

Historian details overlooked Calaveras River

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STOCKTON - For decades, Leslie Crow stubbornly fought for the preservation of Stockton's historic homes, businesses and churches.

Six months after the historian's premature death, her own name has been preserved on the cover of a 200-page book about the often-overlooked Calaveras River.

It is Crow's first full-length book, according to the Stockton East Water District, which hired her to take on the project. The work - "High and Dry: A History of the Calaveras River and its Hydrology" - was nearly finished when Crow, 52, died in May after a bout with cancer.

"She did such a great job," said Paul Sanguinetti of the Stockton East Water District board. "I think the book speaks for itself, and it speaks for Leslie."

Crow headed the city's Cultural Heritage Board for 15 years and boosted its credibility among policymakers, her colleagues have said. She was praised for helping preserve landmarks like the old Children's Home of Stockton and the Sikh Temple.

For this final work, she thumbed through dozens of old newspaper clippings and examined the minutes of water district meetings that took place more than 70 years ago.

The result is a detailed look at the Calaveras, a river whose story has never really been told, Sanguinetti said.

The district has for years been working on a federally mandated plan to save fish in the Calaveras River. Stockton East diverts water from the Calaveras for agriculture and Stockton's drinking supply.

The book supports the district's argument that the rain-fed river was historically a seasonal stream and has never been one of the great rivers of California. Rather, century-old hydrological records show it ran dry during drought years and did not teem with fish on a year-round basis.

About 500 copies of the book are being published, officials said. Some will be distributed to libraries, while others will be sold at a price yet to be determined. Officials could not say Wednesday exactly when the book will be available.

Crow retired in October 2005 from the heritage board, citing health problems. The University of the Pacific graduate died May 12 in an Illinois care home.

"History was her passion and her love," Mel Panizza, a former Stockton city councilman and Stockton East board member, wrote in an afterward eulogizing Crow. "Leslie was not afraid to pursue her passion, to defend her passion and to strongly fight for her passion."

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