

The Great War and The San Ramon Valley



Beverly Lane

It was called the Great War, the War to End All Wars, and the War to Make the World Safe for Democracy. Now we call it World War I. It began with an assassination in 1914, America joined in 1917 and -- one

hundred years ago -- hostilities formally ended on November 11, 1918, at 11:00 am.

The United States was reluctant to join the war, as our longtime allies France and Great Britain urged us to do. President Woodrow Wilson even ran for his second term using the phrase "He kept us out of war." But the Lusitania was torpedoed, German U-boats attacked many merchant ships and Americans were infuriated. The notorious Zimmerman Telegram showed that Germans were urging Mexico to attack us from the south. We declared war on April 6, 1917

The war itself was devastating, destroying a whole generation of young men in Europe where, in France and England, 80% of their young men fought. Nine million Europeans died (seven million of them civilians, with many victims of genocide), more fatalities than in World War II. And the influenza pandemic added to the trauma. World-wide an estimated 50,000,000 to 100,000,000 people died of the influenza, about 2-3% of the world's population.

Beginning in a traditional way, cavalry was viewed as an important part of military plans. Some thought the war would be short. But new armaments were soon deployed: tanks, airplanes, rapid-firing weapons, the Zeppelin, and poison gas. Millions were killed and maimed as trench warfare lasted for years.

About four million American families sent children to the war, suffering 116,516 deaths from combat and disease. Thirteen per cent of the soldiers were from minorities -- African Americans and Native Americans. Influenza killed 670,000 Americans, five times the number of Americans who died in the war.

Columnist Nilda Rego wrote about the Great War in Contra Costa County. When the first local boys left for the military, the "Concord Chamber of Commerce gave them a ravioli dinner at Horgan's Hall and handed each man a \$5 gold piece." Called Liberty Boys, they went to training camps at Camp Lewis, Washington, and Camp Kearney near San Diego.

There were local debates about entering the war prior to 1917. Viola Lynch, a young woman in the first graduating class of San Ramon Valley Union High

School in 1914, gave the valedictory address. She recalled that it was a long, supportive discussion of the country's peace movement.

Once it started, South County workers rode the electric railway to shipyards in north Contra Costa County. Joe Ferreira said he and his dad rode it to Bay Point from 1918-1919, taking about an hour each way. He recalled "there used to be a group of about 20 of us who'd wait for 'The Riveter' which left (from Danville) and took us through Saranap, Walnut Creek and Clyde. We had to walk a half-mile to the factory." The train was the Danville Branch of the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway which was nicknamed the Toonerville Trolley.

Liberty bonds were sold throughout the country. The May 18, 1918, *Contra Costa Gazette* announced that Danville had 290 subscribers for a total of \$37,100 and received an honor flag. Volunteer salesmen included Charles J Wood, Theodore Nissan, John F. Baldwin Sr., J. C. Jones, W. R. Meese, Henry C. Hurst, Fred C. Wiedemann and chairman Frank A. Marshall.

Young men from the San Ramon Valley enlisted and were conscripted. As they traveled, their eyes were opened to new experiences. Five of these Liberty Boys did not come back:



- George Freitas (left) of Danville died from the flu/pneumonia on a ship in the Atlantic returning from Europe.
- Lloyd Wood of San Ramon died of war wound complications at Letterman Hospital in SF
- Peter Byers of Tassajara died on the Western Front, 9/28/1918
- Simeon Anderson of San Ramon died on the Western Front, 9/28/1918
- William Peterson of Danville died in a New York hospital of measles/flu while based at Camp Mills waiting to ship out to Europe.

A 1922 plaque from the Danville Women's Club lists the five men, now at the corner of the Veterans Memorial Building.

So much of today's world view began with the Great War's end. America became the leading advocate for democracy worldwide. Four great empires fell apart – Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian and German. The contributions of colonial troops from Asia and Africa weakened European control, and Wilson's promise of "self-determination" planted the seeds for the end of colonialism. It was the start of the American Century and helped define what it meant to be an American.

After the Great War, taxes were assessed by Contra Costa County and each community with an American Legion Post was able to build a Memorial Hall. In 1926 the Danville Legion Hall was dedicated to honor Great War veterans. It served and serves the community, providing a library for 25 years, meeting spaces for scouts, seniors and others, and a place for the Legion Follies, events and dances.

*From November 1 to December 30, 2018, the Museum of the San Ramon Valley will provide a small exhibition in the Waiting Room, featuring the end of the Great War and the Spanish Flu, titled **The War to End All Wars: The Great War Centennial**. See the web site at www.museumsvr.org for more information.*

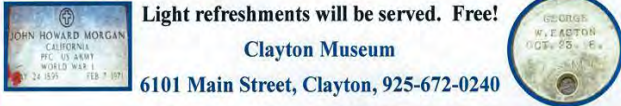
The Clayton HS is also opening a new exhibit to recognize the 100th anniversary of the end of the Great War:

The Clayton Historical Society and Museum
is pleased to present a new exhibit:
"Remembering the Great War: A Community Event"

Come and enjoy this collection of very personal memories, heartwarming to heartbreaking, contributed by you, your family, friends, and neighbors. Family stories, artifacts, letters, poems, and photos document the lives of our people in a time of not only great turmoil, disease, and war, but also of scientific, technological, and social advances 100 years ago.

Opening reception: Friday, October 19, 2018, 5-7 p.m.
Light refreshments will be served. Free!

Clayton Museum
6101 Main Street, Clayton, 925-672-0240





The Antioch Historical Society got its momentum from the 1972 Centennial Celebration – Antioch is one of the oldest cities in the state, having been incorporated in 1872. Residents had been collecting artifacts in garages and attics for some time in hopes of a historical museum. In 1975 the Antioch Historical Society was incorporated with 152 Charter Members. After several years, the Society was able to lease the old Carnegie Library, at 6th and F Streets, from the City of Antioch. The library building was almost too small from the first day of operation, but served our purposes for about 20 years.

In 1999, Contra Costa County offered the former headquarters of the Riverview Fire Protection District, the former Riverview Union High School building, for sale as surplus property. The Society was interested and began its quest by getting the building on the Federal Register of National Historic Places. With the help of the City of Antioch, influential individuals, and a fund-raising campaign, along with a great deal of lobbying, we became the owners of 2.5 acres and a 15,000 square foot 2-story, masonry building – with conditions. We are to be open to the public with no fee, and provide rent-free use to any public agency. The County also retained the option to reacquire the property if we could no longer maintain the building as a museum.

Built in 1910, the Riverview Union High School served as the first high school in east county from 1911 to 1931, when the number of students exceeded the space available. Then the Union High School District was dissolved, Antioch built a new high school on D Street, and Pittsburg took the name “Riverview” for their new high school.

The building’s next life was as engineering offices for the Bureau of Reclamation during the building of the Contra Costa Canal. When that project was finished, Fiberboard Paper Company took over the property as its research center, creating large heating and cooling vaults on the ground floor for testing various types of food packaging. After sitting empty for a number of years, the building was acquired by the Riverview Fire Protection District for use as its headquarters. It was the termination of this use that eventually led to the County declaring the property as surplus.

The many modifications made and the age of the original building have caused considerable work and expense in creating the Museum we operate today. In addition to the history museum, our complex now includes:

- A Sports Legends program honoring those local athletes who have gone on to successful sports careers,
- A small theatre honoring local performers and technicians who have gathered awards in the performing arts, as well as artifacts from previous local theaters,
- A Fire House, home to our Model T Fire Truck, donated by the City of Antioch,
- The McCoy Cookhouse from a local ranch,
- 4 Containers for storage.

As with most volunteer organizations, Officers and Board Members are hard to find and the over-all membership has declined, even though the City of Antioch’s population now exceeds 110,000 residents.

Still, we are blessed with a dedicated group of volunteers that works hard to keep the doors open, maintain and improve our 100+ year-old building, and provide a comprehensive cultural and historical experience for our community, including tours.

*Antioch Historical Museum, 1500 W. 4th St, Antioch
(925) 757-1326*

www.antiochhistoricalmuseum.org

Part of our series on the Historical Societies of our County

From Our Special Collections Room...

German Teen's Gold-Rush Era Emigration To San Francisco, San Ramon Recalled In Family Letter *John Greitzer*

18-year-old Christian Wiedemann, from Germany, shipping off to San Francisco in 1853, surviving a near-shipwreck around Cape Horn, arriving to find many deserted ships in San Francisco, and deciding to stay in town and take a job at a dairy rather than going off to pan for gold...

Deciding in 1865 to make the five-hour trip by ferry and wagon to the San Ramon Valley with some partners to buy ranchland, only to find the best land already taken...

Making a living by cattle ranching and cutting wood, laying the foundations for his future family.



Wiedemann Ranch House, c. 1875. Courtesy Museum of SRV

All that and more was described in a letter written in 1956 by the man's son, Henry F. Wiedemann, to Henry's niece, Roxanne Wiedemann Lindsay, in which he recounted his father's journey. The letter, stored in our Special Collections Room at the History Center, is a typewritten copy of Henry's handwritten letter.

Henry's letter to his niece also described growing up in San Ramon in the late 1800s. During his childhood, he wrote, the town was also known as Limerick. "They had a hard time shaking off Limerick which clung for quite a number of years," he

wrote. He recalled the businesses that thrived in old San Ramon but burned down, and creeks that became wider, deeper, and changed their courses. "I remember one time I was sent to Hayward with a telegraphic message to San Francisco in 1881. Telephones were not yet in general use." He also noted that traveling from San Ramon to San Francisco required riding by horse or wagon to Hayward, riding a train to Oakland, then taking the ferry to San Francisco, a trip of four to six hours. (It can still take four hours, but that's another story.)
See future issues for more finds from our Special Collections Room.

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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 to renew.

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.

New Exhibit on Display at the HC

On Saturday, September 15, the History Center proudly opened its latest exhibit. Called "A TEPCO Teaser," the exhibit showcases the TEPCO chinaware collection of Steve and Priscilla James. Steve (see photo below) is a board member, and our treasurer).



TEPCO (Technical Porcelain and China Ware Company) was in business for 50 years, ceasing

operation in 1968. For most of its life, the operation was in El Cerrito, and for a time it was the largest employer in that town.

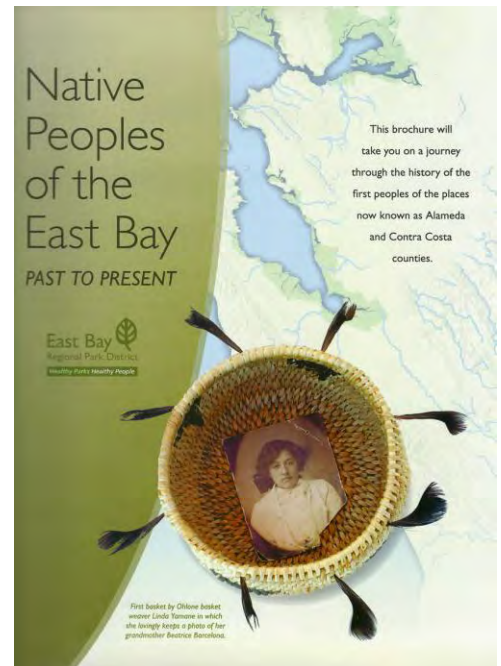
Founded by an Italian immigrant (Giovanni Pagliero), the company supplied restaurants, hotels, private and public organizations, and the military, with its distinctive and robust table ware. The pieces are highly collectable, and there exists a thriving TEPCO club in the county.

We plan to keep the exhibit on display for the rest of the year, so if you have not yet had a chance to see it, please drop by for a look. And tell a friend.

Native Peoples Map Available *Beverly Lane*

A new, colorful brochure from the East Bay Regional Park District is called "Native Peoples of the East Bay: Past to Present" and is illustrated with maps and photographs. On one side is a map showing the tribes of the East Bay with information on their languages and homelands. The other side has information on local Native peoples today and maps of the East Bay during four eras between 1542 and 1865. Linguistic groups in the East Bay at the time of first contact with non-Indians included Ohlone, Bay Miwok and Delta Yokuts peoples.

In essence the brochure summarizes the experience of the many Native American tribes that inhabited the greater San Francisco Bay Area for thousands of years. It also describes the severe impact on an ancient way of life that occurred with arrival of Europeans and others, and the efforts of present-day Native Americans to restore and preserve their heritage. It's a work of great scholarship; nothing like it has been previously available to the general public.



The brochure will be available to the public upon request at all EBRPD visitor centers. It is available at the History Center with a requested donation.

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Clayton Valley Concord Sunrise Rotary Charitable Fund 501-C3



The Contra Costa County Historical Society is proud to announce that it has partnered with the Rotary Club of Clayton Valley/Concord Sunrise. The Rotary Club is well known for its charitable work all over the

world, and the car donation program is a very-low overhead project which raises money to support worthy programs. As a partner, we are eligible to receive 50% of the proceeds of any car sale in which we are designated as the recipient. Here's how it works:

Go to the website at www.Clunkers4Charity.org or www.Cars2ndChance.org and click on the "Donate" button. You will first be asked to "Select a recipient". Click on this line and select the "Contra Costa County Historical Society." Then just fill out the rest of the on-line form, with your name and information about the car you are donating. That's it! Everything else is handled by the folks from the Rotary Club.

"Service above Self" is the motto of the Rotary International. Staffed entirely with volunteers, virtually all of the proceeds from these programs go to the charities they are intended to serve. So if you are considering donating your vehicle, check out the above websites for more information. And consider the CCCHS as the recipient! Your simple click will help us to further our mission of collecting, preserving, and making available the historical documents of our County.

Speaking of Old Vehicles



This pickup truck, a 1936 International Harvester, is the proud possession of board member and past president, John Burgh. On September 8th of this year John entered his truck in the Martinez Car Show and, to his surprise, won an award.

"Amazing to report, the humble machine won a prize! In the Special Interest category.....I think it was the only International there. Last time this



truck won recognition of any sort was at the All American Truck Show in San Jose.....in 1999!"

According to John, "the truck engine is a 78 hp flathead 6- cylinder, pretty typical for that era. Top speed of 45 mph was fine for the mostly-unpaved roads of the day, but hopeless on modern freeways. I rebuilt it 20 years ago, and it continues to be a working truck, albeit requiring driver patience due to it being so slow!"

John has no plans to donate his little green hauler just yet.

Archive Crawl a Success!



Volunteers, From left: Janet Stapleton, Scott Saffler, Kaori Evans, Richard Blue, Priscilla, Peggy Holmes, Maxine Brown, Susan Bryggman.

Well over 100 people participated in our first-ever Archive Crawl on September 29th. We are already looking ahead to next year for a sequel. And a hearty hello to all the folks who looked around and decided to become members. This newsletter is part of the deal.



From The Director



Dear Friends,
After a busy summer, which included a successful Ice Cream Social, the Martinez Vintage Faire, and, for me, a trip by train to Virginia to hear my daughter sing, the Fall began with a bang as we opened our new exhibit “A Tepco Teaser” on September 15 and followed up with our participation in the first ever Martinez Archives Crawl—an event that brought in so many attendees who went away happy that we will almost definitely be holding one again next year. Board member and volunteer Tara Weber deserves major credit for bringing this event to fruition over many months. All of the many volunteers from the History Center who participated deserve our thanks as well (see some of them pictured on page 6).

Since the impetus behind all of these events is to acquaint the general public who are not members with our mission and purpose, we have been gratified by the press we have received and encourage you, as our members, to help us in these outreach events by publicizing them wherever you live. Another way we reach out to the community is to send speakers to service clubs across the County. If you belong to one of these clubs, please let them know about this opportunity by putting in a word that will help us out.

We look forward to the final quarter of the year, during which a good deal of our annual income from members arrives. Watch for the Appeal letter which should come to you about mid-November

As always, please continue to communicate with me and to come in when you can to see us in operation!

Priscilla

From The President

In the last few years, your board has taken steps to be prepared for uncertainties. The archive is protected with a state-of-the-art fire



detection system as well as temperature monitoring and climate control. Beyond the physical protection, we have taken steps to become more financially stable and are continuing our work on creating an endowment fund that will help us to weather future financial storms. In addition, our partnership with the Clayton Valley Sunrise Rotary Club allows us to benefit from the gift of your vehicle donation (see article, pgs 5-6),

Plans are finalized for our annual membership meeting and luncheon, which has been set for **Saturday, January 12**, at the Alamo Women’s Club. We moved the date from December, to avoid competing with the holidays. Our speaker will be Phil Sexton, professional interpreter of cultural and natural resources for California State Parks, who will talk about the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, 150 years ago. You will receive a formal notice in the coming months.

Finally, I am very excited to announce a coming program that many of you will find fascinating and a bit different from our usual historical offerings. On February 9, 2019 at the Campbell Theater in Martinez at 2:00 p.m., Richie Unterberger, San Francisco resident and the author of numerous rock history books will present a program on the history of rock music and Contra Costa County’s influences in the 1960s and 1970s. Save the date. More to come.

Another By-law Amendment

At our Membership Meeting next January, you will be asked to approve the following change to our by-laws: ***Any action by the board must meet with the approval of at least that number of directors required to establish a quorum.***

The wording approved last year had the unintended effect of increasing the quorum number when the number of directors was an odd number.

Buying via Amazon? Remember to avail yourself of Amazon’s **Smile** program, to benefit non-profits, and designate CCCHS as the recipient. Doing so helps the Society and costs you nothing.



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Mark Your Calendar

- 3rd Saturday, October 20** – HC Open, 10-2
- 3rd Saturday, November 17** – HC Open, 10-2
- 3rd Saturday, December 15** – History Center open 10-2. Closed thru the rest of the year.
- Wednesday, January 2, 2019** – HC re-opens
- Saturday, January 12, 2019**– **Annual Meeting & Luncheon, 12 -2pm. Alamo Women’s Club.**
Speaker: Phil Sexton: 150th Anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad.
- 3rd Saturday, January 19, 2019**—HC open, 10-2

Mission Statement

Our Mission is to Preserve, Protect and Provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County, California.

**Contra Costa County Historical Society
Officers and Directors:**

- President.....John Mercurio
- 1st Vice President..... Donald Bastin
- 2nd Vice President.....John Burgh
- Secretary..... John Greitzer
- Treasurer..... Steven James

- Andrea Blachman
- Lisa Gorrell
- Scott Saftler
- Betty Maffei – Member Emeritus
- Oliver Bray
- Beverly Lane
- Tara Weber

Executive Director: Priscilla A. Couden, Ph.D.

Newsletter Editor: Donald Bastin

The History Center

724 Escobar Street, Martinez, CA 94553

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; Find us on Facebook at:

Contra Costa County Historical Society