History of Kings County

Kings County was born on May 23, 1893; the land encompasses the lower Kings River Delta, the western foothills of the San Joaquin Valley, and all of Tulare Lake.

The earliest residents of the area were the Tachi Yokut Indians. “Tachi” is the Yokut word for “mud hen,” a duck that inhabited the local area. The Tachi tribe lived around the vast Tulare Lake and depended on it for their survival. The lake teemed with fish and freshwater clams while the shores were home to a wide array of birds and mammals. It was a Garden of Eden.

When the first white settlers arrived, the indigenous population consisted of the Tachi tribe of the Yokuts Indians. The Yokuts controlled the entire San Joaquin Valley, from the Delta to Tejon Pass. There is no history of Indian troubles in the county as the Tachi tribe was not belligerent, and has continued to live in the region.

The first settlement was a ferry situated on the south bank of the Kings River where the Overland Stage route crossed. Known as Kingston, this town was the only settlement on the stage route between Stockton and Visalia. Kingston was part of Tulare County (which had been incorporated in 1851). A bridge replaced the ferry in 1873, and the town went into decline. By the 1890s Kingston was abandoned.

A few small settlements followed, but the first incorporated community was Lemoore. The town site was surveyed by Dr. Lovern Lee Moore in 1872. The success of the town was assured with the arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad in 1877. The second permanent community was begun in 1877 along the railroad tracks at the site of Perry Phillip's sheep camp. Named for James Madison Hanford, the paymaster of the Southern Pacific, the second town was incorporated in 1891. Hanford became the county seat two years later, when Kings County was formed from the western half of Tulare County.

The early economy of the county was centered around ranching and farming. The first vineyard was established in 1890 and grapes continue to be an important crop in the region. The first dairy came three years later in 1893. Dairy farming continues to be a major part of the Kings County economy. In addition, cotton, fruit, and nuts have all become important crops in the region.

The settlement in Kings County remained modest throughout much of the county's first century. The third incorporated community, Corcoran, was established on the San Francisco and San Joaquin Railroad in 1905. The fourth incorporated town, Avenal, was established in 1929 on the west side after oil was discovered in the hills. A number of unincorporated communities also exist, including Armona, Grangeville, Kettleman City and Stratford.
History of Burris Family and Park

In 1849, David Burris left Missouri and traveled to California. This was the time of the Gold Rush. He stayed for three years, and then returned to Missouri. He was there for a short time and then joined an emigrant train driving a hundred head of cattle to California. He settled in Napa County and married Julia Wilburn.

In 1859 he moved to Tulare County, where he built an adobe house for his family and established a cattle ranch. The new location proved to be unhealthful. Not only were they frequently ill, but the threat of malaria was also an ever-present danger. They left and settled in Sonoma in 1869. David Burris became an active member of the business community and was instrumental in starting three banks.

In 1884, he moved back to Tulare County and resumed their ranching operation. Burris built a two-story fourteen-room ranch house with a tank house for his ten children. He continued to acquire land and the ranch grew to 5,000 acres.

There were fifty-seven acres of Burris’ holdings that lay in the horseshoe bend of the river. The land had never been developed. Four of the Burris’ sons donated this land to Kings County in memory of their parents.

On June 27, 1924, Burris Park was opened to the public. Burris Park occupies the former site of a Native-American village used by the Tachi-Yokuts. Great Oak trees, barbecue pits, a well, dancing platform, swings and see-saw were there for the enjoyment of the public. Today the park is a reminder of David Burris and his family and their contributions to Kings and Tulare counties.

Museum at Burris Park

The Kings County Museum at Burris Park is dedicated to the collection, preservation, study and exhibition of objects illustrating the history of Kings County and the lower Kings River region. Each visit to the Kings County Museum is an adventure into the history of a unique area in California's San Joaquin Valley. At the museum, look for items illustrating the Tulare Lake history, including mud shoes fitted on horses, Native American artifacts, fossils of early life forms, reminders of the Kingston settlement and portraits of pioneers. Wagon barn exhibits include wagons, stagecoaches, and other early day vehicles used by the pioneers of this area. Also included are tools of the blacksmith trade.