



Founded 1951

Fall 2020

# BULLETIN

## A Sign of the Times

*Editor*



*On the street in front of our home in El Sobrante, about 11 am, September 9, 2020*

In our last issue of the *Bulletin*, we suggested that, as we are living through an historic period in our nation's history, our readers forward to us anything of interest (documents, images, etc.) that pertain to two of the most pressing issues, the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. At the time of our Summer newsletter's publication, we had yet to experience the changes to our daily lives caused by the multiple fires that were to erupt in the western U.S., particularly in California, Oregon, and Washington. At the time of this writing, the fires are still burning, but, hopefully, the worst has passed. The photo above was taken on September 9, which, for most of us living here in the Bay Area, was by far the worst day we had experienced. The heavy smoke, combined with the clouds and fog, created a peculiar and ominous atmosphere, and a twilight that lasted all day long. I have lived in the Bay Area for over three-quarters of a century, and I don't remember a day like this. Your experience was probably much the same. September 9, 2020, has become part of our shared experience, at least for us living in the West.

## Mike McCarron succeeds Priscilla Couden As CCCHS Executive Director

By John Greitzer, Board President



The Historical Society has been going through many changes in recent years, in terms of our collection, our size, our technology, and now, our Executive Director – the only paid staff person in our organization.

After ten-plus years at the helm, Priscilla Couden will retire at the end of October, with Mike McCarron taking over as Executive Director effective November 1. Mike's first day "on duty" at the History Center will be Tuesday, November 3.

### Priscilla Couden

Priscilla began her stint as Executive Director on January 1, 2010, so she will have served for almost eleven years when she retires. During that time, the Society has grown in every imaginable way, thanks in large part to Priscilla's efforts and her tireless commitment to the job.

Her time as our Executive Director caps a career in the humanities, most recently art and history (and what a great combination that is).

Before joining us, Priscilla served as Executive Director of the Walnut Creek Historical Society, overseeing its archives, museum and many special events. She also served as Historian and Publicity Co-Chair of the Contra Costa Performing Arts Society. Earlier on, Priscilla served in several capacities in academia, both at the School of Pharmacy at the University of California at San Francisco and the University of California at Berkeley. She was Acting Department Manager at the UCSF School of Pharmacy, where she helped manage several large capital projects.

Fortunately for us, Priscilla has spent these past eleven years with us, focusing her energy, dedication and expertise on helping the Society grow larger, operate better, and attract more funding. She has excelled in all three areas and many other ways that are too numerous to mention here.

"I have so much enjoyed my years at CCCHS, with its wonderful Board of Directors and terrific cadre of volunteers," she said. "I will miss my daily interactions with every one of them. I am looking forward to turning over the reins to Mike McCarron, who will be a great asset to the Society and its future."

Priscilla plans to spend her retirement following her daughter's opera career (Sara was to have been in the San Francisco Opera's production of *The Handmaid's Tale* this fall). Priscilla also will spend more time pursuing her interests of photography and gardening.

### Mike McCarron

Mike McCarron comes to us from the *U.S.S. Hornet Sea, Air & Space Museum* in Alameda, CA, where he served as Executive Director from 2017 to 2020. Mike managed a staff of over 200 employees and volunteers at the Hornet, an aircraft carrier in World War II and the War in Vietnam but had been mothballed until converted to a museum in 1998.

Prior to that position, he held high-level positions for the City of Millbrae and at San Francisco International Airport (SFO). Those of you who live here in the Bay Area likely saw Mike on many occasions being interviewed on TV news when major events occurred at SFO, since he served as the airport's on-camera spokesman during his time there. His airport posts included Superintendent of Operations, Assistant Deputy Director, and Director of Community Affairs.

"I am greatly honored and excited to become to new Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society," he said. "I look forward to building upon the outstanding foundation of work created by Priscilla and all of the wonderful volunteers of the CCCHS as we work together to continue to grow and expand our outreach and support to the community."

We are sorry to lose Priscilla but congratulate her on her well-deserved retirement. We look forward to working with Mike and we know that more great things lie ahead for us.

### From the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

It has been difficult to write this farewell column, as I have come to know so many of you over the years and will miss being your Executive Director. I decided that citing some of my most precious memories from over the years might be the best way to remind us all of the distance we have travelled together. The list is certainly not exhaustive and it doesn't include many names, for the very reason that so many of you – volunteers, board members, and members at large – have been a treasured part of my experience at the History Center, and I didn't want to leave anyone out. Know that I appreciate each and every one of you.

2010 – my first volunteer appreciation, held at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, where I handed out roses and individually appreciated each volunteer and board member.

2011 – the 60-year anniversary of the CCCHS! While celebrating the anniversary, we also opened an exhibit about the County's involvement in the suffrage movement entitled "The Ladies Have Something to Say" that included a well-attended lecture and movie series. That year too, I enjoyed a full day tour of Berkeley's Bancroft Library as part of attending a Conference of Historical Societies meeting.

2012 – our "Before Bart" exhibit accompanied publication of Board member Beverly Lane's *Before BART: Electric Railroads Link Contra Costa County*. We also dispersed many copies of Dr. Epstein's history of medical health in Contra Costa County, *In Sickness and Health*, and we enjoyed a final tree-trimming party at the 510 Main Street site, accompanied by live music.

2013 – Who could forget? The massive move by Waters Moving over the winter break at the outset of the year of 5,000 sq. ft. of materials from 510 Main Street to our new location at 724 Escobar, a historic building owned by Patty and Tom Telfer. So many volunteers and friends were involved in the move! With a grant from the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation, we also installed our Bookkey Scanner and began to scan all of our 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers. And finally, with a grant from the Martinez Community Foundation, we purchased and installed our first Public Access Computer Terminal (PACT), available to all who come to the History Center.

2014 – we created our on-line e-crater bookstore, launched CCCHS founding executive director Betty Maffei's book *Amelia's Nortonville*, and participated in the Museum Assessment Program, with assessor Katarina Spears, from the Library of Virginia Foundation, whose eventual report gave us a blueprint for future action. We took Katarina to a memorable dinner in Port Costa.

2015 – marked the exciting experience of being selected by the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation to be their non-profit partner for their Leshner Newsmakers series in November. The speaker was



*Priscilla Couden and David McCullough*

historian David McCullough, and the Society's special guests and I were able to meet him and his wife at

a pre-talk cocktail party. As part of the evening, the Foundation introduced the audience to the History Center with a two-minute video they had funded. The video can still be seen by clicking on the emails that go out from my office or on our website.

2016 – Under Board member and volunteer Lisa Gorrell's watchful eye, we began creating the Finding Aid for our collections that would eventually be put on the Online Archive of California (OAC); now, people all over the world would have access to our collections. Since my arrival at the History Center in 2010, this Aid had been a dream of mine, and to see it come into existence was truly a treat! We held our first Author in the Archives event at the History Center and have had a steady stream of Author events ever since. We also opened a new exhibit, "Justice and Judges: The History of the Courts in Contra Costa County." At its memorable opening, Judges Goode, Flier, and Justice Marchiano were speakers. Judge Goode is now retired and has become the newest member of the CCCHS Board of Directors!

2017 – it was a privilege and a joy to be awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for environmental upgrades. Receiving this grant was a boost to our public relations, as well as providing environmental monitoring equipment for the History Center. In 2017, also, a major project in the archives was preparing many of our old hand-drawn assessors' maps for the California Preservation Project's "California Revealed" program that would pay for

scanning these wonderful old (1873-1897) maps.

We also purchased our new PastPerfect collections management software and began the arduous task of transferring information from the database program we have used since the founding of the History Center. We held our 2<sup>nd</sup> successful Scan-a-Thon, held a fundraiser at the Hallmark Store in Pleasant Hill, and co-sponsored a Women's Day event at Diablo Valley College.



*Betty Maffei, 90th Birthday*

2018 – a 90th Birthday reception for Betty Maffei, our founding Executive Director, was a highlight of this year. Also, we hosted a full day field trip for juniors from Deer Valley High School, teaching them to use primary sources, and interns from JFK University began work on a project for the Contra Costa County Special Districts Association that will result in publication meant to help high school students understand the role of local government in their lives. Long-time volunteer Margie Newton began writing a monthly column for Pleasant Hill's Community *Focus* magazine that is still running today. In October, we co-sponsored and participated in the first and very successful Martinez Archives Crawl, which brought more than 100 people of all ages into the History Center and other Martinez venues. Our volunteers provided a marvelous introduction to the History Center and its contents, as tour takers got involved in exhibits from each room of the History Center archives.

2019 – the Finding Aid was added to the Online Archive of California! (Check it out – go to [www.oac.cdlib.org](http://www.oac.cdlib.org), then Contra Costa County Historical Society to see the details of our collections – a boon to faraway researchers and our members). Early in January, retired Sheriff's deputies who had researched the first murder of a Contra Costa County sheriff's deputy came to the Center to present donation checks from several associated organizations

to the Society. Mid-year, we expanded our open hours from one to two Saturdays per month. And, we again hosted 80 juniors from Deer Valley High.

2020 – the Covid-19 virus played havoc with our scheduling, forcing us to close down entirely, though working remotely, for large swaths of time. At this moment, we are back to having five volunteers at a time, socially distanced and masked, in the Center, together with an occasional researcher who has made an appointment. Meanwhile, we have received the very large local history collection of Contra Costa County Libraries. We hope that we will be open to the public before the end of the year, but it will not be until Mike McCarron has taken my place as Executive Director. I welcome Mike and know, having met with him several times, that he will be an outstanding highlight of 2020!

It's been a fantastic journey, and I've enjoyed every bit of it. In all cases, it was the *people* involved – you – that made these years memorable. I will miss you all, every single one of our members and volunteers, who are the lifeblood of the organization. Please remember to thank the volunteers profusely when you have the chance, in appreciation of all they do to keep the CCCHS archives in good shape, providing the foundation of our mission – to preserve, protect, and provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County.

Here's to the next 10-plus years! I will miss you!

*Priscilla*

## From the President

Our Historical Society was created in 1951 thanks to the hard work of a whole committee of people, spearheaded mainly by Judge A.F. Bray and Louis Stein, a Kensington pharmacist and history buff.



There's been a lot of growth since then. Virtually everything about our organization has changed, aside from our ongoing commitment to preserving history. Now, nearly seventy years on, the Historical Society is entering an exciting new phase. We welcome new Executive Director Mike McCarron, who officially takes the helm on November 3, with the retirement of Priscilla Couden after ten-plus years. Mike will become our third Executive Director, succeeding Priscilla and Betty Maffei.

We have enjoyed unprecedented growth during Priscilla's decade as Executive Director. Our archives have grown tremendously (more than our building can handle), our volunteer staff has increased in numbers and expertise, our reputation both locally and online has increased significantly, and of course our technology has kept pace, thanks to Board member Scott Saftler, who has served as our Information Technology chief during his many years with the Society.

Sadly, just as Priscilla is retiring, Scott also will be leaving our Board of Directors after putting in untold hours of blood, sweat and tears (well, hopefully not blood or tears) keeping our computer networks running, obtaining new and better scanners and other devices, and running our website. We will miss Scott's selfless commitment to our cause. I can't count the number of times Scott bailed us out with some technological repair or improvement. There were many times when, as the younger folks say, "we woulda been hosed" without his dedication. We wish Scott all the best as he rides off into the sunset.

Amidst all this, we welcome Mike McCarron. We look forward to working with him and we know the Historical Society will benefit from his talents and energy. We hope those of you who are local will stop by the History Center and say hello to Mike. There is a profile of Mike elsewhere in this issue, providing some background. He is a worthy successor to Priscilla, and I know more great things are to come.

*John Greitzer*

## Scott Saftler leaving CCCHS Board and volunteer staff

*John Greitzer*



and chief of technology, Scott Saftler.

Scott has decided to move on to other things after his current term on our Board expires on December 31. He has been a volunteer with us for about 20 years, and has been on the Board of Directors for approximately ten years now.

Scott previously served as Vice President for Consulting Systems Engineering at Bank of America, and has a degree in Computer Science from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Massachusetts. Given this impressive background, Scott was invaluable to us in upgrading and managing all of our technology, including computer hardware and software, internet connectivity, audiovisual presentation methods, and scanning and printing equipment and processes. Many is the day that I came in to the History Center and saw Scott installing new equipment, or crawling under a desk (or into the ceiling) to hook up computer cables, or going over the new Past Perfect database software with our volunteer staff.

He also provided wisdom and insight as a member of our Board of Directors. He was President of the Board when I joined the Board five years ago, and I have benefitted greatly from his knowledge and advice during this period. I can't thank him enough for his efforts.

We will miss Scott, and wish him well in all of his future endeavors.

This is a time of major change in personnel for the Historical Society. In addition to a new Executive Director coming on board (see article on page 2), we are losing our long-time Board member

**Save the Date!** Saturday, January 23, 2021  
**CCCHS Annual Membership Meeting** featuring  
The History and People of Point Richmond

The CCCHS Annual Membership Meeting will be conducted virtually on Saturday, January 23, 2021. Join your friends in history for the Annual CCCHS Update, the featured presentation: **The History and People of Point Richmond** as well as special thanks to retiring Executive Director Dr. Priscilla Couden and retiring Director and past-president Scott Saftler.



*Donated in 1909, this Indian statue mysteriously disappeared in the 1930s. Replaced 1984. CCCHS Photo*

How much do you know about "The Point"?

This little community is **full** of history and interesting characters. Guest speaker Karen Buchanan will entertain us with an illustrated presentation about the



*Nicholl Knobb, 1902. Prof. Botts and his flying machine. Photo courtesy of Richmond Museum of History*

colorful characters and history of Point Richmond. You'll learn about Professor Botts and his Flying Machine, C.L. Cofer and his Terrestrial Wave Detector, and how a failed duck-hunting trip turned into a business deal that literally put Point Richmond on the map! Q&A to immediately follow.

So, be sure to mark your calendars for January 23<sup>rd</sup> for the first (and hopefully last) virtual CCCHS Annual Membership Meeting. Further details about the virtual event are forthcoming. Check your inbox, mailbox or the CCCHS website [www.cocohistory.org](http://www.cocohistory.org)

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724 Escobar Street,  
Martinez, Ca 94553

## Ballot 2020

### Contra Costa County Historical Society Board of Directors

The following candidates are offered for re-election to the Board of Directors. Elected candidates will serve a 3-year term beginning January 1, 2021.

(Vote for up to three)

Write-ins

\_\_\_\_\_ Andrea Blachman (incumbent)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ John Burgh (incumbent)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Steven James (incumbent)

\_\_\_\_\_

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*Your Signature*

*Printed Name*

*Please fold this ballot in thirds with the mailing address of the History Center showing.*

*Tape seam, affix stamp, and mail before November 30, 2020.*

*If you receive your Bulletin electronically, please print out ballot and follow the instructions above.*

*Thank You!*



724 Escobar St,  
Martinez, CA 945

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**Note:** 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](http://www.cocohistory.org), for updates.

**Mark Your Calendar**

**Saturday, January 23, 2021: CCCHS Annual Membership Meeting.. This will be a virtual meeting.** Featured Event: **The History and People of Point Richmond.** Guest speaker: **Karen Buchanan.** Special recognition of retiring ED Priscilla Couden and past president, director, and volunteer Scott Saftler. Details to come.

**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 Greitzer  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President..... Tara Weber  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President..... John Burgh  
Secretary..... Lisa Gorrell  
Treasurer..... Steven James

Donald Bastin                      Andrea Blachman  
Oliver Bray                         Barry Goode  
Beverly Lane                       John Mercurio  
Scott Saftler     Betty Maffei – Member Emeritus

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

**Newsletter Editor:** Donald Bastin

The History Center

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**Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 am-4 pm**

**Open 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday, 10 am-2 pm;**

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Website: [www.cocohistory.org](http://www.cocohistory.org); Find us on Facebook