthy Sacramento businessmen or politicians. Josiah Johnson had served as a state senator from Sacramento in the 1850s before he helped to co-author the Consolidation Bill in 1858.⁵³ H.T. Holmes owned a lime manufacturing and roofing company on I Street.⁵⁴ The third trustee was C.H. Swift, who owned a grain store on Front Street and later served as the president of Sacramento Savings Bank.⁵⁵

The Board of Trustees, eager to implement and manage the street-raising project, utilized Ordinance #124 as a rough guideline. The corner of Front and I Street became the highest point in the city with the grade falling to the south and the east. J Street was graded at two feet six inches above the high water mark, while K Street was raised to one foot six inches above the high water mark. On L Street, the grade was six inches above the high water mark.⁵⁶ Property owners could petition the Board of Trustees to select their block for the high grade, and unless two-thirds of the owners formally objected, bids for the work would be issued. Alternately, the Board of Trustees would select a block for the improvements and await the objections of at least two-thirds of the owners before issuing bids.⁵⁷ While the trustees initiated, regulated and managed the project, the financial burden fell on the property owners. They were responsible for constructing brick retaining walls and sidewalks on their property, as well as hiring contractors to raise their buildings, if they chose to do so.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ “Ordinance Number 124 ‘Fixing the Grade of the Streets’” in Board of Supervisors Minute Records, Book F: 542-545. Center for Sacramento History.

⁵¹ Cole, *Consolidation of Sacramento City and County Government*, 70.

⁵² *City Charter and Ordinances of the City of Sacramento*, compiled by Daniel J. Thomas (Sacramento: Water Fount and Home Journal Print, 1866), 33. Center for Sacramento History: City Clerk Collection.

⁵³ John F. Uhlhorn, *The Sacramento Directory for the Year 1875* (Sacramento: H.S. Crocker & Co., 1875), Center for Sacramento History, Eleanor McClatchy Collection.

⁵⁴ John J. Murphy, *The Sacramento Directory for the Years 1861 and 1862* (Sacramento: H.S. Crocker & Co., 1861), Center for Sacramento History, Eleanor McClatchy Collection.

⁵⁵ *Reports on the Board of State Capitol Commissioner and Miscellaneous Papers, 1850-1892* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1893-1988), 71.

⁵⁶ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 53-54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

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The trustees were responsible for hiring the contractors to fill and pave the new streets, but taxed property owners to finance this portion of the construction.⁵⁹ As the street-raising project neared completion, the Board of Trustees passed ordinances to address construction-related problems and mitigate hazards. In the summer of 1872, the former high point of the city – the city plaza on 10th and I Streets – was suddenly a gaping pit in the middle of the city as surrounding streets had been brought up to the new, higher grade. The Board of Trustees brought the plaza up to the city’s new street level.⁶⁰ That same year they also instituted changes to the sloping grade along J, K, and L Street roughly between 10th and 13th Streets to reduce the amount of flooding due to run-off.⁶¹ In 1876 the Trustees approved an ordinance regulating the process of filling in the numerous low or uneven spots throughout the city.⁶²

Engineering: Saving the Site by Engineering Safety

Hardin Bigelow spearheaded the construction of a levee in 1850 – Sacramentans’ first attempt to manage the natural environment. Tax payers funded the project by approving a special \$250,000 tax assessment.⁶³ Upon completion, the levee ran from Sutterville (a settlement south of Sacramento City on high ground), west toward the Sacramento River, north along the river, around a particularly flood-prone area just north of the business district called China Slough, to the American River and then up the American to high ground. The massive earthwork was three to five feet high, 20 feet wide at the base and 10 feet wide on the top.⁶⁴ According to Samuel Colville, the funds for the project came from a “pro rata tax upon property owners” amounting to \$185,460.⁶⁵ In 1854, citizens constructed a new levee to replace the “Old Levee” they had built in 1850.⁶⁶ Colville describes this new and improved flood-control measure as “composed of portions of the old embankment.”⁶⁷ Work crews “widened, partially planked, raised and materially strengthened” the new levee at the cost of \$95,000.⁶⁸

This and other modifications to the business district’s landscape kept Sacramento safe until the winter of 1861-62, after which the citizens and Board of Trustees adopted the street-raising project. Beginning in 1864, property owners, private contractors, scores of teamsters, and chain gangs provided the manual labor to hoist the district above high-water. Owners prepared their sections of the street for fill by constructing bulkheads – brick retaining walls that not only denoted property lines but also the new level to which the street would be filled – 10 to 14 feet away from their storefront. Each brick used during the high-grade construction was handmade locally. If an owner refused to do their part, or if he or she lived elsewhere, the trustees hired a contractor to do the work then charged the owner accordingly.⁶⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 128.

⁶¹ Ibid., 129.

⁶² *City Charter and Ordinances of the City of Sacramento*, 157.

⁶³ Mary Helmich and Pauline Spear, *A Gold Rush Merchants Manual* (Office of Interpretive Services: California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1989), 5.

⁶⁴ Colville, *City Directory of Sacramento for the Year 1854-55*.

⁶⁵ Colville, *City Directory of Sacramento for the Year 1854-55*.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 65.

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Turton, Knox and Co. was a popular Sacramento-based contracting company during the street-raising project. William F. Knox, one of the owners, was an architect, carpenter and contractor. In the 1850s he served as a public official under the consolidated government and in the 1870s on the Board of Trustees as the Street Commissioner.⁷⁰ His and others' hired teamsters hauled the dirt into the city for street fill from local farms or the American River riverbed. The gravel for paving the new streets came from Folsom.⁷¹ Workers employed a variety of equipment and hand labor to collect and move the enormous quantities of dirt needed for fill. Typically dirt-moving teams consisted of a few workers, scrapers, one-horse carts, called "earth movers," and a wheelbarrow. Teamsters usually worked 12-hour days, earning five dollars for hauling dozens of cubic yards of fill into the business district.⁷²

A property owner had the option to leave his or her building at its original elevation, in which case many opted to add a story to the top. Most, however, chose to raise their buildings to the new street level. To do so, they hired a contractor who employed dozens of teamsters to lift the structure on screw jacks, technology similar to today's car jack. Joel Johnson, along with Turton, Knox, and Co., was among the most popular Sacramento building-raisers. According to the *Union*, Johnson earned \$62,750 in one year.⁷³ That amount is roughly equal to over a million dollars today.⁷⁴ To keep from harming the structure, the process had to be slow, methodical and coordinated. All workers would have to turn their jacks in unison to raise the building inches a day.⁷⁵ As they raised it, they would construct a new, brick foundation for the building. They constructed new basement walls and employed both barrel-brick vaults as well as lintel vaults to bear the structure's load.

During this time, Sacramentans instituted another flood-control effort to protect the business district. In addition to reinforcing the levees and executing the high-grade construction, the community decided to alter the course of the American River. They grappled with a few problematic areas of the river's natural shape and flow. One spot was the location at which the levee failed in 1861, a place located on the American River at 28th Street called Rabel's Tannery. The second location formed a slow-moving, C-shaped bend that stretched all the way from the present-day site of the H Street Bridge to B Street. Furthermore, the river's natural drainage spot as it met with the Sacramento River tended to be a low-lying area of the business district near I Street. At these points, construction crews worked to deepen the channels to divert and quicken the flow, remove large amounts of debris deposited by hydraulic mining in the foothills, and relocate the mouth of the river north, away from the business district.⁷⁶ By 1868, workers had completed these flood-control measures, having redesigned the American River.⁷⁷ These

⁷⁰ See *Sacramento City Directories; City Council Minute Index*, Center for Sacramento History: 76/39/01.

⁷¹ Lagomarsino, *Early Attempts*, 58.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 100, 101.

⁷³ "Improvements in Buildings," *Union*, January 1, 1867.

⁷⁴ J.S. Holliday, *Rush for Riches: Gold Fever and the Making of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 346.

⁷⁵ William Holden, *Sacramento: Excursions into its History and Natural World* (Sacramento: Two Rivers Publishing Company, 1987), 200.

⁷⁶ Eugene Itogawa, "New Channel for the American River," *Golden Notes* 17, no. 3 (October 1971).

⁷⁷ Brienes, "Sacramento Defies the Rivers," 17; McGowan, *History of the Sacramento Valley*, 187, 188.

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engineering projects were symbol of Sacramentans' willingness to do battle with nature to provide safety and permanence in Sacramento's business district.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on the information provided in the historic context statement (H.L. Downey, October 2010) and the themes discussed here, the Raised Streets & Hollow Sidewalks District appears to be eligible for listing at the state level as a historic district. The street-raising project reflects themes in 19th-century social history and community planning and development, and demonstrates citizens' economic and political goals as the state capital and a transportation and commercial hub for the region. Furthermore, the district is a cultural landscape whose character-defining features exemplify the method of construction by which Sacramento and other cities, such as Chicago, were raised in the nineteenth-century. Finally, the district has the ability to yield potential information about nineteenth-century vernacular design and construction of retaining walls and bulkheads to raise the street, on average, nine and one-half feet above the grade, yet retain hollow sidewalk spaces.

The completion of a National Register nomination for the district is recommended. Cooperation with the City of Sacramento's Preservation & Planning department, as well as outreach within the community as a means of educating property owners and other citizens about the district's significance, are also encouraged.

Integrity

The RSHS District conveys its significance as a historical vernacular landscape altered by human efforts which can be read most easily in the raised streets, dipping alleyways, and hollow sidewalk segments. These character-defining features work together to convey the districts integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. The District and its raised streets, dipping alleyways, and hollow sidewalk segments exist in their original location in Sacramento's business district at the confluence of the Sacramento and American River, thereby maintaining the District's integrity of *location* and *setting*. Furthermore, the District maintains historic integrity of *feeling* and *association* because the landscape created by the street-raising project remains, allowing visitors to the District to experience the changes in elevation that make the area unique, and reminding them of the street-raising project as well as business and political activities that occurred there in the 1860s. Those architectural features that define the District, particularly those associated with the hollow sidewalk segments, remain, and are able to convey how property owners and construction crews physically raised the District in the 1860s. Similar technology as that used by Sacramentans to raise their business district was employed in other "raised cities." However, Sacramento was one of the earliest American cities to adopt such an engineering project, and therefore contributed to the development of the design and technique. The District still reflects early Sacramentans' original design for the District as a flood-control measure, thereby maintaining integrity of *design*. Furthermore, the District possesses enough raised streets, dipping alleyways and hollow sidewalks to demonstrate how workers completed the task, thereby maintaining integrity of workmanship and, in many cases, material. The District maintains integrity of *materials* and *workmanship* because the raised streets,

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dipping alleyways, and hollow sidewalk segments work together to convey how workers hoisted the district above high-water, and how it has stayed elevated for the past 150 years. Many of the accessible hollow sidewalk segments feature the original brick, wood and metal that stabilized the District's infrastructure beginning in the 1860s. Inaccessible hollow sidewalk segments remain within the District, and except for where demolition and construction for Interstate 5 and the Downtown Plaza have taken place, and even where hollow sidewalk segments have been filled in, it is assumed that the buttresses and retaining walls remain in place and retain integrity of materials and workmanship.

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