

The Samson's first job was on Duck Slough and Burns' Cut-off levees of Roberts Island,²⁷ but the water was so low that the equipment could not make headway unless a channel 30 by 7 feet was dug. The volume of material that had to be removed to keep the scow floating vastly exceeded the amount planned for the levee.²⁸ Nevertheless, the demonstration resulted in urgent requests from levee builders in the Sacramento and Mokelumne river districts for assistance from the new dredges. One of the machines was tried at Staten Island early in 1876, but its boom was so short that to dump fill where it was wanted required excavation into the natural banks of the Mokelumne.²⁹ In November 1876 one of these dredges was used in building a cross levee on lower Grand Island. The performance was more promising and was thought to be a successful demonstration of the utility of machinery for levee building.³⁰ The dredge did not, however, satisfy the requirement for a machine which would not weaken natural banks in the process of raising levees above them.

²⁷The levee followed the right bank of the slough southwestward toward Middle River from the slough's outlet on Burns' Cut-off. The present Honker Lake Tract, the Pocket, and Roberts Island north of the Santa Fe right-of-way (including McDonald Island) would be north of the levee.

²⁸"Reclamation of Roberts Island," SWI, Nov. 20, 1875, p. 5.

²⁹"Crops on the Lowlands," SWI, June 24, 1876, p. 5; "A New Contrivance," ibid., Nov. 18, 1876, p. 5.

³⁰ibid.; "Reclamation," ibid., Nov. 11, 1876, p. 7; "Roberts Island," ibid., Sept. 22, 1877, p. 7.