

President:
Dorothy Walker
283-3303



NEWS

Lafayette, California

April 2006

Vol. 33, No. 2

Mark Your Calendar!

Annual LHS Potluck Dinner

DATE: **Tuesday, MAY 9, 2006**

PLACE: **New Veteran's Building, 3870 Mt. Diablo Blvd. & Risa Road across from Village Ctr.**

TIME: **6 p.m. Social Hour**

7 p.m. Dinner

8 p.m. Short business meeting followed by

ENTERTAINMENT: **LAF-Frantics 50th year Reunion**
Multi-media show – Melodrama and song

PRICE: **\$5.00 per person** to help defray LHS costs. ~ **PLUS** ~

Your favorite hearty salad or casserole (please bring serving utensils)

Dessert and coffee provided by Board Members.

QUESTIONS: **Call Ollie Hamlin - 283-6822 or Mary Solon - 283-7335**

President's Message

I hope you have read the announcement for our Potluck and will join us for this annual event. It should be great fun in the wonderful surroundings of the new Veterans Building. The building has already become an asset to the community by hosting many functions and now it's our chance to check out its interior. So come early, look around, and meet old friends.

This year we are very lucky in having live entertainment, presented by original members of Laf-Frantics. Not only will there be skits and songs, but we will have a multi-media presentation of some of their show highlights. This issue of the LHS Newsletter includes an article that describes what this dedicated group has contributed to our community.

The LHS Board has been meeting regularly since September to make the organization more cohesive. Our main focus has been how to make the History Room in the new Library and Learning Center a useful, accessible place in which all members of the LHS community can learn about our past. In connection with this effort, we hope to prepare a new book documenting Lafayette's past. Two members of the Board are spearheading this venture: Thank you Mary McCosker and Mary Solon. The website continues to be updated and improved (check it out if you haven't already – Lafayettehistory.org). We are hoping to complete further cataloging of our photo collection and want the artifacts we've collected conserved and ready for display. We are always looking for volunteers to help us with the many tasks that lay ahead. Please feel free to contact anyone of our Board members.

I look forward to seeing you all on May 9th.

—Dorothy Walker, President

The Laf-Frantics' Antics Will Make You Laff Yet

Remember those old movies with Andy Rooney, Judy Garland, and their teenage friends? When they needed money for a project and sat around wondering how to get the money, one of them would say, "Let's put on a show!" And others would chime in, "Let's refurbish the old barn as a show place and charge admissions!"

That is what must have happened 50 years ago when, in 1956, members of the Lafayette Suburban Women's Club, Lafayette Suburban Junior Club, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Lafayette Improvement Association, and Lafayette Community Center were wondering how to get the funds to complete, operate, and pay taxes on a Lafayette Community Center. Betsey Young, Jeri and Dick Burnside, Theron Nelson, Marge Adams, and others decided that a variety show could be staged at Town Hall and locals would perform.

As the reproduction of the first program shows, Laf-Frantics started with the first shows in October 1956 in the Town Hall with a melodrama and two acts of olio in the form of short skits or songs. All

proceeds from the show were donated to the Lafayette Community Center. The program does not say how much the tickets cost or how the seating was arranged, but the occasion must have netted enough to give the Community Center a good start. In their first six years, the Laf-Frantics earned \$11,000 and contributed it to community causes. When the Lafayette Town Hall was condemned, the show raised money to save it. Some of those funds are now evident in the Buckeye Fields Recreation

**START READING HERE
Don't Miss Anything
IT'S ALL IMPORTANT**

**LAF-FRANTICS
OF '56**

PRESENTS

A TEAR FOR TATTERS

**October 5 & 6; 12 & 13
8:00 P. M.**

**TOWN HALL
LAFAYETTE**

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
**Relax, Be Happy, Enjoy The Show
Ladies May Take Off Hats, Shoes
and Loosen Corset Strings, etc.
Gentlemen May Take Off Their
Hats, Coats, Shoes and Neckties.**
**Remember - No Butts Allowed
Upstairs**
Restrooms In the Basement Only

Laf-Frantics '86
presents
One More Time
Lafayette Town Hall
March 28, 29, April 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19

THE CAST
Barbara Abel, Dave Asher, Conry Anderson, Sarah Arbogast, Charlotte Aszklar, Charlie Berger, Marilyn Brooks, Jeri and Dick Burnside, Nancy Kärn, Kristina Coad, Jan Day, Bud Duling, Paul Fletcher, Carol Finney, Bill Garwood, Bobbie and Gene Gosselin, Melba Luna, Lani Meyer, Kristi Maffie, Dian Overy, Jack Peterson, Drew Patzak, Nancy Quenzel, Deanna Seaman, Eric Sargeason, Dick and Jean Smith, Marge Straker, Donna Smith, Betty Schmidt, George Wasson, Betsey Young, Bob Metzger, Theron Nelson, Dave Wenrich, Carl Engsthal

Mascot: Hayley Burnside
We Would Like To Thank Our Parents For Making Us Possible

THE STAFF

DIRECTOR Evelyn McLean
ASSISTANTS Charlie Berger, Nancy Quenzel, Betsey Young, Jeri Burnside, Dick Smith
PRODUCER Conry Anderson
CHORIOGRAPHERS Betsey Young, Ruth Purcell, Susan McBride
CHORAL DIRECTORS Charlie Berger, Jack Peterson
WRITERS Charlie Berger, Evelyn McLean
STAGE MANAGER Dona Miner
BACKSTAGE CREW George Wasson, Drew Patzak, Ed Quenzel, Theron Nelson
LIGHTING Ed Aszklar
SPOTLIGHT Craig Cooper
SOUND Scott Burnside
PROPS Dona Miner
COSTUMES Shirley Kern, Amy Brownley, Betty Bjaudet, and the cast
SET DESIGN Lani Meyer, Jeri Burnside, Dian Overy, Jill Meyer, Nancy Quenzel
SET CONSTRUCTION Ed Quenzel, Dick Burnside, Jack McLean, Jack Peterson
MAKEUP The cast
HOUSE Barbara and Dick Abel
BARTENDERS Dick Abel, Ed Quenzel, Jack McLean
PUBLICITY Paul Fletcher, Charlie Jarrett
MARQUEE Susan McBride
PROGRAM Jeri Burnside and Dian Overy
TICKETS Charlotte Aszklar
PERCUSSION Shannon Taylor
MARQUEE HANGER Randy Quenzel

LAF-FRANTICS BOARD: Bill Garwood, Kristina Coad, Paul Fletcher, Lani Meyer, Jan Day, Dick Burnside, Business Manager

Thanks to The Dramateurs for use of the set:
Patrons Are Requested Not To Remove Cigarette Butts From The Ashtrays
As These Are Part Of The Director's Perks

Center on St. Mary's Road, which was originally acquired by the Lafayette Community Center, Inc. and donated to the City of Lafayette along with the funds in their accounts after Lafayette incorporated

in 1968. While the town hall was being refurbished, the play went on as the show temporarily moved to Danville. On some occasions, Laf-Frantics also took its show on the road and performed in Folsom and Virginia City, Nevada. In 1986 the 30-year run of the Laf-Frantics shows at the Town Hall came to an end, though, as shown in the reproduction of the last program.

Early Laf-Frantics shows were produced and directed by Louise and Dan Welty who were doing musical shows in Danville. Betsy Young reports that the Welty's warned that "You'll be lucky if you last seven or eight years. That's about the usual lifespan of little theatre groups". Laf-Frantics fooled them. Later shows were directed by Evelyn McLean with assistants of Charlie Berger, Nancy Quenzel, Betsy Young, Jeri Burnside and Dick Smith. When the group found that they needed to pay royalties for using other author's melodramas, Charlie Berger began writing and directing original melodramas. Betsy Young was (and is) a dance instructor and along with others were the choreographers. Jack Peterson and Charlie Berger were choral directors. In addition to all the people that appear on stage there were backstage crews, lighting, sound, costume, set design, makeup and a long list of other duties that were performed by many people. Jeri Burnside designed most of the stage sets in addition to being a dancer, singer and artist for program sketches. She still teaches art here in Lafayette.

During the 30 years of Laf-Frantics action, there were 473 (by actual count) names on the roster of participants. Some of those named on the list were in all of the shows, including prominent Lafayette school administrators and business owners. Members of the cast entertained at many local functions and in convalescence homes and hospitals. Quite a number of performers were not from Lafayette, however: they joined the crew because they had such a good time doing so.

Most of the people that were in the shows found it to be fun even though there were long rehearsals and study for dance and song lyrics. Laf-Frantics survived for many years because there was a need for activities to support. It ended probably because the group grew older and there were not younger people to take up the challenges.

Come and see and participate in the 50th anniversary of the start of Laf-Frantics in Lafayette. There will be lots of photographs, scrap books, old programs; see how many people you recognize today!

Some of the original organizers and cast members will be featured at our May 9th Pot Luck Annual Dinner. They will be able to describe how the whole thing got started and how they kept going so long. Selected skits and performances from some of the audio and video recordings will be shown as projections during the program after the dinner. There may also be some audience participation as we righteously boo the villains and cheer for the heroes and heroines.

—George Wasson

Nelda Rigo to Speak

Ms. Rego will share some of the events, stories and characters of the Lamorinda area and its earlier days. She will bring the history of the days gone by to life with historical information and humor. After her talk, there will be plenty of time for questions. **THURSDAY, MAY 25, 10:30 AM—noon** Lafayette Senior Services Center at the Lafayette Community Center ♦ 500 St. Mary's Rd. ♦ Lafayette Call (925) 284-5050 to let us know you are coming. **There is NO CHARGE.**



Update on New Library and Learning Center

Ann Merideth, Director Community Development for the City of Lafayette, reports that the Library/Learning Center architect is presently completing the construction drawings for the new building in order to present them to the State of California, Contra Costa County, and the Fire District for their approval. The architect hopes to present them in May of this year. Ann stated, "We are still planning on the groundbreaking ceremony for the new library to be in the fall of this year."

Steve Falk, Lafayette City Manager, acknowledged that there has been some delay because the County has not as yet accepted the new Veterans Memorial Building. "They want to be assured that there is a clear title report before they take title to the building and there are a couple of problems, such as easements, that have to be cleared," notes Steve. He believes that the title questions will all be resolved around the middle of April.

As soon as the County accepts the new Veterans Building, the City of Lafayette will take over the old Veterans Building and start demolition. The contract for demolition has already been awarded, so we will only have to wait until the County formalizes final acceptance and transfer is made before the process moves ahead.

—*Marechal Duncan*

Old Libraries of Lafayette

The earliest Lafayette library was located in the general store on the town plaza park. When the store was first established by Benjamin Shreve, the town was not yet named Lafayette, so it is uncertain that it was called the Lafayette Library. Shreve, a gold miner, came to California from the

Midwest to find his fortune in the gold fields. Apparently he did not succeed, because in 1853, as he was making his way to San Francisco, perhaps to return home, he happened on the new settlement and was persuaded by Elam Brown, town founder, to stay on as the first schoolteacher.

After two years, Shreve left teaching to open his general store at the site of today's Handlebar Toy Store, which also housed the post office and a small lending library. This first library most likely served the community until, toward the turn of the century, the town had grown enough to require a separate building. The early library, a subscription library, became the first public library in the county with a catalog of 60 books.

In the early 1900's Carrie Van Meter served as the Lafayette postmistress well as the town librarian in a building located at the site of today's Safeway parking lot.

In 1927 the Lafayette Improvement Club bought the second school house building, moved it from Moraga Road to Mt. Diablo Boulevard (site of today's Red Wagon clothing store) and set up a combination post office-library and telephone company office. \$600.00 was borrowed from a Mr. H. H. Boyer (and was paid off in 1932) and \$679.00 was collected from the community to complete this purchase. The library went from this location to Town Hall to a small building on the same location as today's library. In 1961 the present-day library was constructed and has served our community since then. As we look forward to our new library in 2008, it is important to note that libraries have played an important role in Lafayette almost from the very beginnings of our community. As my friend Brenda Hepler reminds me: "Communities build libraries, libraries build communities."

—*Mary McCosker*

A Single Photo Tells a Long Story

The 1917 National Gypsy Tour in Lafayette



Found in the LHS archives: an 8-inch high by 45-inch wide photo of motorcyclists in Lafayette, captioned “National Gypsy Tour to Lafayette, California, June 17, 1917.” The picture was taken by Weidner Photo, 830 Market St., San Francisco. It is in fair condition with a few cracks, some smudges from the negative, and a brown stain at one end.

At first we imagined that ethnic Gypsies had graced early Lafayette, but in fact “Gypsy Tours” assembled the members of several motorcycle clubs, something like Harley motorcycle owners’ gatherings today, perhaps. According to Mark Mederski of the American Motorcyclist Association, these events always took place around Father’s Day, the third Sunday in June. The first Father’s Day’s was celebrated in Spokane on the third Sunday of 1910, and was named a national holiday in 1924 by Calvin Coolidge, so we may infer that the 1917 Gypsy Tour may indeed have been celebrated in Lafayette under the auspices of Father’s Day. The tour would have been sanctioned by the Motorcycle and Allied Trades Association (M&ATA). Lapel pins, buckles, tie tacks, and trophies were awarded to participants.

The photo’s donor, Louis L. Stein, Jr. of Rugby Avenue in Berkeley, has handwritten on the back, “Moraga Blvd. near Tunnel Rd. across from creek.” (*At that time Tunnel Road came all the way out to Lafayette, where it is now Mt. Diablo Boulevard*). Further research may reveal the precise location of the photo.

What does this photo tell us about old Lafayette, and what still remains today? There is a sign or store-front roof fa ade in the center to the right and rear of the man standing above everyone else. Also, at right center there is a bridge, although we are not presently sure which one or whether it still stands today. Note the baby in the side-car at left. An informal count reveals 280 people, of whom 40 are women, three are babies, and one is a child. There are 107 motorcycles with 19 sidecars and one trailer car attached to a motorcycle. There are 11 automobiles, all black, and a van with B. F. Goodrich on it. One man is holding a bullhorn embossed with the Indian Motorcycle name.

Continued on Page 6

This photo shoot would have been planned well in advance. If the photographer came over from San Francisco, he would have likely taken a ferry and gone through the old tunnel. Perhaps he took a train. The camera would have had a pivot and a tripod so it would have been bulky.

On this very day, June 17, 1917, King George V took the name of Windsor. The U.S. had just entered World War I on April 6. The Red Cross launched a War Fund drive surpassing the goal of \$100 million in one week. Woodrow Wilson was President. German submarines were sinking military and merchant ships. Local newspaper articles had the names of the men who had enlisted.

The *Contra Costa Journal* of June 21, reports on the Gypsy Tour in its "Lafayette" column, "Sunday a barbecue was given, in honor of motorcyclists from Oakland and surrounding cities. A large number attended." Were some of those nominal Gypsies having a last fling before enlisting? If they had stayed on in Lafayette, they might have gone to the Lafayette Improvement Club's Shirt Waist Dance with Bilger's Jazz Orchestra, advertised in the same paper

Publicizing the event, assembling the cyclists, organizing the barbecue, and getting everyone lined up for the photo must have posed a considerable logistical challenge. Yet they did it and we are the richer for it. Louis Stein has passed on but his legacy of the photo has not. It is a part of Lafayette history to be cherished.

—*Mary Solon*

Old Betsy Gets Her Dancing Shoes

Old Betsy is having her shoes (tires) replaced. All four wheels are now off the vehicle (see our last newsletter for details) and the old tires have been removed. It is possible that these old tires were original equipment for Old Betsy when she was built in 1920.

A Model T wheel includes spoked wheels, a metal rim attached to the wheel, and tires, tubes, and a liner all mounted on the rim. After up to 85 years of being attached to their rusty old rims, the tires were difficult to remove. Big O Tires in Lafayette assisted by doing the removal work, which was all hand labor because the old rims don't fit on the modern tire replacement equipment. Even so, it took them a whole lot less time that it took three of us to remove just one tire from one rim, as reported in the last newsletter!

Now it's time to have the rims and other metal parts sandblasted and cleaned for the next step in this operation: the removal of the old wooden spokes, in preparation for the installation of new spokes. When all of the above is finished, Betsy will be ready to frolic with a new and reliable set of "shoes" sometime this spring or early summer.

The tire replacement is part of the Old Betsy refurbishment generously supported by a grant from the Lafayette Foundation.

—*George Wasson*

New Book of Interest

"A Most Dreadful Earthquake", an eye witness account of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, has just been published by the California Genealogical Society. The book is based on a packet of letters found in a forgotten box in the Society's archives. The letters are from a young San Francisco woman to her fiancée in New York. They give a vivid account of the quake itself, the devastating fire which followed, and the travails of post-quake living in the City. To add some context about the letter writers, author Dorothy Fowler researched the writers' families.

The Book is available from California Genealogical Society for just \$19.31, including tax and shipping. Send your check to the Society at: 1611 Telegraph Ave., Suite 100, Oakland, CA 94612.

Don't forget to enclose your return shipping address.

Looking Back in Lafayette

Excerpts from the *Lafayette Sun* from years past:

Spring 1976 (30 years ago):

- ◆ April 24 was designated Elam Brown Day in Lafayette. A community celebration was held led by Mayor George Wasson and included music from the Acalanes High School Symphonic Band, a beard-growing contest, and square dancing.
- ◆ Langeac, France welcomed Lafayette, California as a sister city. Langeac is near the birthplace of the Marquis de LaFayette. Barbara Langlois, Vice Mayor, spearheaded the project to acquire a sister city for our community.
- ◆ The Lafayette School Board Trustees cut \$135,000 from the next year's budget and made significant progress in achieving a balanced budget by unanimously voting to close the Ellis School campus.
- ◆ Diablo Foods was totally destroyed by a fire. Damage was estimated at \$500,000 to the contents and \$200,000 to the building. \$50,000 in water damage was reported for Bill's Drugs next door. The "Grand Tree", a redwood planted by Jennie Bickerstaff, which is in the parking lot of the store was badly burned but may be saved. Arson was later determined to be the cause of the fire.
- ◆ A 1976 Honda Civic could be leased for \$62.96/month (for 36 months) and a 1976 Pontiac Grand Prix was listed as selling for \$4797.

Spring 1966 (40 years ago):

- ◆ The Lafayette Reservoir Recreation Area opened to visitors for hiking, fishing, boating and picnicking. 8,000 people visited the new facility on Opening Day.
- ◆ A broad-based study group has been formed to study the desirability of incorporation in Lafayette.
- ◆ The following food store advertised their prices in the local Sun: Safeway, LoRay, U-Save, Lucky, LaFiesta Foods, P & X Foods, Park and Shop Markets, Jim's Food Center, Blacks, Louis Stores, and Farmer Joe's.
- ◆ A 1966 Jeep Wagoneer was advertised for sale by Cochran and Celli in Oakland for \$2625.

—**Mary McCosker**



2005/2006 Directors

President: Dorothy Walker.....	283-3303
Vice President: Marechal Duncan.....	283-6812
Treasurer: Paul Sheehan.....	284-1287
Recording Secretary: Ruth Dyer.....	283-8312
Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin.....	283-6822
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Tom Titmus.....	299-2030
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Walking Tours: Mary McCosker.....	284-5376
Fire Engine: George Wasson.....	284-4603
Membership: Oliver Hamlin.....	283-6822
Newsletter: Dorothy Walker, Charlotte Robertson	



Lafayette Historical Society Member Information (Please photocopy form for additional names)

Name: _____ Spouse: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Membership Categories and Annual Dues: (please check one)

_____ Life membership \$100.00 (one time fee) _____ Family membership \$10.00

_____ Business membership \$50.00 _____ Student membership \$2.50

Please indicate areas of special interest:

_____ Annual dinner _____ Archives _____ LHS Online _____ Displays _____ Photo collection

_____ Landmarks _____ News Clips _____ Oral History _____ Fire Engine _____ Programs

_____ Research _____ Telephoning _____ Walking Tours _____ Other _____