

A Leap of Faith

At almost the same instant that Barack Obama was declared the winner in the recent presidential election, our board took a huge step and accepted the lease offer on a nearby property, at 724 Escobar Street. It was not an easy decision, as there are many unknowns.



As on the national level, it seemed that the board understood that it was decision time. And just as the country took a final look at the candidates and made up its mind, even though there was little certainty as to the course of future events, your board took a similar action, with faith that it will prove to be a wise decision. Time will tell.

Now we must begin the difficult task of planning the move, which will take place within the next two months. Fortunately, the new building is only steps away, which may allow us to take some of our materials in wheeled carts over a period of several days or even weeks. In any case, we are pleased to be able to remain in downtown Martinez, as we are a county institution and Martinez is the county seat. Also, we will remain just as available to our volunteers and our

patrons, which is no small thing.

October Board meeting in the new building.



The new building is somewhat larger than our current site, and broken up

into many spaces (it previously served as the Sheriff's Office), so our move team is diligently figuring out how to distribute our collection. At our next membership meeting in December, we hope to arrange tours to our new digs (see next page).

Please Join Us!

Contra Costa County Historical Society Annual Meeting and Reception *A historic occasion!*

Sunday, December 9, 2012
1-5 p.m. @ the History Center
610 Main Street, Martinez, California
Cost: \$20 donation for party and building fund

Annual meeting and Program – 2 p.m.

- 2012 Annual Report
- Election of new Board members
- Meet the Honorary Board

Speaker: “The Civil War Comes Home” Harold Helm

Reception

Holiday gift book sale

- CCCHS authors signing their books
- New books for sale and \$1 sale table

Holiday refreshments

Holiday Exhibit at the History Center

- Reminisce about some of the toys on display

Farewell to Main Street-Possible visit to our new location

The Tassajara Grammar School

This year the Tassajara Grammar School began a new life. It is now owned by the Museum of the San Ramon Valley which has committed to



preserving the 1889, National Register-eligible one room school house on Finley Road in south Contra Costa County.

Here is a history of this lovely little gem.

The Tassajara School House

Beverly Lane

Today the Tassajara School House sits in rural, restored splendor on its original site at 1650 Finley Road in Contra Costa County's Tassajara Valley. A belfry with bell tops the building, original outhouses, a restored stable, picnic tables, flag pole, handicapped restrooms and a redwood water tower complete the picture. From January to June, the Museum of the San Ramon Valley provides a living history program for every third grader in the SRV Unified School District -- 2800 students in 2012.

The Beginnings

This School House was the second Tassajara grammar school, built when the student population outgrew a smaller structure. On Jan. 12, 1889, ten out of ten Tassajara School District voters approved the sale of bonds amounting to \$1700 to purchase a lot, build and furnish a school. Peter Anderson was paid \$200 for an acre of his ranch land on Finley Road.

The *Livermore Echo Newspaper* on March 14, 1889, reported that the contract for the new school was let to J. L. Weilbye of Sunol. In those days, such a small building would have been constructed soon after the contract was signed.

Students from first to eighth grade walked, rode horses and took buggies to get to school. In 1889 Richard D. Williams was the teacher and 41 students attended beginning that August. Roger Podva (born



in 1884) began school in 1890 and said there were 42-75 students at the school

when he attended, sitting two to a desk. They learned mental arithmetic, reading, geography, spelling and writing. A picture of George Washington hung on the wall.

The *Contra Costa Gazette* announced that the Tassajara School children raised their new flag with appropriate ceremonies on August 1, 1890. As part of the program, George Fergodo, Tony Silver and Walter Scott gave the recitation "Red, White and Blue" and County school board member A. J. Young gave a speech "appreciated by young and old."

According to historian Vivian Coats Edmonston, "Roger Podva said that the black walnut trees in the school yard were planted by the children, starting with the oldest child down to the youngest (Roger). His tree was planted by the 'rest room'."

Students from Portuguese and Danish immigrant families regularly exchanged lunches -- linguisa and sweet bread for sandwiches slathered with butter.

Later years

A public high school in downtown Danville opened in 1910 and some of the students traveled into town for this higher education, joining grammar school graduates from five other schools in the area from Alamo to San Ramon.

Because of dirt roads, the school year calendar varied. In 1921 school opened for the fall semester on July

18, according to the *Contra Costa Gazette* which wrote that it opened early “as a mid-term vacation of two months is taken each year during the heavy rains of the winter when students residing in the rural sections are unable to attend.”

In 1946 the Tassajara School enrollment shrank to 11 after two large families moved away. Several parents thought that students could get a better education by going to a more modern school. That year the school closed, and students and teacher Gertrude Arendt went to Danville for elementary school. The desks were transported to Danville as well.

Mrs Gertrude Arendt and last Tassajara school class, 1946



Gordon Rasmussen, who was in sixth grade when the school closed, said “It was like hitting you with both barrels. In 1946 I had one other kid in my class, but then all of a sudden the next year there were 40.” (*Times*, 1972) His younger sister, Nancy, worried about learning all the names in her Danville class, since she had been the only one in her grade. A yellow bus took them into Danville.

The abandoned school fell on hard times. The bell disappeared, windows were broken and Washington’s picture was stolen. But people in the Tassajara community organized to restore and care for the School House, replacing the foundation and roof and putting in new wiring and floors. They created the Tassajara-Highland Improvement Association



and, in 1970, a new volunteer fire district.

An annual picnic at the school included a barbecue, raffles, auctions, games and recruitment for fire volunteers. Funds were raised for the school’s restoration and care. Eventually the picture of Washington was returned anonymously by the youth who took it; in a note he said his conscience had bothered him. Mrs. Arendt donated a World War I Liberty Bell from Pleasanton.

The Twenty-first Century

Today the School House is in excellent shape because of the efforts of the Tassajara and San Ramon Valley Fire Districts, dedicated volunteers such as Gordon Rasmussen and Vera Reinstein and others in the supportive Tassajara Valley community.

The Tassajara Fire District merged with the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District in 1990. For over 20 years, the SRVFPD managed the buildings and grounds and supervised rentals of the site. It installed the replacement flagpole and water tower on the original site and many fire fighters kept track of the facility while they were on and off duty. A historic plaque was placed in front of the school by the San Ramon Valley Historical Society in 1999. In 2006 Shapell Homes reconstructed the historic stable, restored the outhouses and installed handicapped restrooms as a community project. Garden clubs have planted bulbs for a spring flower display.

One-room school program, 1999

Teachers Patty Connert and Joan Kurtz



Beginning each January, the popular one-room school program taught by Museum of the San Ramon Valley docent-teachers draws hundreds of students and parents to the Tassajara School each day. The

children are taken back in time and spend a school day in 1888.

For nearly 125 years the School House has been an important feature for the Tassajara Valley community. It was a school, first and foremost. But it has also been used for graduations, dances, 4-H and fire board meetings, church services, wedding receptions, picnics and a polling place. The picturesque school is a favorite subject of artists and photographers.

The restored Tassajara School stands as a tribute to the caring community which worked to save it.

Acknowledgments: photograph from Ralph Cozine, drawing from SRV Historical Society



CCCHS Partners with San Jose State Grad Student to Produce Preservation Policy

Adriana Nino, a graduate student at the Library and Information Science Department at SJSU, contacted our society in order to satisfy a course requirement to collaborate with a local library, archive, or historical group to help create a digital preservation policy. We were naturally happy to work with her, as we are in a long-term project to update and codify our policies, including digital preservation. Adriana visited our

Adriana Nino with volunteer Bill Mero



History Center on Wednesday, November 14, and met with Policies subcommittee member Donald Bastin, and with our executive director, Priscilla Couden, and several volunteers. After several hours of questions and answers, she left to work on what

she had learned. Hopefully, her work will help us as we move forward with the necessary changes that must be made.

The Gold Fever! exhibit came to a roaring finish as



docents Harriett Burt and Steve James, together with Executive Director Priscilla Couden and a last-

minute draftee docent Kathleen Mero led 20 home schooled children and their parents



on a tour of the exhibit and the archives on Thursday, November 15.

Please invest in the future of the Contra Costa County Historical Society with your contribution:

I would like to contribute to Contra Costa County Historical Society's ongoing goals. Please list my contribution as coming from _____
(please print name of individual or institution)

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Thank you so much for investing in the future of The Contra Costa County Historical Society
 Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

****Please note that this contribution is separate from your annual membership dues.****
 *Note also that we do not retain credit card information. Donations also by phone to 925-229-1042.

Note: This form should have been included with the special invitation to our Membership Meeting on December 9

Contra Costa Library System Turns 100!

Ian Richards, Senior Community Library Manager, El Sobrante and Pinole Libraries

I'm happy to inform you that the Contra Costa County Library will be celebrating its 100th Birthday on July 21, 2013. In honor of this momentous



Alice Whitbeck, 1st County Librarian, 1913-1931

occasion the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors has agreed to proclaim 2013 "The Year of the Library". Beginning in January 2013, the Contra Costa County Library will begin our year-long celebration to commemorate "100 Years of Bringing People and Ideas Together".

The celebration will kick-off with 5 regional events throughout the county followed by various other displays and programs during the year. The 100th birthday bash will be on July 21. Details are still being worked out but I will be sure to pass on information as I get it.

The West County Regional event will take place on Saturday March 2nd, at the El Sobrante Library from 1 to 3pm. The El Sobrante Historical Society will be doing a brief presentation on the history of the El Sobrante Library. However this isn't just a celebration of the El Sobrante Library but of all of the West County libraries. To this end, I would like to extend an invitation to the rest of our West County Historical Societies to see if you would have any interest in joining us in El Sobrante on March 2nd. If so we would like to invite you to do a presentation on the history of the library from your community at the event.

This should be a fun, whimsical, informative affair and I hope you will be able to celebrate with us.

Contact Ian at: irichard@ccclib.org

In Memory: Roy S. Bloss 1918-2012

Roy Bloss passed away on October 14, after 94 years as a productive historian, political advocate and citizen of Alamo and the County. He had lived in Alamo over 50 years and supported the Iron Horse Trail, a tree-lined Danville Blvd. and home rule for Alamo. In the 1973



incorporation election for a city in the San Ramon Valley, he would have been on the city council had the proposal passed.

An avid historian, he was the founding President of the San Ramon Valley Historical Society in 1970, President of the CCCHS in 1983-4, and the driving force to establish the County archives now housed in the History Center. The author of the book "The Pony Express -- The Great Gamble," he also facilitated the Anza Trail enactment through Contra Costa County in 1976. He retired from the Western World Pet Supply Association in 1983. His upbeat personality, prodigious energy, and eagerness to create positive change will be missed by his many friends.

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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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

From The Executive Director



We've had a great year that included many challenges, with our most major challenge still on the very near horizon—our move 3 blocks away to 724 Escobar Street, Martinez, in January of 2013. Help us celebrate the History Center's 40th year by visiting us at our new location early in 2013.

But first... we will “ring out the old” with our Annual Meeting, book signing, book sale, and exhibit opening on Sunday, December 9. It should be a grand party! We hope you will be there to learn about the doings of our Society in 2012 and hear our wonderful speaker, Harold Helm, on the Civil War.

It's hard to believe I've been your Executive Director for almost three years now! The days fly by as our dedicated volunteers continue to enter data into our LookBack database. We are already two years into our History Center 2015 project; in 2013, we will begin the task of scanning our valuable old newspapers, using a large-scale scanner, a future acquisition to be provided by a generous grant from the Dean & Margaret Leshar Foundation. We also plan a computer terminal dedicated to the use of visitors to the Center so that people will be able to access our database themselves.

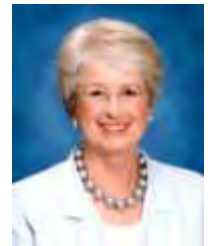
I am thankful to have the support of a marvelous and giving group of hands-on board members. Several have joined the ranks of our volunteers in order to give me some much needed time to work on important projects. And I am always eternally grateful to the 30 volunteers who now dedicate some part of their week to the History Center. As always, I invite *you* to join their ranks.

Whether or not you are able to volunteer, please consider using the matching gifts programs of corporations you work for or have retired from. Matching gifts double your donation and make possible the long-term survival of the Historical

Society. Especially if you know any Chevron employees or retirees, I have just learned of a program by which Chevron will give the Society \$500 to match twenty hours of an employee's or retiree's volunteer service to the Society, or \$1,000 for forty hours volunteering. 20 hours is just 4 five-hour days or 10 two-hour days. Two of our volunteers have already been able to contribute through this program. If you can donate the time or know someone who can, this would be a fabulous gift to the Society.

Thanks for your continued support, *Priscilla*

From The President



As 2012 comes to a close with our Annual Meeting on December 9, we can look back on a productive year for the Society as we plan for our History Center's new venue at 724 Escobar Street in Martinez. Our Executive Director, Priscilla Couden, has written several successful grants including a substantial Leshar grant which allows us scan and preserve rare newspapers.

This year we have welcomed new volunteers, begun a multi-color Bulletin, mounted two educational and popular exhibits, produced a booklet on electric trains in the County, sold books representing all parts of the County and added a new Honorary Board.

As a Board we have addressed productive meetings and written new policies, pondered our level of support for historic buildings County-wide, and met the challenge of moving from 610 Main Street (our home for 12 years). Clearly the County appreciates what the CCC Historical Society provides and contributes substantially to our rental expenses. We hope you will join us as we raise the resources needed to support our archives so that these treasures are saved and well cared for.

Thanks to all of you for helping the Historical Society and its mission to discover, preserve and share knowledge about the history of Contra Costa County.

Happy New Year! *Beverly Lane*

Mark Your Calendar

November 29-December 20—Toys Exhibit

December 9 —General Membership Meeting, History Center, 610 Main Street, 1-5 p.m. Our guest speaker will be Harold Helm, talking about Contra Costa County during the Civil War. Book sale- **authors will be on hand to sign their works!**

December 15—Center open 10 -2

January 2-9—Move from 610 Main Street

January 15—History Center re-opens at 724 Escobar Street (If everything goes as planned)

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.

Officers and Directors:

President.....Beverly Lane
1st Vice President..... Melissa Jacobson
2nd Vice President.....John Burgh
Secretary.....Webb Johnson
Treasurer.....Steven James

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

Executive Director: Priscilla A. 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, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 am – 4 pm

Now open 3rd Saturday, 10am – 2 pm

Email: info@cocohistory.com

Website: www.cocohistory.com

Contra Costa County Historical Society



60th Anniversary 1951 - 2011

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