



Saturday, May 21, 2016: New Exhibit Opens with Four Local Judges in Attendance

Along with a healthy crowd of members, volunteers, and other interested visitors, the History Center was honored by the presence of four local judges (2 retired and 2 active). In the photo above, three of the judges can be seen: Just to the left of President Saftler is Superior Court Judge Barry Goode, who was principally responsible for the donation which led to the exhibit. To his left is James Marchiano, who served both as a County Superior Court Judge and subsequently as an appeals court justice. The man in

the front chair is Richard Flier, retired Superior Court Judge. All three men spoke at some length. Judge Goode commented on the overall quality of the exhibit and the general state of the judicial system in the County. Justice Marchiano was very familiar with the Angela Davis trial, which took place in 1972, and in which the presiding judge was Richard Arnason (who served for 49 years as a County Superior Court Judge). It was clear that the passions that surrounded the case were still very much alive in the judge's re-

telling of the Davis story. Judge Flier recounted many anecdotes concerning Judge Arnason and other judges of his acquaintance. Not in the photo is Judge Christopher Bowen, currently serving as a Family Law Judge in the Spinetta Family Law Center, in Martinez. Judge Bowen joined our society at the conclusion of the ceremony. The other judges are all long-term members and supporters.

Judge Flier had been invited to the event by board member and former president John Burgh.

Afterwards, John received the following message:

John,

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to talk to the Historical Society. As a judicial alum, I sincerely appreciate the work done by your organization to be interested in and to document the Contra Costa Judiciary.

As the third branch of California Government, there is a tendency to think of the courts as a "department" of the Executive and Legislative Branches rather than a totally independent government arm. Certainly, the Historical Society understands this. It's gratifying that you are tracing the development of the Contra Costa Courts.

It was an honor to chat with all of you last Saturday.

*Best wishes,
Richard Flier*



The exhibit, "Justice & Judges: The History of the Law in Contra Costa County," will remain on display for an indefinite period. To watch a video of the opening talks by the judges, click here: https://youtu.be/P43ap0R0_hc.

The Hon. Betsy Rahn: First Woman Judge in Contra Costa County

When we began to research the history of the law in our county, one thing became clear: For



most of its history, the local court system was dominated by men. White men. Actually, that was not a surprise. It was not until the latter half of the 20th century that women and minorities began to make a significant impact in all kinds of employment sectors, all over this country. Still, the details of Judge Rahn's judicial service were difficult to pin down.



It seems to be generally agreed that the first woman on the Superior Court bench was E. Patricia Herron, who was nominated to that position by then Governor Jerry Brown, in 1977. It was also generally conceded that while Betsy Rahn preceded her as a judge (though she never served on the Superior

Court) the exact circumstances of her service and the dates remained uncertain.

We knew that Judge Rahn was working in the Walnut Creek Municipal Court some time in the 1960s. We also had references to her working in the Walnut Creek Justice Court (as a justice of the peace) before that. But when? That's where our volunteer researcher (and fellow board member) Lisa Gorrell came to the rescue.

Based on the fact that the Walnut Creek Municipal Court was formed in December of 1959, we surmised that if Ms. Rahn was working as a JP as of that date, she likely would have been elevated to the MC at that

time. So Lisa combed through our collection of the *Walnut Creek Sun*, from the late 1950s.

Sure enough, there it was. Betsy Rahn was in fact elected as a Justice of the Peace for the Walnut Creek Judicial District, in



December of 1958. She fought a tough campaign against a popular attorney, C. Terrence Ring. Although the job was part-time, she promised to work full-time at the job, as opposed to Ring, who would continue his law practice. She won handily, and served as a JP for one year. In December 1959, she was elevated to the newly-created Walnut Creek Municipal Court. Overnight, her salary went from \$8000/year to \$18,000. Betsy Rahn served as a Muni Court Judge until her retirement in the mid-1970s. Thus, throughout her career, she was the only woman judge serving in the County.

Richard Flier, retired Superior Court Judge, was an attorney when Judge Rahn was on the bench and remembers her well. In particular, he remembers that he learned to wrap up his cases early on Thursdays, as the judge had a weekly hair appointment at 3:30 pm that she was loath to miss.

While we have identified Betsy Rahn as the first female judge in the County, this is still a guess at this point. We know for a fact that she was the first female Municipal Court Judge in the County, and that it would be another 18 years before a woman would serve on the Superior Court. But it is possible that a woman held the position of Justice of the Peace before her. Not likely, but certainly possible. So if any of our readers has any information to enlighten us, please let us know.

CCCHS Members Enjoy Diablo Stroll

John Mercurio, CCCHS 1st VP



The Diablo Country Club is an obscure neighborhood in Central Contra Costa County to some, or completely unknown to others. And then there are others such as myself, who have known about it for years and have even driven through it, admiring the beautiful and diverse architecture of the

houses there.



On June 4, a small group was treated to a walking tour of both

the historical locales within this community as well as the interior of the impressive club house structure, a historic building in its own right. The host was David Mackesey, historian of the Diablo Country Club and author of a recent book detailing the history of the



community as well as the buildings in it and the individuals who participated in a host of interesting

and important events dating back to the late 1800s. Twelve separate historic points of interest were visited by the group and explained by Mr. Mackesey, with appropriate asides and details about the people who not only were important in the creation of the country club but also played a role in the history of California.

Afterwards, many of the participants enjoyed lunch in the “tavern” and continued the discussion of the country club and the golf course that has played a critical role in its history.

A Boat with Soul: *Alma* *Donald Bastin*

The San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, located at the east end of Aquatic Park, is the home to 7 historic vessels, and the engine of an 8th vessel (the *Wapama*, a steam lumber schooner). Many can be boarded, but only one, the *Alma*, a scow schooner, is available for bay cruises. As members of the San Francisco Maritime Library, my wife and I were invited to sail aboard the *Alma*, for free, last November.



As the *Alma* is absolutely unique, and the last remaining example of a type of craft built to sail the waters of and surrounding San Francisco Bay, we jumped at the chance.

From 1850 to the early years of the 20th century, the scow (or hay) schooner was commonly seen on San

Francisco Bay and the waters of the Delta. Over 400 were built, and they were the “trucks” of the day, hauling all kinds of cargo (mostly non-perishable) to ports in the south and north bays and far up the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. They were extremely simple craft, essentially a barge with sails, and were often built “by eye” rather than from plans.

The *Alma* was built in 1891. Her length on deck is 60 ft, but considering the length of the bowsprit, the total length comes to 80 ft. Beam is just under 23 ft, and this dimension is carried fully fore and aft, as the boat is basically a box. Draft is just 4 ft, and the bottom is flat (which is the reason this type of craft is referred to as a scow) so she can sit in the mud at low tide while her hold and decks are loaded with freight. She incorporates a movable centerboard, which is lowered when sailing against the wind. The schooner designation refers to her rig. A schooner carries two masts, either of equal length, or if unequal, the foremast is the shorter. On the *Alma*, the foremast is a bit shorter than the mainmast.



We got underway about 9:30 in the morning, with a moderate wind coming through the Golden Gate. I was very interested to experience the sailing characteristics of this utilitarian craft, and it quickly became evident that she was no sprinter. Even with all sails set, she moved slowly and deliberately. Surprisingly, she sailed to weather (into the wind) fairly well, and as the wind picked up, her performance, as might be expected with such a design, improved. But it would take a capful of wind to make this boat come alive.

While today's *Alma* is equipped with a diesel auxiliary engine, the old-time sailors had to depend solely on the wind to get them far up the rivers and back again. The sail to Sacramento and other river ports was usually a downwind run, but coming back was a slog to weather, often against a stiff tidal chop, which



would mean that a trip to San Francisco would take days or even a week or more (thus the

reason for carrying non-perishable cargo, such as hay or grain). As can be seen from the photo above, the schooner skippers loaded their craft beyond the limits of prudence. This boat looks like a pygmy version of a modern container ship. It is unbelievable that these fully loaded boats were able to sail, upwind, from distant river ports to San Francisco. But they did.

After 45 minutes or so, we were under the Golden Gate Bridge, falling off before the wind to head back eastward toward our berth. On the way we passed the *Potomac*, once the personal yacht of President Franklin Roosevelt, and now also an historic ship, taking passengers for a cruise on the Bay.



Off the breakwater at Aquatic Park, we dropped sails and fired up the diesel, sliding easily into our mooring next to the other historic ships of the Maritime Park. We were happy to have had this opportunity to sail on one of the rarest boats in the world, and a true piece of our local history. Visit the park or book your passage on the *Alma* online at:

www.nps.gov/safr/index.htm



SF National Maritime Park. At left is the ferry "Eureka."

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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, or e-mail info@cocohistory.com.

Please consider CCCHS in your estate planning. It is simple, and any gift is tax deductible. We have a Schwab account that makes it easier for members and others to donate shares of stock to the Society, a good way to make a year-end or other contribution.

Bay Point Historical Society *Dean McLeod*

The Bay Point Historical Society is unusual among Contra Costa County Historical Societies. Its domain doesn't cover just one city; in fact there is no incorporated City of Bay Point. Given the fact that the communities between Concord and Pittsburg have never been incorporated, their survival has been difficult. Clyde, Nichols, Port Chicago, West Pittsburg, Shore Acres and other smaller developments grew out of the early 20th century needs of heavy industry and the United States Navy. The name Bay Point has been applied to three communities, all within Township Two North, Range One West.

The first was the Bay Point School District, whose boundaries were set in 1857, and included Pacheco to the boundary of Rancho Los Medanos. Growth brought new school districts to the area until, by 1908, the name was applied to a new company town laid out and called the City of Bay Point. The company housing surrounding General Chemical became Nichols. A new bedroom community was built by well-known developer R. N. Burgess in 1918 providing housing for workers at his Pacific Coast Shipbuilding Company, and called Clyde. The coming of the electric railway about the same time brought a rail station called West Pittsburg, a name that was attached to a wider area along what became highway 4. Housing sub-divisions were built from the mid-1920s into the 1950s. Each place developed a separate sense of community.

In a fascinating evolution these communities never achieved solidarity, thanks to the needs of multinational industries and the needs of the Navy and Contra Costa County. The commonly applied name West Pittsburg was changed back to Bay Point in August of 1993.

One of the unique things about the Bay Point Historical Society is its attempt for one organization to represent the historical interests of the communities that were, in reality, separate and very different from one another. It tries to suggest a big picture, "Long Now" idea, when most locals think in terms of "separateness". Our goal is to keep the history of these diverse communities alive.

BAY POINT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Bay Point Historical Society is to discover, preserve and display objects and materials of significant historical interest, importance, and value in relation to the communities of: Bay Point, Clyde, Nichols, Port Chicago and West Pittsburg; to identify and preserve Bay Point's historical structures and disseminate knowledge of Bay Point's history by creating, and making available, historical records.

The Society has accomplished a great number of things related to its mission statement: Historic artifacts are being preserved, including an antique fire truck. An archive of documents, photos, letters, scrap books, and films filling seven file cabinets are publicly available at the ***Contra Costa County Historical Society***. Many informative lectures and talks have been sponsored by the society. It has taken a leadership role in providing a public focus on the Native Americans on its borders and in Diablo Valley. The dramatic first exploration of Contra Costa County by the Spanish four years before Anza has been publicized by the society. The overlook on the Bay Point side of Willow Pass has been designated as Crespi Hill to help memorialize this historic event in the community. The society is a stakeholder in the development of the historic narrative at the future National Park Service/East Bay Regional Park District being planned for the Inland Portion of the Naval Weapons Station.

Resources We Need:

Volunteers for:

One time projects; Archiving documents and photos; Newsletter; Web page; helpers on 4 activities a year; Social media skills; Grant applications; Oral interviewing; Writing and editing; Membership development

Financial development: A physical place to meet, exhibit, and store archive; School program Monument development; Archival materials

To request a membership application, please contact the Society (925) 458-4487; or you may write to:
Bay Point Historical Society
Barbara Middleton
P.O. Box 5386 ~ Bay Point, CA 94565
barbs.place@comcast.net

From The Director:



Dear friends,
A happy and healthy summer to you. Having had a fall that put me out of commission for a few weeks and losing the services of our long-time volunteer Leland Tayler to illness, I am realizing how much our friends and volunteers do to make the History

Center a success. Scott, our president, and Steve, our treasurer, have stepped up in a major way to help with openings and closings of the History Center, and our newsletter editor Donald Bastin and Tara, our events volunteer, helped in getting out the recent appeal mailing. Our “regulars” Margie, Jennifer, Ann, and community service volunteers Roberto and Jim and Peggy helped as well. Harriett and Perri, our front desk people on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, have been invaluable. And others—Bill, Dean, Lisa, Betty, Diane, and Janet, as well as Scott, Melissa, and Daniel have taken on added responsibility for responding to the ever-increasing number of queries that come in by mail, telephone, and e-mail or from people who come in to the History Center. I am so grateful for all of this work on the part of our volunteers.

Nonetheless, there are still major gaps in our schedule of volunteers. I am prompted to ask if you can search your calendar to see if you could put in 2-4 hours a week or more to fill in at the reception desk on Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday morning, or Thursday all day. Or to take on one of the many jobs that are open, as follows:

- Devote 4 or more hours per week to help in our photo department with scanning photos and negatives to be added to our database;
- Take on the project of re-housing our naturalization records, boxing up the valuable tomes so that they are protected from light and handling damage;
- Assist, especially on Tuesdays or Wednesdays in adding data to our database.
- If you cannot volunteer your time, consider becoming a monthly donor.

Enough said. I only want to thank *all* of you for the kinds of support you have already given and ask you to look forward with me to a really exciting and vibrant remainder of the year.

By the way, I hope to see you and your friends at the Ice Cream Social on July 16—the beginning, we hope, of a long tradition.
--Priscilla

From The President:



I hope you had a chance to join us for our “Ice Cream Social” at the Center in mid-July. Thanks again to Marty Bender at Main Street Sweets in Martinez for his generous donation of the ice cream, dishes and spoons for the occasion. If you are ever in downtown Martinez, be sure to stop at his place for some ice cream or some old time candy. He’s located at 815 Main Street, about a block or so from the History Center.

Our exhibit, “Justice and Judges: The History of the Law in Contra Costa County”, has been up since May, and is drawing a good number of visitors to our Center. Thanks to our director and newsletter editor Donald Bastin and his wife Clementina for an excellent job in the setup of the documents, photos and other artifacts that adorn the room, and a special thanks to Judge Barry Goode for helping us obtain the valuable collection of Judge Arnason, which forms the centerpiece of the exhibit. A video recording of the speeches, which runs about an hour, can be seen on our YouTube page at the following address: “https://youtu.be/P43ap0R0_hc”. We are also showing the video at the Center in our exhibit room, so stop by and see the exhibit and the video. As noted above, we have established a YouTube channel where we hope to upload a number of the videos that our volunteers have put together on various historical aspects of the county. Search for “Contra Costa County Historical Society” on the YouTube main page to get to our channel, and please subscribe so you will be notified when we upload new material.
--Scott

