In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, just as today, it was not uncommon for laborers to make long and uncomfortable journeys to faraway places looking for work. In describing his own journey to Locke, CA in the book Bitter Melon by Jeff Gillenkirk and James Motlow, one of these laborers, Wong Yow, says, “I came here on a ship. I didn’t have a thing with me except the clothes on my back. You weren’t allowed to bring many valuables in, or any valuables at all.” After such a trip, the first thing most workers wanted to find was a safe room where they could rest and store their few precious belongings. That’s just what they found in a large two-story building on the north side of Locke now known as the Locke Boarding House Museum. Continued on page 2...
Built in 1909 to house farm workers and laborers who were building the Southern Pacific Railroad, the boarding house was known as the Jack Ross Boardinghouse until it was purchased in the 1920s by the Kuramoto family, who had emigrated from Japan. The Kuramotos called it “Sam’s Rooms” and leased rooms for $5 a month, which was typically about a quarter of a worker’s monthly wages. According to the book Remembering Locke, published by the Locke Foundation, “The building’s simple design is meant to house as many residents as possible. Individual boarders often shared the 14 small rooms on the second floor with another worker, who would use it in their absence. Each room contained only a bedframe, a mattress, bureau, and mirror.”

Although Locke’s population was primarily of Chinese descent, many laborers from Japan, the Philippines, and other locations often found themselves working on asparagus farms and pear orchards in the Delta, and Sam’s Rooms was known for housing these workers. The boarding house operated regularly throughout the 1920s and 30s, until the Kuramoto family was imprisoned in an internment camp in Arizona during World War II. Sam Kuramoto, who is still alive today, recalls that the family was able to sell the building for cash about a week before it would have been confiscated, and a neighbor took over operations for a time until it closed permanently.

In 2005, California State Parks acquired the boarding house as a site of historical interest. In 2008, the building underwent extensive restoration work before opening as the Locke Boarding House Museum, giving visitors a true-to-life glimpse into an era when Locke was a bustling community defined by diversity and opportunity. In 2021, the museum won Best Museum in the annual Best of the Delta awards and remains an important stop for anyone hoping to learn more about the richly complex history of this region.

For hours, location, and docent tours visit: www.lockeboardinghouse.com
Renowned author and essayist Joan Didion, born in Sacramento in 1934 and died recently at the age of 87, was a daunting figure in the literary world. In her writing, the fifth-generation Californian recalled growing up in the Sacramento region, running in its fields and swimming in the Sacramento River. She was known for her powerful, incisive prose and strikingly clear perception of not only the ways that people shape their environments, but also the ways that people are, themselves, shaped by their environments.

Didion was a sometimes-divisive figure, offering harsh criticism of wealth, liberation movements, colonial expansion, and other ideas and practices that have defined modern life on the west coast. Always keenly aware of the power dynamics that shaped the world around her, she did not shy away from uncomfortable truths about California’s history and politics. However, that awareness also extended to the unparalleled beauty of the state and the inspiring soul of its people, and to those who read her works today it is clear that her criticism springs forth from an intense and enduring love.

Indeed, in her 1977 novel, A Book of Common Prayer, Didion writes, “You have to pick the places you don’t walk away from,” and despite often feeling like an outsider and even living in New York for a time, Didion never truly walked away from her home in California. Her very first novel, Run, River (1963), is set in the capitol city of Sacramento, and her subsequent novels and essays, preoccupied with battles between order and chaos, dreams and reality, are often set against the backdrop of what many would call essential elements of the California experience: Hollywood industry, the culture wars of the 1960s and 70s, and even in the case of her 1977 essay, “Holy Water,” California’s endless struggle to manage its water resources.

In that essay, by detailing her fascination with the monumental effort involved in moving water around California, Didion deftly expresses the love she felt for California and its people, people determined to make their dreams come true in areas of questionable natural hospitality and continually challenged to preserve the beauty of the state while also exerting their will upon it. Describing her visit to the California State Water Project Operations Control Center, she writes, “I stayed as long as I could and watched the system work on the big board with the lighted checkpoints. The Delta salinity report was coming in on one of the teletypes behind me. The Delta tidal report was coming in on another. I had no further business in this room and yet I wanted to stay the day. I wanted to be the one, that day, who was shining the olives, filling the gardens, and flooding the daylong valleys like the Nile. I want it still.”
If you look at an overhead map of the California Delta, you may notice an area just south of Bacon Island that looks a little unusual. Once a segment of a large agricultural tract that produced staple crops such as potatoes, barley, onions, and beans, the Town of Discovery Bay covers approximately seven square miles of land centered around a dense cluster of docks and piers. It is technically defined as a Community Services District, and is governed by a Board of Directors made up of five elected officials, similar to a city council, including a President and Vice President. The Board oversees matters related to water and sewer services, recreation, and landscaping, while all other services are handled by Contra Costa County. Today, the District boasts over 5,500 homes, a country club, a thriving boating community, and more.

Planning began in 1964 for a recreational community of bays on what was then known in the area as the Byron Tract. During its construction, the development went through several years of contractual difficulties, but lots finally opened for sale in October 1970, with sales and home construction continuing for the next 11 years before the grand opening of the Discovery Bay Marina on July 4, 1981. In 2013, the Delta’s very first lighthouse, a donation from Discovery Bay residents Ed and Jean Stewart, was constructed on Indian Slough. Boats docked in the marina enjoy access to over 1100 miles of waterways within the Delta, and it is also possible to reach the Pacific Ocean through the San Francisco Bay, which means a journey that begins in the waters of Discovery Bay can reach virtually anywhere in the world. More than 15,000 people call Discovery Bay home, and its recreational opportunities and evolving urban amenities make it central hub of tourism for the California Delta.

“I would not leave Discovery Bay unless I was leaving California entirely,” says Kevin Graves, current president of the Town of Discovery Bay Board of Directors, “We are a caring community that works hard to meld our varied interests into one.” Graves moved to Discovery
Bay in 1994, when the town was populated largely by retirees and part-time residents. It was so small it had no traffic signals or grocery stores, and residents had to drive to neighboring Brentwood to address most of their needs. Today, he describes a quickly developing community with great schools, a number of social hubs, and an increasing number of permanent residents.

One of those permanent residents, Sam Arditi, says, “Did you ever hear the expression, ‘work hard and play hard’? That describes Discovery Bay the best.” He goes on to describe the convenience of living so close to large employers in tech and other industries in the San Francisco Bay area, and emphasizes that Discovery Bay is home to a number of great restaurants and readily available recreational facilities including watercraft rentals, dirt bike trails, and a dog park.

The Discovery Bay Yacht Club is central to the area’s boating community. Members enjoy live music, holiday parties, weekly game nights, small boat cruises to local clubs and restaurants, and more. The Club also organizes annual Opening Day and Christmas boat parades that are open to the general public.

So what’s the best way to visit this unique maritime destination in the Delta, given all that it has to offer? The answer is simple: “Start your visit in the marina,” says Arditi, “and walk all the way to the lighthouse.”

A Lighthouse in the Delta?

Discovery Bay is the first community in the Delta to boast a lighthouse. The 10,000 pound structure was completed in 2013, thanks to residents Ed and Jean Stewart and Reclamation District 800. You can discover the lighthouse on the levee near the Discovery Bay marina.
Delta Events & Agency Meetings

January

First Saturdays (All year) – Free Admission Day at the Haggin Museum – Stockton
www.hagginmuseum.org

Second Saturdays – Tours of the Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area
www.yolobasin.org/wetlands-tours

January 20 – Delta Protection Commission Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/commission-meetings

January 26 – Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Meeting
www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov/board-meeting-materials

January 27 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

February

February 24 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

March

March 5 – Delta Blues Festival – Antioch
www.deltabluesfestival.net

March 17 – Delta Protection Commission Meeting
www.delta.ca.gov/commission-meetings

March 23 – Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy Meeting
www.deltaconservancy.ca.gov/board-meeting-materials

March 24 – Delta Stewardship Council Meeting
www.deltacouncil.ca.gov/council-meetings

Delta Flood Ready

Be aware. Be prepared. Take action.
DeltaFloodReady.com