



BULLETIN

SPRING 2013



The Contra Costa County
Historical Society

Invites You to . . .

Our Grand Opening!

724 Escobar
Street in
Martinez!



April 18, 2 to 7 pm

Preview event for members and guests

*General Public: April 20,
10 am to 4 pm*

**Ribbon Cutting, Tours,
Activities for children,
Refreshments**

*View our new exhibit:
Contra Costa County:
*More than the Opposite Coast**

Moving History

For months, the executive director, board members, and volunteers have agonized over the necessary but stomach-churning move to a new location for our archives. The following is an account, culled from several sources, of that historic move, which began on January 3rd. The first section, slightly amended, is from our director, Priscilla Couden.



For several days during the 1st and 2nd weeks of January, big moving trucks were parked on the 600 block of Main Street, while employees of the local Waters Moving and Storage Company and volunteers of the Contra Costa County Historical Society worked

diligently doing a Herculean task that all of us hate - moving! This is moving on a large scale...



5,000 square feet of archival materials prepared for the move by most of the Society's board members and moved by a crew of 6 from Waters.

The History Center's 724 Escobar Street location is in a building that housed a Sheriff's division for a number of years. The building is owned by the McMahon-Telfer family. In the 1970s, it was one of

the first downtown buildings to be renovated and restored to early 20th century charm by the late Jack Telfer and his wife, Aislee McMahon Telfer, a member of the prominent McMahon family who settled in Martinez in the mid 19th-century. *(While earlier stories mentioned the 724 Escobar location as "sheriff's office" at one time, it has not been mentioned as a funeral parlor. (It was Curry's at one time, then Brunscher and Connolly, which later moved to Alhambra Avenue and is now known as Connolly and Taylor.) Later, it was the location of the Venetian Club, a popular drinking spot. So, from many angles, it is appropriate that it is now a historical society location ... a part of interesting history itself.—Bill Sharkey, Mtz Gazette).*

The move became necessary because of finances. California counties are required by law to keep permanently certain records including those of the Superior Court. Appointed by presiding Judge of the Superior Court Peter L. Spinetta as the court's archival facility for the safe storage and preservation of the court records, the County Historical Society was provided with space by the county for the center to store those mandated records and many other historical records of the County, first in Pleasant Hill near the present Pleasant Hill Library and then in the former Hilson's Department Store at 610 Main Street. This year, after almost 30 years, the county changed its method of support to a yearly stipend, which the Society will use toward paying its rent and utilities—a rent that is higher now than it has ever been. This added responsibility for the Society led to the need to move when the landlord raised the rent on the Hilson's building location.

To look on the bright side, moving one's residence is not as nearly big a task as moving 162 years of Contra Costa County history, including 13,500 historic photographs, hundreds of copies of County newspapers going back more than a century, and original records of the Superior Court dating back to 1850. And that's just part of the Contra Costa County Historical Society's collection thanks to the diligence and commitment of the late Kensington

pharmacist Louis Stein and Justice A. F. Bray. Their interest and foresight, as well as Stein's collecting ability and Justice Bray's ability to convince people to get to work saving, collecting and organizing a fascinating record of our County were the moving forces behind the collection that exists today.

Housed first in a classroom of a closed Pleasant Hill school, the History Center came into its own when it moved to the Main Street location 13 years ago. The large open room was divided into sections by metal shelves, filing cabinets, and map drawers, with desks and chairs scattered around and between the storage areas. Moving all this quickly and in an organized manner so nothing was lost or damaged became the challenge of the Society's board of directors and of its executive director, Priscilla Couden. Especially challenging was that all the material would be moved from a large open room to a building of equal size that was divided into almost a dozen small offices.

The moving company's experience with carrying out large commercial moving projects was very useful as were the engineering skills of Board member John Burgh who worked with Couden and consultant Kris Carlock to plot on graph paper where everything would go.

As it has turned out, the offices are serving effectively as "file rooms" with various types of materials able to be housed together in the same room. Researchers who depend on these records will find the Center even easier to use than in the past.



Volunteers "settling in"

The following, abbreviated account, is courtesy of Faith Barnidge of the Contra Costa Times:

The Contra Costa County Historical Society is now open for business at its new location, on Escobar Street just a few blocks from its old Main Street location.

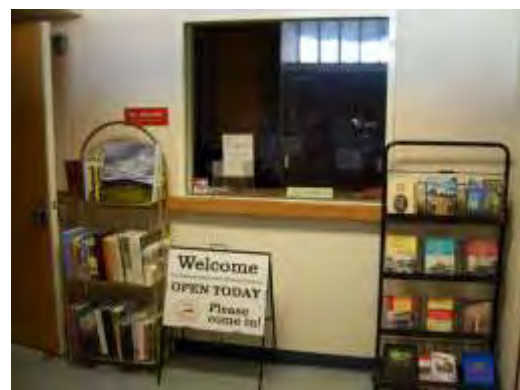
In addition to a number of researchers, recent visitors have included a large number of third-graders from John Swett Elementary School in Martinez.



From left: Ellie Lewis, Jack Lewis, Lisette Jones, Aaron Manning

"Their expressions of delight and awe and curiosity were truly exciting," said Dr. Priscilla A. Couden, the society's executive director.

One youngster wanted to know why the old 19th century leather-bound volumes had bumps on the spine. Others were curious about some wood block stamps that were used for printing pictures in the newspapers in the "olden" days.



Satisfy your own curiosity about the olden days, and help us celebrate our new home at our grand opening event in April.

For more information, contact the Contra Costa County Historical Society at www.cocohistory.org, call 925-229-1042 or visit at its new home, 724 Escobar St. in Martinez.

*The latest in our series on the historical societies of
Contra Costa County~ed.*



By Mildred Dornan, President of the PRHA

Point Richmond was once an island at high tide. Incorporated in 1905, it was the beginning of Richmond. and today is its “old town”. It is the city that it is today largely because at the beginning of the century, the Santa



Fe Railroad Company chose it to be its western terminus and Standard Oil (Chevron) chose it to build a refinery. In 1979 by Donna Roselius founded the Point Richmond History Association and dedicated it to promoting awareness of the community's exciting and colorful history

In October of 1980 the Point Richmond History Association was formed with the publication of a book called “THIS POINT...in time, an historic view of Point Richmond”. A group of interested residents researched and compiled the information about the Point’s history and with the publication came the recognition of the need for an ongoing and more thorough collection of facts, stories, artifacts and memorabilia connected with the Point’s colorful past. The Association was incorporated in March 1982 with charter members Donna Roselius, Rosemary Corbin, Mid Dornan, Michele Brown and Teresa Albro.

In May 1982 the organization began publishing a bi-monthly newsletter, “THIS POINT...in time”, for 75¢. Donna Roselius became Editor and hand set the print in her home in the Point for the newsletter as well as doing all the art work. The Editorial Staff included the charter members plus Lucretia Edwards, Judy Spediacci and Roz Bury. It was decided that there was not to be any advertising or politics. Membership dues were set from \$5.00 to \$100.00. An Annual Meeting was set for the third Sunday in May at which the Board of Directors was elected.

In 1986 the Editor Donna Roselius moved to Port Orford, Oregon and since the Editor was the key to the success of the Organization, a new Editor was needed. Gary Shows agreed to become temporary Editor, and it, as with many volunteer positions, became permanent. He was the first to use a computer for composing the newsletter and printed it in his garage on a Gestetner offset printing press. It is now printed by a commercial printer, but we still fold, staple, sort and mail ourselves by hand.



In 1987, the small Richmond Supply Company Building (oldest commercial building in Point Richmond) was about to be demolished to make room for a new multi-story structure. Under the guidance of

President Jerry Cerkanowicz, and with assist from Santa Fe Railway Company, Chevron and others, the building was moved from 139 West Richmond Avenue to 139 1/2 Washington Avenue in the downtown triangle to become our unique little Museum that is open for visitors on Thursday and Saturday. To learn more about our organization and see many of our photo archives and resources go to <http://www.pointrichmondhistory.org>

From The Executive Director:



As Spring comes to Martinez with flowering tree-lined streets and lots of blue sky, I'm thankful to be part of an organization that preserves the history of Contra Costa County.

With the move to 724 Escobar, we have developed a wish list, which includes a microwave, a four-drawer filing cabinet, a two-drawer filing cabinet, and book cases. In addition, we need to raise more money this year in order to sustain our growth and increased budget. If you have funding ideas or are able to provide some funding yourself, please contact me or the board's fundraising chair, John Mercurio.

More volunteers are also on my personal wish list. As little as 2 hours a week makes a difference. Basic tasks include greeting guests, clipping newspapers, or entering data into the computer. We need a receptionist on some Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10-1 or 2, someone to join Betsy and Kaori in identifying and describing documents from the Veale Collection, a helper for Larry and Kathleen to enter names from the West County Times into the database, and someone to answer inquiries about the History Center's collections. Some projects can be finished in a day, like the rough organization of our boxes of West County Times negatives that Tiffany did last Thursday. Others are long-term projects that take months or even years, like collecting and organizing the obituaries as Mary Ann and Mike have done. Soon we will have a new scanner that will require some reliable volunteers to scan our old newspapers. The history you learn as you get involved in a project is really interesting and fun, as all of our volunteers will attest. Please come in and give volunteering at the History Center a try.

I look forward to seeing you at our Grand Opening. Meanwhile, "Like" us on Facebook and help to make that a successful project by posting your thoughts and questions about Contra Costa history. *Priscilla*

From The President:



The New Year traditionally brings hope for a brighter and better New Year. For sure I experienced that – in spades – when my becoming your President coincided with relocation of the History Center to our new quarters on Escobar Street. Though only a 3-minute walk from our previous home on Main Street, our new world has many contrasts with the old. I felt like I was carried along by an incredible tide of your talent, time and enthusiasm. Our Volunteers and Members, and the crew from Waters Moving & Storage all pitched in to make the move safely, losing nary a single document, and at cost lower than expected. I know I speak for the community we serve: you are all heroes!

In addition to securing a home in an historic building with lower rent, we gained better environmental controls for the archives. Compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Escobar space comes completely wired for modern technology in communications and archive preservation. Its interior is arranged such that we now have dedicated rooms for library, maps, newspapers, Court records, Special Collections, researcher work stations, and the like.....all enabling us to do a better job.

Looking back, it is hard to grasp that we started with no dedicated space at all. Beyond our dreams in the beginning, our latest evolution puts us in a facility better equipped than ever for what we do now, and what we will do in the future. Rest assured.....thanks to people like you and our legion of supporters and donor organizations, the trajectory of this organization is upward, unstoppable, and exciting!

Thanks for extending me the honor of being your President for this year. *John*

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Your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter via e-mail please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042

Meet the New Guy!

Join us in welcoming the newest member of the CCCHS Board of Directors

Stan Davis, our newest Board Member, was born and raised in Oakland, CA, attending Laurel Elementary, Bret Harte Jr. High, Fremont High and Oakland Junior College before receiving his B.S. in Engineering at San Jose State. He was employed by Contra Costa County, passed his California State Registration in Civil Engineering, and was then hired by the City of Antioch where he spent 32 years, 27 as City Engineer. Additional education included Certificates in Public Administration from Hayward State and Transportation from San Francisco State and CalTrans. He also holds his California State Registration in Traffic Engineering. Stan is a member



of the National Society of Professional Engineers, American Society of Civil Engineers and the American Public Works Association

He and Carole Ann, his wife of 53 years, have two children and three grandchildren, all soon to be college graduates – the best ever. They enjoy driving on long trips the length of California and across the United States, while visiting family and friends, as well as genealogy, miniatures, trains and volunteering.

Stan's volunteer interests include the Antioch Historical Society where he is a former board member and past president, being a docent at the California State Railroad Museum and a member of the Black Diamond Model Railroad Club in Antioch.

Stan states he is looking forward to working with the Board of the Contra Costa County Historical Society in its mission to preserve county-wide history.

'Modest Mansions' Now Martinez

Landmarks

Harriett Burt



Photo courtesy of Carter Wilson, Mtz, Historical Society

I never drive (north) down the

Pine Street hill and turn left (west) onto Brown Street without appreciating the cozy homes on both sides of the street recognizably old yet somehow timeless.

For years I passed them by paying little attention but was somehow calmed by the varying styles that look like a picture of happy families. Now I know it was intentional that I and others should have those feelings. They were designed that way by Walter W. Dixon, an Oakland architect who was the unsung but energetic proponent of "storybook style" homes throughout the country during the 1920s and 30s.

I first learned about them three years ago when the Martinez Historical Society Home Tour featured one home thought to be based on a design by Dixon, the Alan and Katherine Hern home at the corner of Pine and Brown Streets. It was originally built for prominent 1930s Martinez businessman Les Mullen. Nearby is Sharon McNally's Brown Street home, originally owned by volunteer fireman and Shell Chemical plant supervisor Frank "Red" Harrow and his wife, Grace. A dozen or more other examples of "Storybook" houses exist in the three or four blocks of Pine and Brown bordering the site of the original Christian Brothers winery.

The Storybook style was a reaction to modernism, the carnage of the First World War, the influenza pandemic, and societal upheaval and change. The standard Period Revival house built for middle class families in the 1920s evoked a rather dreamy version of cottage life in previous centuries in England, France, Spain or the American colonies. Storybook heightened the detail in those styles including gables, turrets and vaulted ceilings borrowed, in the words of one writer, from lands that existed only in imagination. The end result was homes that Father in Father Knows Best could have been raised in. Indeed, "Hansel and Gretel," "Disneyesque" and "Romance Revival" are other descriptors used for the style.

Dixon was a skilled marketer whose popular book of plans for small homes, "Home Designer Magazine: A Book of Plans," touted the style and made it accessible to individual builders including those who built the houses on Pine and Brown Streets. He sold house plans based on his own designs and those of other Bay Area architects who specialized in the style. As the years passed, Dixon added unusual amenities for the time including two-car garages and automatic garden sprinkler systems. He and another builder coined the terms "miniature mansions" and "modest mansions" to describe their homes.

Proclaiming himself "an authority on small home design," Dixon believed that everyone should have a

home who wanted one. His designs focused on small five or six room homes of just over 1,000 square feet which often seemed larger because of the open-ceiling living rooms, rounded fireplace nooks and ample windows. No space was wasted with the possible exception of the barrel-vaulted living room ceiling he fancied. He often included built-in buffet and china cabinets in the dining room. Dixon occasionally used a breakfast nook design thereby leaving space for a larger living room. The breakfast nook might have foldaway tables and seating and he frequently used hidden wall beds, even in the living room. French doors separated the rooms in the living area and all rooms featured large windows often with a curved wooden molding over the top as in the Hern home.

He loved light and curves as well as gables and nooks and window seats. Although small, many of the homes are "one and a half story" with the second story smaller than the first thanks to a steeply pitched roof. Another favorite Dixon style is the split level with living rooms on one level, the master bedroom five steps up and an additional 10 stairs leading to an attic, either unfinished or built as a bedroom.

However, Dixon's real success was in not 'over-doing' the fairytale theme. According to one writer, "his storybook style was quieter than that of some of his contemporaries -- less ragged brick, fewer wrought-iron grills. His magazine inveighed against too much ornamentation. His interiors were often plain stucco walls with restrained moldings. He avoided plate rails."

As is inevitable with design fashion, Storybook Style went out of style at the end of the 1930s not so much because of World War II as much as the growth of post-modern architectural design and the rapid growth of large suburbs instead of small neighborhoods. But as with some design, Storybook became timeless with landmark Bay Area neighborhoods being preserved and new owners in Martinez such as McNally and the Herns excited by their homes and committed to restoring and preserving their early 20th century charm.

Mark Your Calendar

April 18—Special preview of our grand opening: members and guests only, 2-7 p.m.

April 20 —Grand Opening of our new home! View new exhibit: **Contra Costa County: More than the Opposite Coast.**

May 18—Center open 10-2

June 15—Center open 10-2

July 21—Big Birthday Party for the Contra Costa County Library, which turns 100! Event to be held at Main Library, Pleasant Hill

Mission Statement

The mission of the Contra Costa County Historical Society is the dissemination of knowledge about the history of Contra Costa County and the State of California through publications, lectures, workshops, and through the acquisition and preservation of pertinent historical documents.

Contra Costa County Historical Society

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Newsletter Editor: Donald Bastin

The History Center

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Phone: 925-229-1042 fax: 925-229-1772

Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 am – 4 pm

Open 3rd Saturday, 10 am – 2 pm

Email: info@cocohistory.com

Website: www.cocohistory.com



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