

ECV Jim Savage Mariposa Battalion 1852 Chapter
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Fresno City

Among the many landings and “ports” where steamboats landed along the San Joaquin River, where such marvelous places as Hills Ferry Landing, Watson’s Ferry Landing, Crows Landing, Salt Slough Warehouse, Temple Warehouse, Firebaugh’s Ferry, and of course, Sycamore Point.

Hills Ferry Landing was located near where Hilmar is today. In fact, Matuca XNGH Randy Jenks family owned the property where the ferry was located. Crows landing is obviously near where Crows Landing is, (Walter Crow, the main shooter from the Mussel Slough Incident was part of the family that owned that) Watson’s Ferry was across the river from about where Mendota is now, Salt Slough Warehouse was in Los Banos, Firebaugh’s Ferry was in Firebaugh, and we know where Sycamore Point was located.

But there was another landing that has faded from history, that being Fresno City. Where the Hell was Fresno City? People have told me that it was where Sycamore Point is. Not correct. They told me it is just south of Millerton. Not correct. It was by Los Banos. No, it wasn’t.

Fresno City was north of Tranquility, southeast of Mendota, and south of Firebaugh. The city was established around 1854 on a bend in the Fresno Slough, just south of where the San Joaquin River turns northward. There was a ferry crossing here, and by 1858 the Butterfield Stage Route stopped here. This was a busy place along the Pacheco Pass Route between the coast and Visalia.

The town was laid out to have 85 houses and buildings on both sides of Fresno Slough. The Casa Blanca Hotel was built, and there was a telegraph line from San Francisco by 1860. The US Post Office also came in 1860. There was a pier built there for the steamboats to land and off load their cargo. Obviously, the river was shallow and they used flatboats and barges to help haul the various cargoes.

The paddlewheel boats need to have high water years to be able to travel upstream as far as Sycamore, but I'm not sure how wet the years between 1855 and 1862 were. But in 1862, Fresno City was washed away in a huge flood. It never really came back after that, although pieces survived in to the early 1870's. The construction of the Central Pacific Railroad through the valley really shut down most the steamboat traffic, and then the building of White's Bridge over the river changed the course of the Pacheco Pass Route, basically killing the town. The Post Office moved in 1863 and ultimately would merge with the Mendota Post Office.

There is nothing left there now, except the Mendota Wildlife Area. Google maps aerial views show the area where Fresno City was located as nearly completely underwater. That photo could have been from that really wet year a couple of years ago when Tulare Lake roared back to life.

There is a California State Parks Association monument on Highway 180 several miles away, but nothing at the actual site. However, there is a road called Riverside Drive that goes right past the actual site. I think it is actually a levee. There is a wide spot in said levee where a Jim Savage monument would overlook the entire site of Fresno City. I plan on taking a road trip out there and finding out who owns that property. And then I plan on going to Giant Burger in Firebaugh and having an awesome burger!