



BULLETIN

Summer 2020

The El Sobrante Historical Society *History Center*

Donald Bastin, President, ESHS



When the El Sobrante Library caught fire, over two years ago, and caused the library to be closed for much of the intervening time, the community was scrambling to carry on its business. The library has been the heart of our community and a well-used meeting space for well over 50 years. Fortunately, other organizations, particularly the Elks Club, stepped up to provide meeting space while the library was closed. The fire, however, provided an opportunity to mount a badly-needed upgrade. The building is now a better place, roomier, airy, full of light, and updated in ways that could not have been foreseen in 1975, when it was first brought up-to-date. So we got a better library (our

city hall) out of the deal. At the same time, we got something more—a History Center.

With the reconstruction of the Library, Supervisor John Gioia saw the opportunity to refurbish the little house behind the library as well, and make it more usable for community groups. While he was able to find some money for this secondary project, it was made simpler by the fact that a general contractor was already on site, and whose services could be utilized without any break in the flow of work, resulting in savings of time and cost. So it was that the old “Friends of the Library” building was thoroughly gutted, new wiring and walls installed, a bathroom installed, a heating and ac system installed, and the whole thing made ADA accessible. The name has been changed to the “Nancy Fahden House,” in honor of the fact that Nancy Fahden, the first woman supervisor in CC County (and first female president of the Board of Supervisors) used this building as one of her offices during her 16-year tenure. This fact raised the status of the house in our community to that of an historic building, and a perfect place to house the collection of the El Sobrante Historical Society.

We currently share the space in the Fahden House with the Friends of the Library. We have roughly one-third of the total space, 2.5 rooms at the right end of the building, for a total of around 250 sq/ft. Not a large space but a

lot better than nothing. We have had access to the building since late November, and have been busily creating exhibits to best display our collection. The fact that we now have space has spurred many donors to offer their historic items to us. For instance, Richard Oliver, owner of Oliver's Hardware, recently donated a very large 1909 map of the Rancho El Sobrante. This fragile and rare document took weeks to prepare for display, but now hangs proudly in our hallway. We also have received adobe bricks (from the Victor Castro Adobe in El Cerrito) from both the El Cerrito Historical Society and the San Pablo Historical Society. From the Contra Costa County Historical Society we recently received (on a long-term loan) a matrimonial trunk that is of Spanish-Mexican origin, and once belonged to the John Marsh Family. None of these artifacts would have come to us without space to display them.



Just as important, we now have space to display artifacts that we have had for years, but have been unable to display properly. At the top of that list is our collection of Native American stone implements, which can just be seen to the right in the above image, in the vertical glass case. We are very fortunate to know exactly where these items were found--several hundred yards to the east of our HC, right along the banks of San Pablo Creek.



Just off the hallway leading from the entrance is the *Maurice Abraham Room* (named in Memory of our late President and founding member). Here we have our document collection and a visitor-accessible computer to allow for searches of our database. We also have a large collection of items from the old De Anza High School, such as these very old botanical and zoological charts, which are beautifully drawn, and were old even when the school opened in 1955. We were lucky to rescue 15 of these charts just before the school was torn down.

We have also been

fortunate to have been donated display cases. In the photo above can be seen one of the cases placed with us on a long-term loan from the CCCHS. Isabel Ziegler, Supervisory Museum Curator with the National Park Service, has generously donated two custom-made cases for our permanent use. One can be seen at the right. Thanks to Beverly Lane for connecting us with Isabel.



The El Sobrante Historical Society is a young group, having its first meeting of founding members late in 2011. The idea of a society sprang from the impending publication of my history of our town (Arcadia Press) in 2012. Having spent almost two years on this project, my wife (Clementina Diaz) and I had collected far more information and far too many photographs to be contained in one small volume. It seemed a waste to stop there.

I was pleased to find that a fellow resident, Maurice Abraham, had formed the same idea, and had even begun a society website. We got together, and found that we were in complete agreement on the direction of our project. We also found that we had both attended De Anza High School; Maury had graduated in 1960 while I had graduated the following year. But our paths had not crossed while in school.

It wasn't long before we had expanded our website, launched a newsletter, and attracted several others to our "board." By mid-2017, with the help of our treasurer, Steve James, we had completed the paperwork to become a genuine non-profit organization, which was a significant help in attracting donations of both artifacts and money. But without our own display space, we were limited to the willingness of local businesses, and the head librarian, to show our stuff. And often, the displays could only remain for a limited period. And with the library fire, we lost even that venue. At least for awhile.

We now have our museum/history center, and for the most part, the exhibits are complete. We are ready to open to the public. Naturally, the public cannot come in at the present time. The course of the Covid-19 Pandemic has been a roller-coaster ride, and while for a moment it seemed that we might be able to open in early July, that hope has been dashed by the steady rise in infection and hospitalization rates. We have given up trying to predict an opening date, instead following the lead of the library. We will open when the library opens to regular service, whenever that may be.

In the meantime we have our quarterly newsletter, the *Leftovers*, which comes out at the same time as the *Bulletin*. You can find current and past editions on our website, www.elsobrantehistoricalociety.com. You can also find much information about our collections, and, of course, information as to when we might open. Till then, stay safe.



The Los Californianos visit the History Center

Found among the archives: The Los Californianos visited our center Friday, Oct 22, 2010. It was a Friday, when we were normally closed, so volunteers Leland and Avice Taylor joined Betty Maffei in staffing the Center, at that time on Main Street, Martinez, from 12:30 until after 4. Not much has changed in the way research is performed and supported at our History Center on Escobar Street, so we thought our readers would be interested in this report, filed by Betty Maffei at the time. Priscilla Couden

The Los Californianos are descendants of the De Anza Expedition—the first settlers of California, who arrived at San Francisco Bay on March 28, 1776, where they established the Presidio of San Francisco and then Mission Dolores.¹ The Los Californios were holding their annual meeting at the Hilton in Concord, and they had requested some time to research at our Center.

The first gentleman to arrive—David Jackson of Sherman Oaks--wanted to find two family names we all know—Martinez and Castro. His next request made all of us stop and think. He said: "I'm looking for the Martinez and Castro who served in the Civil War." In response, we started with our Civil War files and then moved to court cases. He was here three hours, and found many answers to his questions in our files.



Juan Bautista De Anza



Ken Cusenza and Ruth Craft are from Sacramento. They were looking for their family in the Pacheco land grant. They found the ranchos listed in Leonora Fink’s cards on the ranchos. Leonora was Ruth Galindo’s sister and a member of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. Her work was done with county assessment books and we have those books. Ken and Ruth renewed their membership and, after searching the books, went away happy.

Michael and Margaret Turner from Lakewood were looking for the Martinez family—not the California family, but the ones from Spain. Ann Protopopoff was a member of the Los Californianos. Her family came from Spain and were part of the De Anza trek. Ann’s collection is in our Center and has so much information, the visitors were delighted.

Carol Eber from Petaluma came with a prayer. Her ancestor, who had married a Pacheco in Sonoma County, came from she was not sure where and died in Santa Rosa. She had one bit of research she had found: the name Ortega was listed in something she had read as one of the original families of Contra Costa County. There were Pachecos in the file names, but Ortega was not in our biography of the Pachecos. We really thought we had finally hit a wall, when Lee suggested checking the 1852 census. As all of our friends were leaving and thanking us, Carol said: “Betty, I found Ortega in the census!” There will be much more researching for Carol, but she went back to the meeting happy and left us feeling very satisfied that we had helped all six of our visitors and found something for everyone.

100 Years ago: Tennessee Puts Woman Suffrage Over the Top Beverly Lane

As with any federal constitutional amendment, the last state campaigns to provide three-fourths approval were the most challenging, and the Tennessee story is compelling. Suffragist Carrie Catt came to Tennessee to help bolster the effort, and later wrote that, in all her decades of campaigns, she had never seen anything like the battles there – bribery, lies, alcohol, threats-- the state capitol had it all.

The Tennessee Senate approved the amendment but the House was evenly split, with legislators wearing red (anti) or yellow (pro) roses to show their positions. The youngest House legislator, Harry Burn, wore a red rose, thinking his constituents were opposed. He had grown up on a ranch managed by his widowed mother who had written him urging his suffrage support. When it came to a final vote, he voted “yes” and supported woman suffrage, making Tennessee the 36th and final state to ratify. This astonished advocates on both sides, with the galleries erupting in applause from suffragists and antis yelling their objections. He finally had to flee the raucous chambers.

This is what Burn said the next day:



I want to state that I changed my vote in favor of ratification first because I believe in full suffrage as a right; second, I believe we had a moral and legal right to ratify; and third, I knew that a mother's advice is always safest for a boy to follow and my mother wanted me to vote for ratification.

Final certification put the Susan B. Anthony amendment into the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920, and added 26 million potential new American voters.

The latest “move” is done...

Priscilla Couden

On April 29, three of our most experienced exhibit people—Beverly Lane, Donald Bastin, and Andrea Blachman—came in to the History Center to remove our current exhibits and ready what has been our Exhibit Room to be added to the archives in order to make room for the influx of Contra Costa County



Library materials that were coming our way.

After months of planning, on Thursday, May 28, movers brought shelving and many new (to us) map cases, microfilm cabinets, and filing

cabinets of clippings to the History Center from the Vault of the Pleasant Hill Library and installed them

in various rooms of the Center, including the former Exhibit Room. They also built new shelving, for the hundreds of books, maps, and microfilm that arrived on Friday.



Volunteer John Burgh worked to take down an old shelf in the Lesher Room so that microfilm cabinets could be installed

On Friday, the books arrived.



Exhibit Room transformed.

Editor's Note:

This latest donation is huge, and takes up most of the available space in our Center. For the next few months, Priscilla and our volunteers will assess the contents of the donation to determine the disposition of the materials. Hopefully, a report on this addition to our archive will appear in our Fall Bulletin.



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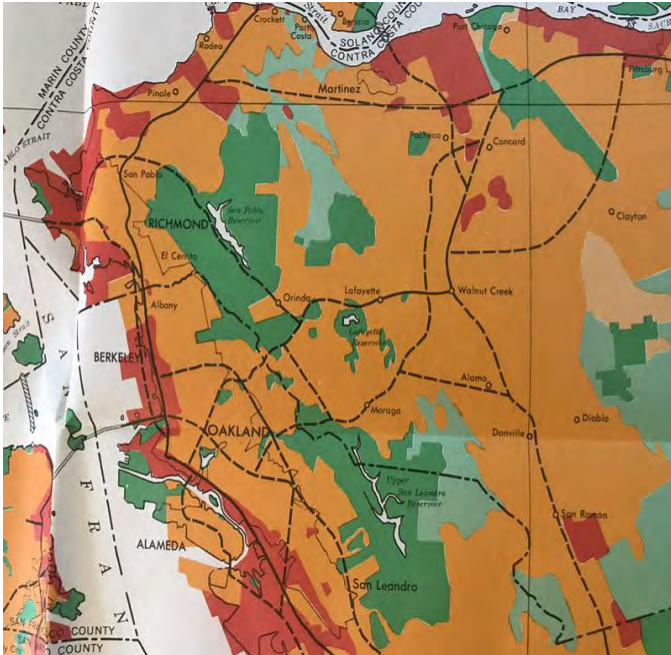
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Your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter via e-mail please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042, or e-mail info@cocohistory.org to renew.

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.

Looking back at the History of the Future

John Mercurio



Years ago, an engineer friend cleaned out his office and gave me a set of maps. He knew I loved maps and that I was interested in history. These maps with a booklet are housed in a heavy cardboard sleeve embossed with the title *Future Development of the San Francisco Bay Area 1960-2020*. We have reached the future but not the version projected in the large colorful maps prepared for this report.

In 1959, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Commerce, commissioned a study of the nine Bay Area counties to ascertain the pattern of growth in the region. In the words of the report: “The study covers a 60-year period to meet the needs of the Corps of Engineers in analyzing projects for the future on a long-range basis.” The research resulted in a series of maps backed up by data which projected where and when various types of development would occur in the Bay Area.

How successful were they in predicting the future population of the Bay Area? Most people would be glad to know that they completely missed the mark. The present population (as of 2019) is 7.6 million.

The estimate in the report is 14.4 million. Having

another seven million folded in among us would result in a Bay Area landscape more like the Los Angeles Basin. And we can assume that for the 20 to 30 years after 1960, the residential development would have been single family homes. The land required to accommodate that development is land now cherished as permanent, public open space.

In 1960, the number of manufacturing jobs stood at 316,000. As of 2017, that number had risen only to 341,000—a modest increase, but the report forecast 1, 279,000 of these jobs.

Looking closely at the map for 2020, three things are readily apparent:

- Industrial development (**red shading**) along the west and north shoreline is extensive and would have required draining and filling marshlands that are now preserved habitat.
- Residential and commercial development (**orange shading**) covers nearly all the county except for the southeastern quarter.
- Several freeways (**dashed black lines**) are proposed through what is now open space and residential area around Moraga, Orinda, Pleasant Hill, Alamo, Concord to Pittsburg (including a new bridge across the Sacramento River) and Vasco Road.

As noted by John King, San Francisco Chronicle's Urban Design Critic in a 2005 article, it was this report and especially the map that showed a huge area of the bay (325 square miles) available for filling, that spurred Kay Kerr, Esther Gulick and Sylvia McLaughlin to form *Save the Bay* in 1961. This was a key moment in the Bay Area's land preservation movement. Subsequent to this, the several land trusts in Contra Costa County and the East Bay Regional Park District played key roles in preserving the undeveloped hills and shorelines in the East Bay, adding to the land already preserved as watershed land by East Bay Municipal Utility District.

Ed. Note: This material (about 25 maps and booklet) is now part of the CCCHS Archive, and is available for research purposes.

From the Director:

Dear Friends,

The past quarter has been a difficult time, as we shelter in place, physically distance ourselves from each other, and try to maintain some modicum of normality in the face of the pandemic. The History Center has been closed to the public since March 13, and volunteers have only very recently begun to return to the tasks that keep the History Center a place where people can find materials that are continuously updated in conformance with our mission to “preserve, protect, and provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County.” The bright side of our situation lies in our website and the access it provides to our materials, as well as the miracles of social media. By email and telephone, queries have continued to come in and be processed. Thanks especially go to Lisa Gorrell, our resident certified genealogist, who has fielded numerous queries from home, as well as to various other volunteers, including retired volunteer Bill Mero, who has helped a number of people with their inquiries. Our Shelter in Place Books specials found on the website include many one of a kind, out of field, books at the low price of \$7.99, tax and shipping included, and we have sold a good number of them. Scott Saftler, our database manager, has recently updated the list, so do have a look and find something you will enjoy!

Aside from handling queries and book orders, we have not been idle. At the end of May, we received the much anticipated Vault Collection from the CC County Libraries. Volunteers are now inventorying the materials, and we plan to have them in our database and available for access in the Fall. We are bursting at the seams and trust that the County will soon make a larger storage facility available to us.

As we look forward to being open again later in the year, I want to wish each and every one of you the very best. Stay well, and keep us in your thoughts.

Yours,

Priscilla



From the President:

Our History Center was partly back in business after the three-month medically induced shutdown, but not for long. We brought our volunteer work force back in to resume work, but then shut down again due to a new upswing in Covid-19 cases. We hope this latest shutdown will be short.

When we return to business, we will face some of the same ongoing challenges and some new ones as well. We have a backlog of archive material that needs to be processed, scanned, and entered into our online databases. We continue our search for more off-site storage space – with climate control systems, easy access, and parking – and have our eyes on several additional computers to create more workstations.

We also face new challenges. One is the adaptation to COVID-19 guidelines within the History Center. We are figuring this out as we go, but we are confident we can find a way to make it work. Another is how our society can best respond to the historic Black Lives Matter struggle. Please see our notice on the last page regarding this issue.

Lastly, we are challenged with the recruitment of a new executive director. Priscilla Couden has held the post for ten-plus years and has done an outstanding job. Priscilla’s handling of so many tasks at once, her knowledge of archival practices, her relationships with other institutions and her commitment to her job will make her difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

We hope to have a new executive director in place sometime in October, to slightly overlap with Priscilla whose last day will be October 31. More information is available on our website at www.cocohistory.org.

Our newest Board member, retired Superior Court Judge Barry Goode, is on our Executive Director Recruitment Committee. He has already been an outstanding contributor. We are delighted to have Barry with us.

I hope you, your family and friends are in good health. I know that Priscilla and our Board of Directors join me in thanking you for your interest and your support.

John Greitzer





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Mark Your Calendar

The History Center remains closed until further notice. In the meantime, we are available online to answer your queries and to offer books for purchase. Please check our website, www.cocohistory.org, for updates.

To our Readers: Because we are living in historic times, the Contra Costa County Historical Society is seeking to collect and preserve images, documents and ephemera related to the Covid Pandemic and the historic **Black Lives Matter** movement for social justice and equality. If you have anything you wish to share or donate, please contact us by mail, email (these are best) or phone.

Mission Statement

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

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