



# BULLETIN

WINTER 2011-12



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ANTIOCH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
invite members and friends to  
our  
**SPECIAL CHRISTMAS  
CELEBRATION & LECTURE**

WHEN: SATURDAY  
DECEMBER 10, 2011  
11:00 HAPPY HOUR  
11:45 LUNCH  
WHERE: ANTIOCH MUSEUM  
1500 W. 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET

ROUTE TO MUSEUM:  
CA-4 EAST  
EXIT AUTO CENTER DRIVE  
AUTO CENTER BECOMES  
W. 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET  
MUSEUM IS ON LEFT

Cost of the luncheon and meeting is \$25.00

### *Beyond Words: 200 Years of Illustrated Diaries*

Our speaker will be **Susan Snyder** of **The Bancroft Library**. She has mined Bancroft's riches to compile a volume of often-elusive illustrated diaries -- writings that transcend time and place and creator to remain as fresh and relevant as the day they were written. Susan's other books include *Bear In Mind: The California Grizzly* and *Past Tents: The Way We Camped*, both also based on treasures from The Bancroft Library.

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**RESERVATIONS AND CHECKS MUST BE RECEIVED BY MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2011. PLEASE MAIL BOTH TO: CCCHS, 610 MAIN STREET, MARTINEZ, CA 94553. ENTRE WILL BE FILET TENDERLOIN OR GRILLED CHICKEN BREAST. LUNCH INCLUDES HOUSE SALAD WITH VINAIGRETTE DRESSING, GARLIC ROASTED MASHED POTATOES, HONEY WHEAT ROLLS, CHEESECAKE AND COFFEE OR TEA. VEGGIE ENTRE IS A VEGGIE GRILLER ON A BED OF RICE. CHOICE OF ENTRE:**

**BEEF** \_\_\_\_\_  
**CHICKEN** \_\_\_\_\_  
**VEGGIE** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME(S)** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**EMAIL** \_\_\_\_\_  
**QUESTIONS? PHONE: 925.254.2295**

**TO 2015 AND BEYOND:**  
**A REPORT ON TECHNOLOGY AT THE**  
**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL**  
**SOCIETY**

*SCOTT SAFTLER*

One of the biggest concerns faced by any repository of old documents and photos is the deterioration of the original material due to the ravages of time, moisture and exposure to light and air. The ink fades, the media becomes brittle and eventually that valuable letter signed by a historical figure is unreadable, untouchable and essentially useless. One preservation option is to enclose the documents in a package that protects the document from these environmental factors. This can be expensive, time consuming and often requires that the documents be generally stored away from the public. An alternate option, or more precisely an additional option, is to scan, photograph or otherwise create a digital image of the documents that can be stored on computers and be easily and safely retrieved, viewed and disseminated to others.

Earlier this year, the Contra Costa County Historical Society committed itself to modernizing its technology as part of an overall effort to digitize as much of our holdings as possible. The project, dubbed "History Center 2015", is a multi-year, multi-phase project designed to preserve our documents, maps and photos digitally. In addition, we will be recording these holdings in electronic format, so that we may better deliver information on our available information to researchers world-wide via our web site.

The project got a great kickoff early this summer, as our executive director, Priscilla Couden, was able to secure a \$5,000 "challenge grant" from the Dean and Margaret Leshner Foundation of Walnut Creek. With this money, we have been able to replace all of our old computers at the History Center with new PCs, flat screen monitors and other required peripheral equipment. Also, through a San Francisco-based organization called "Tech Soup" (<http://www.techsoup.org>), we were able to purchase copies of Microsoft's Office 2010 suite of programs

for each of the new PCs. Tech Soup works with software manufacturers to deliver today's software at extremely discounted prices to non-profit agencies such as ourselves, with the large part of the charge being considered either a donation or a grant from the manufacturer to the non-profit organization.

By mid-September, all of the new computers had been purchased, installed and were operational. As with any new technology and hardware, we've had our share of growing pains as our staff adjusts to the new software and our technology gurus deal with some of the stricter security measures introduced in the latest versions of the operating system and applications software. The gnashing of teeth over the new programs as well as the frantic weekend visits to Martinez to straighten out the latest glitch in connectivity seems to have died down considerably, and everyone appears to be dealing with the changes well.

So, as we approach the end of a successful kickoff year of this project, what are some of our goals to keep the momentum going in 2012?

- **Organize and prioritize our digitization projects.** The Center houses hundreds of thousands of artifacts, from photographs to correspondence to court records. To best take advantage of our time and resources, a good "road map" of the tasks ahead needs to be developed to guide our efforts in what may seem somewhat akin to eating an elephant with a teaspoon.
- **Develop a standards guide for the project.** One of the more important components of seeing a project this large to a successful conclusion is to develop a firm yet flexible set of standards for digitizing and cataloging. Clearly, you do not scan and store a picture in the same format that you might store a journal containing the minutes of court hearings. However, other information about the artifacts, such as naming conventions and storage locations can and should be as uniform as possible across the broad spectrum of artifacts to be captured.
- **Recruit and train a dedicated group of project staff.** A lot of hard work and long

- hours will be expended in such a formidable task as this. A good group of people who are dedicated to the task and well versed in the use of the various technologies and the developed standards is important to assure that the project is done in a timely and complete manner.
- **Secure a large format scanner.** Currently, the scanners we have at the History Center can handle documents no larger than 8.5” x 14”, a sheet of legal-sized paper. In order to allow us to easily scan many of our maps and large format ledgers in a single file, we would like to get a scanner that can handle documents up to 11” x 17”. The price of such a scanner is on the order of \$3,000 - \$5000. We are looking at various avenues for funding such a purchase, but any cash donations for the “scanner fund” would be greatly appreciated.

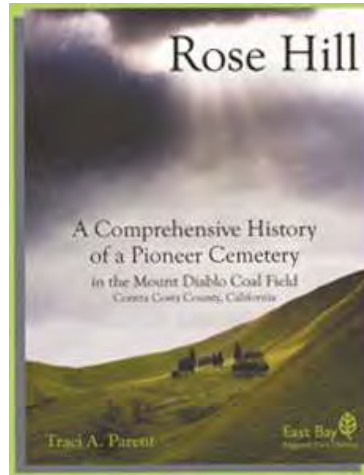
These are but a few of the tasks ahead in the next 3 or 4 years for the History Center 2015 project. As you can see, we can use help at all levels of the project, be it scanning, cataloging, documenting procedures and standards or just helping to maintain the hardware and software we are using. If you are interested in volunteering for any of these areas, please contact us at the History Center in Martinez at 925-229-1042, or drop me a note at [hc2015@cocohistory.com](mailto:hc2015@cocohistory.com)



*Scott Saftler is one of our newer board members, besides being our resident techie guru. For years has been our webmaster. If you haven't seen his work, visit our site at: [cocohistory.com](http://cocohistory.com).*

**Please take a moment to complete the ballot that was inserted into this newsletter, and mail it back to us. Thanks!**

## Traci Parent Introduces New Book at September Membership Meeting



The 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly meeting of the CCCHS Membership was held in the Social Hall of the Community Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, on September 10. Featured speaker was Traci Parent, author of a new book

published by the East Bay Regional Parks District (Traci's employer). For over 30 years, Traci, Supervising Naturalist of Black Diamond Mines

Regional Preserve, has assembled material and information on a small 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery within the



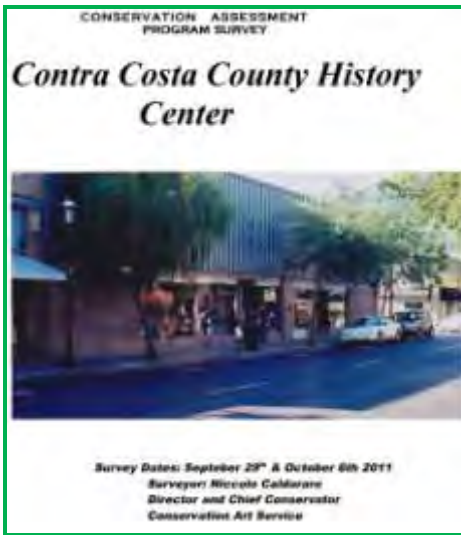
confines of the preserve. The result is a veritable tome which will no doubt prove to be a comprehensive reference guide in this rarefied but fascinating field. The event was a joint effort by the



CCCHS and EBRPD, and was very well attended. Ms. Parent's talk included all aspects of the laborious collection of materials, the painstaking search

for information, and the current techniques of gravestone repair and preservation. Traci Parent is a long-standing member of our board of directors and a former president of that board. We are fortunate to have such talent in our group. Her book can be purchased at the History Center in Martinez.

## Special Grant funds Conservation Assessment of History Center Archives



With the funding of a special grant from the CAP (Conservation Assessment Program) the History Center was recently visited by conservator

Niccolo Caldararo, who conducted an extensive assessment of the physical facility that houses our collection as well as an assessment of the overall management and health of our organization.



*From left: board member Harriett Burt, Niccolo Caldararo, Director Priscilla Couden, board VP Beverly Lane, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP Melissa Jacobson and board member John Burgh*

Over a 2-day period, Mr. Caldararo inspected our archives and conducted interviews of our staff, board members, and a number of volunteers. We have just received a draft of his report, to be reviewed by our board and returned with our comments. Not only will this report help us to preserve, protect, and present our holdings, but it will assist us in our efforts to secure grant funding in the future.

## CCCHS Receives Valuable Donation From *West County Times* ~ Donald Bastin

As many of you are no doubt aware, the local newspaper agency, the Bay Area News Group, has been suffering hard times, financially. As a result, newspapers have been consolidated, with the total number of offerings substantially reduced. As a part of this re-structuring, the *West County Times* building in Richmond has been vacated. With no storage space for the newspaper archives in that building, I was contacted by veteran columnist Chris Treadway, to inquire if I knew of any group that might take their newspaper files and photos, going back to the early 1970s. I fielded this question to our board, who, not unexpectedly, enthusiastically voted to accept this donation.



*From left, WC Times employees Dave Boitano, Chris Treadway, Dora Scardina*

On Tuesday, October 12, I met with Priscilla Couden, our executive director, and board members Webb Johnson and John Mercurio at the *WC Times* office, to have a look at the

donation. It was immediately clear that there was much too much material to be hauled away by private car or even a pickup



truck. We would need the help of a professional mover. Fortunately, our president, Andrea Blachman, was a good friend of the operator of a local moving company, Waters Moving, who very

generously offered to take care of the move on short notice and on favorable terms.

On October 25, right on time, the three professional movers from Waters arrived at the *Times* building and moved file cabinets full of photos, news clippings, slides and negatives, and completely filled their large truck. Within a few hours, the entire load was deposited at the History Center. Since the files were already arranged within their original cabinets, the contents were immediately accessible to our patrons. This is a tremendous acquisition, and helps to round out a collection which, until now, was light on the history of West County.



*The amazing movers, from left: Anthony Duarte, Juan Hernandez, Daniel Fasbin*

We are deeply indebted to the generosity of Ken and Paulette Waters, owners of Waters Moving and Storage, for making this move not only possible but painless. We heartily recommend this company and their great employees.

## **CCCHS Represented at First Annual History Expo**

On Saturday, October 22, the Hercules Historical Society hosted their first-ever History Expo, at the Hercules Library. This event was open to all historical societies within Contra Costa County. The purpose was to showcase each group to the public and to establish better communication within the various and varied historical societies that operate within the county.

The library itself is a modern and beautiful structure, very open and airy, and with many amenities to attract researchers and students. The groups represented were: Hercules Historical Society, Contra Costa County Historical Society, Pinole Historical Society, Rodeo Historical Society, Point Richmond Historical Society, El Sobrante Historical Society, and El Cerrito Historical Society. Each group brought informational material to give away and most had local history books to sell.



*From left, WC Times columnist Chris Treadway, Traci Parent (manning the CCCHS table) and Bonnie Jo Cullison (Pt. Richmond HS)*

Though public turnout was somewhat light, the event was deemed a success and will probably be held again next year. It was agreed that publicity needed to be better and that, should additional groups become involved, a larger space will be required.

## **Last Chance to Celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Women Winning the Right to Vote in California, 1911**

Our exhibit on this landmark event will close for good on November 23, if you have not had a chance to come in and see it yet, mark your calendar now!



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## From the Executive Director:

Dear Friends,

It's been a wonderfully busy Fall season at the History Center--beginning in late August, with our new computers, (thanks to the Leshner Foundation) and continuing in September with the Conservation Assessment Program (CAP) assessment of our collections by Niccolo Caldararo (thanks to a grant from federally funded Historic Preservation). Integrating into our archive a very large acquisition from the *West County Times* was the main challenge for October, but in October and November, we also accomplished our Lecture Series that accompanied our exhibit on the Centennial of Woman Suffrage (soon to close... please come see it if you can). Phew!



Through it all, our volunteers worked on, closer to their individual goals... Betsy worked to finish recording all the documents in one Veale box, Mike and Kaori have their own boxes they are finishing up. Larry hopes to finish his entry of our accessions into the database by the end of the year. Margie works on the membership files and is entering more court cases into the database. Jennifer continues to inventory our library but has added some administrative tasks. Lee, Janet, and new recruit to the photo department Daniel continue to organize and scan our many photos. Susan and Avice answer the many queries that come in each week, MaryAnn keeps up with finding and filing obituaries, and Betty and DVC volunteer Leila are working together to get the Sharkey donation processed for the archive. Becky enters the log of Somersville postal money orders into the computer and Mark has begun the long task of scanning our Immigration and Naturalization documents. Dean has been inventorying our collections. And Saturday volunteers Bill, Kathleen, Scott, Dean, Mark, and John work on various projects and interact with the people who visit the Center.

Volunteers Dick, Diane, and Carole are all on medical leave. Long time volunteer Bill has been on vacation since moving the database software to the new computers, but he will return soon. Meanwhile, his new book on the place names of Contra Costa County has been published and is available at the Center.

I cannot say how grateful I am to all of these volunteers, and I invite each of **you** to come in and donate two to six hours a week to continuing the work of this great organization. The work is interesting (imagine coming on a letter regarding a speeding ticket for driving a horse or a request for Sheriff Veale to find one a wife) and enjoyable. And you will make a long-term contribution to the Society's mission of disseminating information about the County to any and all! Please call me to volunteer!

A very happy Holiday season to you! ---Priscilla

## From the President:



It hardly seems possible that we are about to celebrate Thanksgiving, and then Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Years. The Society has had a very good and productive year, thanks to an energetic and committed board of directors who have provided excellent leadership. We thank our capable Executive Director Priscilla Couden who has introduced new and innovative ideas to the management of the history center and has also found the time to apply for several grants that have helped us meet our obligations, and we are grateful for the dedicated and hard working volunteers who make it all happen. We want to thank board members Mario Menesini, Lucille Irish and Audrey Katzman for their many years of service, and welcome Harriett Burt of Martinez who brings enthusiasm and a vast amount of experience and interest in our mission.

If you haven't already done so, please take the time to see the current display – *The Ladies Have Something to*

*Say – Celebrating California’s Equal Voting Rights Centennial, 1911-2011.* It focuses on the fascinating campaign women ran to bring all people the vote in Contra Costa County and California. These ladies were so smart and sophisticated in the innovated ways they brought the message to the men who would ultimately vote to give women the franchise, and to the women who needed to be educated about their rights. The display will be up until November 23 when the festive Christmas decorations will take over the front window of the history center.

We thank those who so generously continue to support our mission, and encourage each of you to remember us as you write those end-of-the-year checks to your favorite charity. Best holiday wishes to you and to your families! ---Andrea Blachman

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New     Renew     Gift

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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Please check here if you would prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail—saves money and trees

#### DUES:

Individual \$30     Couple \$50     Sponsor \$75

Patron \$150                       Corporate \$500

Benefactor \$1000               Student \$15

*Remember that your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter electronically, please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042*

## Capturing the Past Before It’s Gone

*Donald Bastin*

For some time now, I’ve made it a habit to carry along a camera with me wherever I go. Not to capture the usual travel stuff, but to capture places and things which are about to be lost or to be significantly changed in some way. It is amazing to realize how often some significant landmark has been erased and no one has thought to record the event.

About a year ago I was passing the old Walter T. Helms Junior High School, in San Pablo, which was in an advanced state of demolition.



Fortunately my camera was with me. Even though there were workers around, no one questioned me as I wandered around the building and even slipped inside, snapping as many pictures as I could.



But what to record? Architectural features, certainly. Helms was opened in 1950, and incorporates many interesting design features typical of the era. It even seems to draw on 1930s motifs, as is shown in the photo at the left.

Some things are absolutely unique to the site, such as the tiles, made by the students and glued to the wall, shown here. Who knows what happened to these charming and priceless artifacts.



As far as I know, the pictures that I took of the old Helms school are the only ones to document its passing. So keep your camera with you and keep your eyes open for that chance to capture the past.

**Mark Your Calendar:**

- November 19—History Center open 10-2
- November 23—Exhibit Closing “The Ladies Have Something To Say”
- December 10—**General Membership Meeting**, Antioch Museum. Presentation by **Susan Snyder**—“Beyond Words: 200 Years of Illustrated Diaries.” See front page for details
- December 17—History Center open 10-2
- January 21—History Center open 10-2

**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**

**Officers and Directors:**

President.....Andrea Blachman  
 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President.....Beverly Lane  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President.....Melissa Jacobson  
 Secretary.....Webb Johnson  
 Treasurer.....Audrey Katzman

|                                |                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Donald Bastin                  | John Burgh       |
| Harriett Burt                  | Mary-Ellen Jones |
| Kathy Leighton                 | John Mercurio    |
| Traci Parent                   | Scott Saftler    |
|                                | Paula Wherity    |
| Betty Maffei – Member Emeritus |                  |

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

**Newsletter Editor:** Donald Bastin

The History Center  
 610 Main Street, Martinez, CA 94553  
 Phone: 925-229-1042 fax: 925-229-1772  
**Open Tuesday thru Thursday, 9 am – 4 pm**  
 Now open 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday, 10am – 2 pm!  
 Email: [info@cocohistory.com](mailto:info@cocohistory.com)  
 Website: [www.cocohistory.com](http://www.cocohistory.com)

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60th Anniversary 1951 - 2011

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