



BULLETIN

SPRING 2012

BEFORE BART:

Electric Railroads Link Contra Costa County

Just a century ago Contra Costans began to use a new and exciting mode of transportation, the electric railroad. These railroads provided fast and flexible trips for people and freight. They also served as a transition between steam railroads and motor vehicles.

In Central County the **Oakland, Antioch & Eastern Railway** opened electric service from Oakland to Sacramento in 1913. Extending 85 miles to the



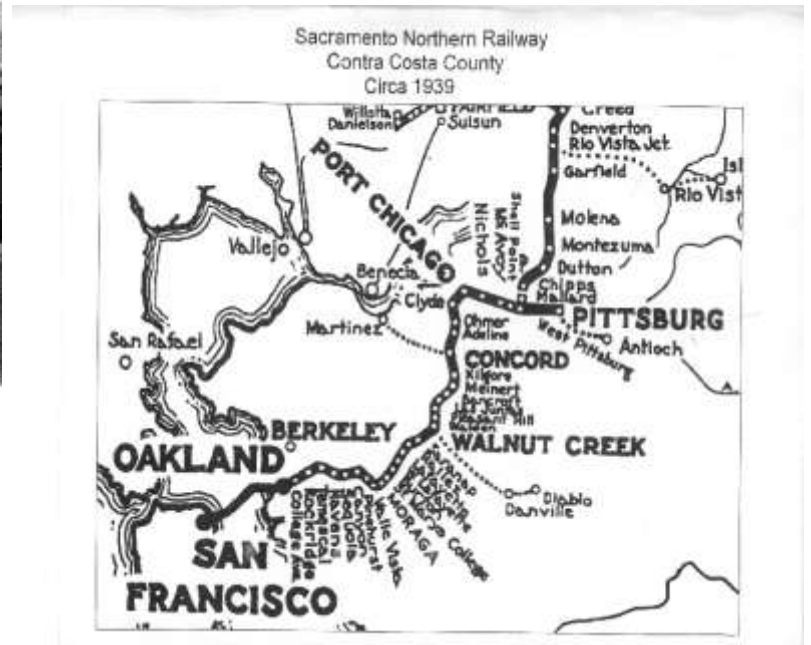
Oakland pier through the Redwood Peak Tunnel, it had stops at Lafayette, Walnut Creek, Concord and West Pittsburg (among others) with branches to Danville, Pittsburg and Walwood. Beginning in 1915, the trains used a unique all-steel ferry to cross the river at today's Bay Point and connect to the Northern Electric Railway in Sacramento.

Richmond's **East Shore & Suburban Railway** began in 1904 and was absorbed into the East Bay's **Key System** in 1922. Two branches went to Point Richmond and Alvarado Park.



East Shore & Suburban car, Macdonald Ave, at Southern Pacific station, Richmond, 1907. View east.

In 1929 several electric lines merged to become the **Sacramento Northern Railroad**. At its peak in the 1930s, the Sacramento Northern became the longest electric interurban railway in the country, with main line service from Oakland to Chico for 177 miles.





Moraga, St. Mary's Station, 1940. Photo Courtesy of Tom Gray



Walnut Creek Station. Western Railway Museum Archive

Special electric trains served the county

Soon after it opened, OA&E Railway passengers came to Mount Diablo for day-long excursions, promoted by Robert N. Burgess who was constructing a snazzy new country club at the southern base of the mountain. Locals called the trains "Millionaires' Specials" as they came to visit the mountain and hear about the new Mount Diablo Park Club, which opened in 1916 complete with a club house, lake, tennis courts and golf course.

For several years, trains called "The Produce Cannonballs" brought fresh vegetables, fruit and fish to the Oakland Produce Market from the county's farms.



During the Pan-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, which celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal, special electric trains brought visitors to the Oakland pier for the ferry ride across the Bay to San Francisco. Contra Costa Day was April 3, 1915.

Trains Traveled East and West

For trips to San Francisco, electric riders from Contra Costa took the ferry at the Key System's Oakland pier from 1913-1939. Trains went directly to San Francisco when the lower deck of the new San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge opened to rail service in 1939.

Trains going east crossed the San Joaquin River from today's Bay Point using the ferry *Ramon* (1915 to 1954) through Chipp's Island, then travelling over a bridge and trestle to Solano County. It was the only interurban railway ferry in the United States.

Eventually versatile new automobiles and trucking services rendered electric railroads obsolete. Sacramento Northern passenger service ended in 1941 and freight service began to phase out in 1957.



For a brief period, during World War II, electric railway passenger service was

revived. From 1942 to 1945, the **Kaiser Shipyard Railway** delivered workers from all over the East Bay to Richmond's shipyards.

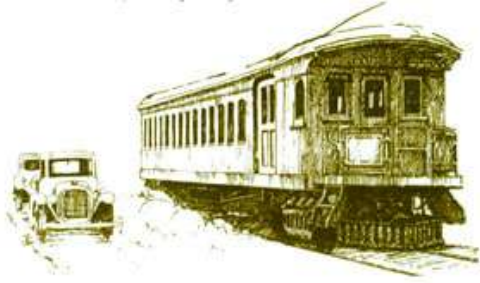
Today the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) and the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail travel on part of the Sacramento Northern's original right of way. Electric trains live on as BART trains link communities throughout Contra Costa County and beyond. Gone, but not forgotten.

Sources: Harre W. Demoro, Irma M. Dotson, Garth G. Groff, Ira L. Swett. Written by Beverly Lane.

Large Crowd Turns Out for “Before BART” Opening, Saturday, January 21

Weeks of hard work and diligent research paid off with a

large and enthusiastic group of visitors at the opening



day of the “Before BART” exhibit.

There was something for everyone. Even the kids had a “hands-on” toy train layout.

Special thanks go to John Burgh (left) and Bill Swindell,

who constructed and laid out the little, dynamic trolley car display. John built the table



while Bill laid out the intricate array of wires which power the model trolley. According to Bill, getting the car to run slowly and continuously, over the many



little “dead spots,” was quite a challenge.

According to John, the car does two laps per minute, or about 3 miles in an average 7-hour day.

He calculates that, at the end of the exhibit, June 28,

the little model passenger car will have racked up over 200 miles, or longer than the distance of the SN at its peak!

In addition to the many historic photographs, documents, and artifacts, most of the visitors were captivated by the video display of the Sacramento Northern line, mostly in color, and which runs on a continuous loop.



The “Before BART” exhibit will remain on display at the CCCHS History Center through June 28.

Acknowledgments:

Contra Costa County Historical Society
Museum of the San Ramon Valley
Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society

Exhibit Created By

John Burgh Beverly Lane Ralph Cozine
John Mercurio Bill Swindell Jerry Warren

CCCHS Ex. Director Priscilla Couden

Volunteers

Donald Bastin, Lind Higgins, Doug Lane,
Bill Mero, Lee Taylor, Jan and Jim Trolan,
Stuart Swiedler (eastbayhillproject.org),
logo by Paul Dunlap

Donations from:

Robert Campbell, Sr., Andrea Blachman,
Bill Swindell, Jim Tuggle, Karl Wandry,
Lisa Gorrell, Bob Ferguson, Robert Reichert.
Historical Societies: Concord, Lafayette, Moraga.

Unique Volunteer Opportunity!

Docents wanted for the Rosie The Riveter WWII National Park in Richmond. *Contact Lucien Sonder: Lucien.Sonder@nps.gov. Or call: 510-232-5050, x6622*

MORE TRAIN STUFF!

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY invites you to a LECTURE

Saturday, March 17, 2012 12:30 PM – 3:00 PM



HOW AN ELECTRIC RAILROAD IMPACTED THE GROWTH OF CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

Stuart J. Swiedler, our speaker, will use rare, historic images from the East Bay Hills Project website to trace the considerable role the Sacramento Northern Railroad and the Oakland Antioch and Eastern Railway played in helping populate Contra Costa County and surrounding areas.

The route of the Sacramento Northern created a unique transportation corridor connecting



Contra Costa and Alameda counties during a period of rapid growth in the early to mid-20th century. Most of the images you will see are not yet on the website and many have never appeared in print or shown in any presentation.

Swiedler's lecture will be held in Martinez at Veterans Memorial Hall located on Ward Street, corner of Court Street.

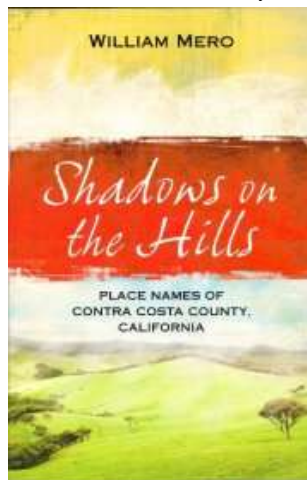
Admission: \$10 payable at the door. Guests are welcome. Light refreshments will be served following the lecture.

You are invited to visit the History Center at 610 Main Street to view a related exhibit titled: Before BART: Electric Railroads Link Contra Costa County.

Questions? 925.254.2295 or 925.387.5385

Two New Local History Books Available Now at the History Center

Shadows on the Hills, written by long-time volunteer Bill Mero, tells the story of how places in the county got

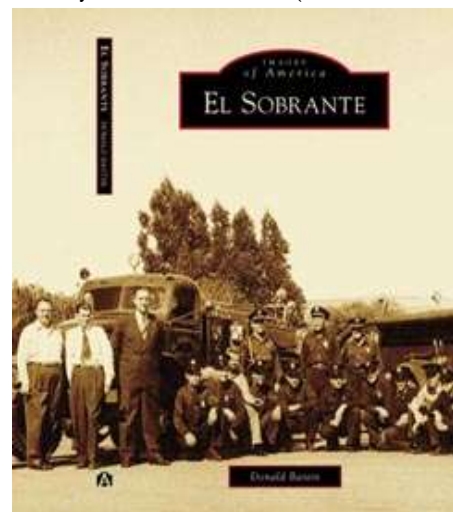


their names. “One of my goals was to stimulate an interest in local history. Almost everything that ever happened in the settlement of California also took place in our little Contra Costa County. Our historic place names and their stories reflect these events—from range wars, Indian troubles, famous

brothels, logging of the redwoods, wheat bonanzas, coal mining, to our very own silver and copper rush,” said Mero, a retired geologist for Chevron.

Shadows on the Hills is available at the Contra Costa County History Center, 610 Main St., Martinez, and can be bought online at the History Center website, cocohistory.com, for \$19.95 plus shipping. (*Excerpts from Days Gone By column, CC Times, by Nilda Rego, 2-5-12.*)

Our newest offering from Arcadia Publishing is a history of the community of **El Sobrante**, in West County. Put together by board member (and *Bulletin* editor) Donald Bastin, this work contains many images from the CCCHS archives, but considerably more from El Sobrante residents, most of which have never been seen before. Cost is \$21.99.



THE SUFFRAGISTS MARCH ON!

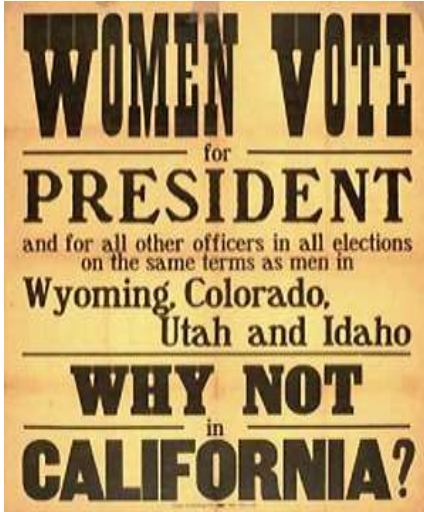
The Martinez Historical Society

and
The Contra
Costa County

Historical
Society

Present

A Suffrage
Film Fest



3/19/12 ONE WOMAN, ONE VOTE

The 72 year history of struggle before victory –
1848-1920

3/26/12 CALIFORNIA WOMEN WIN THE VOTE

An amazing eight month campaign to Election Day –
Oct. 10, 1911

4/2/12 IRON-JAWED ANGELS

Hilary Swank stars in a compelling dramatization of
the tumultuous final years of struggle

Location: **MARTINEZ VETERANS HALL**
930 Ward Street, Martinez

Time: 7:00 p.m. (doors open at 6:30)

Suggested Donation: \$5

Each film will be followed by discussion.

The CCCHS Board of Directors

Warmly thanks our donors who

*Contributed to our Special appeals in
2010 and 2011:*

Jeff & Jennifer Apkarian, Carol Baier, Douglas Baker, Joseph Barkley, Basin Research, Donald Bastin, James Benney, Richard & Nancy Bentley, Andrea Blachman, Roy Bloss, Eileen Bordenave, Lorraine Bray, John Buffo, John Burgh, Harriett Burt, Sherida Bush, Harold Christian, Nancy Colchico, Condor Country Consulting, Kevin Cornish, Charles & Susan Couch, Priscilla & Henry Couden, Ralph Cozine, Paul Craig, Rosemarie Curzi, Gary Darnsteadt, Conrad Diethelm, Paul & Betty Dunlap, Ruth Caroline Dyer, Carl & Joanne Elkinton-Walker, Dr. Marvin & Ruth Epstein, Walter & Jean Foskett, Bernard Freedman, Clifford Gambs, Gary Ginder, Betsy Glen, Rita Gott, Stanley and Janice Lee Hansen, Anita & Pete Heiser, Hercules Historical Society, Neal & Lind Higgins, Robert Hoyer, Melissa Jacobson, John Keibel, Jerry Kent, Jeannine Kikkert, Rebecca King, Darrell Klasey, Joe B. Knight, Jr., James & Beverly Lane, Paul Larsen, Bernice M. Lasell, Wayne Lawson, Stephen & Melissa Lawton, Daniel J. Leer, Harry & Lois Lindstrom, Betty Maffei, James & Claire Marchiano, Joseph Mariotti, Dana Matthews, Diana McEwen, Cindy McKenna, Dean McLeod, Art McNulty, Mario Menesini, Catherine Mercurio, John Mercurio, Kathleen & Bill Mero, Claudia Mauzy Nemir, Margie Newton, Kay & William Norman, Ron & Shirley Nunn, John H. Nutley, Orinda Historical Society, Tom Patterson, Roy Peak, Frank & Deanne Pedroni, Kathleen Petricca, Mary Piepho, Linda Pizza, Nilda & John Rego, Elizabeth Rimbault, George Russell, Marian Sauer, Mary Ann Savignano, Igor & Shirleymae Skaredoff, Carol & Jerry Schmalenberger, Michael Traynor & Janice Blyth, Earl Turner, J. Michael & Pamela Walford, Nancy Wiedemann, Stephen Weir, Victor Westman, Charles & Nora Whisenant, Claudia Whitnah, Col. George R. Wiley, Janet Wilkins, Carter Wilson, Jean Wilson, Sheridan Winfield-Hale, E.H. Winslow, Ingrid Wood, Marciel Hart Wood, Rick & Kitty Yarborough.



On display now! The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is hosting a distinctive exhibit of unusual collections. Thru April 28. 205 Railroad Ave, Danville. (925) 837-3750. MUSEUMSRV.ORG.

In Memoriam

**Harmon Howard
Jean Miller
George Wiles**

Pittsburg Historical Society

(Part of our series on local historical societies)



The founders of the Pittsburg Historical Society could never have envisioned such a grand museum as we have at 515 Railroad Avenue. The group that came together for a common purpose, preserving the history of Pittsburg, had deep roots in this colorful river town and wanted following generations to know about its people and evolution. With no space of their own, they began with temporary exhibits held in various places. This group was made up of the pioneer Buchanan family, Norma Daly, the O'Hara and Davi families, Marie Harper, the Milton Killoughs, and Theresa Gatto Freed.

Needing to find permanent space, the founders obtained a former Chevron clubhouse which was moved to the edge of City Park, where for many years their collection grew to the point of overflow. In the 1990s ownership of the closed Southern Pacific Railroad Depot was tentatively secured. On the eve of transfer the building was completely destroyed by fire. Then President Pat Firpo and then Curator Marti Aiello had their eye on the vacant Pittsburg Post Dispatch building. They worked with the Leshner family and purchased the building in 1997. Built in 1926, they were unable to open to the public until it was retrofitted for earthquake stability. Thanks to grants from the City of Pittsburg, local industries, and others and under the supervision of Joseph Barraco, architect and former society president, the building was remodeled and a grand opening was held in 2003. In 2006 the Albert D. Seeno Family donated \$250,000 to the museum and the history of Pittsburg lives on.

Today the museum hosts a large collection of artifacts, historical photos, and a library of papers, maps and reference books. Open



Wednesday, 1-4 pm and Saturday, 10-2.

Officers: Ed Caruso, President; Denise Lawrie, 1st VP; Diana Gunter, 2nd VP; Secretary, Fran Confetti; Treasurer, Joan Evola; Curator, Rosemarie DiMaggio. *(Edited by Denise Lawrie and Gail Pearson)*

Visit us at: Pittsburghhistoricalsociety.com

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

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Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

E-Mail _____

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 via e-mail please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042

From the Executive Director:

Dear Friends,

As Valentine's Day comes and goes, I want to wish each of you a lovely spring and a great New Year.



It's hard to believe, but my second year as Executive Director has come and gone. Well into my third year, it is still a joy to work with our board members, who have been such a wonderful "hands on" group, and with our volunteers, as their numbers increase. I also want to note that the Chevron Federal Credit Union (CFCU) has now been a partner for more than a year. In that capacity, not only have they helped us to grow our membership, but they have funded several printing projects for us and underwritten our latest exhibit, Before BART!

Many people have visited the exhibit, including an entire 3rd grade class. Each child who visited was to prepare a 1-minute speech for his or her class. I hope you will have an opportunity to visit the exhibit as well.

As more and more people come to the History Center both to see the exhibit and to do research, I find that I really need some volunteers who would be able to spend a two to three-hour period on a regular basis, to act as greeters. The work will not be arduous, and the rewards of meeting and greeting the variety of individuals who come in to the Center are great. Please consider volunteering in this capacity. Training will be provided.

Planning for the coming year includes increased digitization of our archives, as well as beginning to incorporate the West County Times materials into the archives and more outreach to the community. Come and support our honoring the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage when it continues with a 3-evening film fest in March and April. Our Before BART exhibit will be up until the end of June. If you belong to an organization that would like to hear a speaker

from the Contra Costa County Historical Society or would be interested in a tour of our archives, please let me know.

As always, I look forward to meeting you either at a membership meeting or in the History Center. Please stop by for a visit.

Sincerely, Priscilla



President's Message:

The Contra Costa County Historical Society and its History Center are alive and hopping these days. Several new volunteers have joined us to help manage our many archival resources. And our new exhibit on the electric railroads of the County has been drawing many visitors.

An Honorary Board for the CCCHS is beginning this year as well. We are looking forward to the support and advice of these leaders throughout the County: Tom Butt, Rosemary Corbin, Steve Leshner, Nancy Parent, Gwen Regalia, Bill Sharkey, Gayle Uilkema and Steve Weir.

Please join us at the first CCCHS Program on March 17 which features Stuart Swiedler talking about the impact of the electric railroads on our County. We are co-sponsoring a film festival on Women's Suffrage films in March and April. And remember that the History Center is open on third Saturdays.

Beverly Lane

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