

President:  
Tom Titmus  
299-2030

# Lafayette Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 133, LAFAYETTE, CA 94549

# NEWS

Lafayette, California

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## President's Message

We must all take a moment to honor a man who gave us the privilege of his presence and friendship. Bill Wakeman left us too soon. His strength of character, geniality and capacity to pitch in as a helper and guide to family and community leave a permanent monument. Bonnie, his wife of 60 years, held a celebration of his life on his birthday, January 4, 2004.

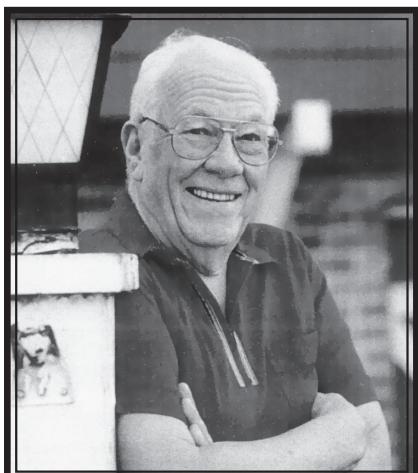
LHS continues to welcome new members, and we look forward to sustained growth in 2004. Publicity about the new library, which includes plans for an area dedicated to Lafayette's history, should promote that growth.

This slim edition of the newsletter (blame it on the season!) will give you up-to-date details about our recent activities with respect to the new library, old Betsy, and General Lafayette. Ruth Dyer's history of the Templars in Lafayette is particularly interesting.

And, in that connection, the more articles we receive, the more interesting and useful the newsletter will be. Please jot down any news you come across or, perhaps, an anecdote about your residence in Lafayette (when did you first move to Lafayette and what was it like when you first moved here?), a historical tidbit you know about, a Lafayette or California collectible you own, or your ideas about displays to be placed in the new library. Our editor, Dorothy Walker (925-283-3303), would be delighted to receive your work or to talk over an article you are considering.

*—Thomas Titmas, President*

## Lafayette Mourns Longtime Resident Bill Wakeman



Lafayette residents have lost a well-loved link to their past.

Bill Wakeman, the city's ever-humble unofficial historian and highly regarded native, died Nov. 2, while recovering from a brief illness at the Lafayette Convalescent Hospital. He was 82.

"It's really like a family member has departed," said Oliver Hamlin, who served with Wakeman on the Lafayette Historical Society. Wakeman was born on Jan. 4, 1921, on his family's chicken farm on what is now Lafayette Circle.

"He took pride in being a native son, literally, and that spilled over into how he dealt with people," said Karen Rose, administrative manager at the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. "He was just a genuinely nice man who loved telling stories about Lafayette."

*Continued on Page 2*

**"We believe in the power of history to ignite the imagination, stimulate thought and provide enjoyment.  
Through our collections and programs we strove to link Lafayette's history to the lives of people."**

"When he spoke of Lafayette, his eyes would light up. You could tell he had a lot of quiet pride," echoed Ruth Dyer, who served with Wakeman in the Lafayette Historical Society and the Lafayette Improvement Association for many years. "In a way, he was a quiet sage. He didn't intrude into matters. He was a constructive presence."

"He was a living history of Lafayette," added Lafayette resident and fellow historian Ray Peters.

The WWII veteran spent much of his time conveying that city pride to those he met, always with a twinkle in his eye, a big smile and his unobtrusive manner.

Longtime associate Marechal Duncan admired Wakeman's ability to "think on his feet," his impressive memory, and his succinct, insightful way of communicating. "Instead of telling jokes, he'd have quips to fit in with the conversation," Duncan said.

Wakeman exemplified an optimal blend of extroversion and introspection.

"What a perfect idealized grandfather he was to the whole community," said Lafayette resident Anne Grodin, who met Wakeman while both volunteered at the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. "It was his big heart. He always greeted you with a big bear hug and a kiss."

With gratitude, Niroop Srivatsa recalled the day in 1992 when Wakeman gave her a copy of a book about Lafayette's history. It was inscribed: "I hope you will grow to love this town as much as I do." "He knew this was more than a job, that we would be raising our kids here. He was sharing a piece of community with me," said the city's planning and building services manager.

"He was in love with the town as he knew it, the spots that were there when he grew up. They were good memories and he wanted to preserve that for others," said Wakeman's wife Bonnie.

His sense of nostalgia did not mean wishing for bygone days, however.

"He was born here, he lived here and he moved into Lafayette today," said Ann Denny, executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.

"Bill wasn't one who was tied to the past that he couldn't allow the future to happen."

Everyone knew Bill and Bonnie were going to settle in Lafayette.

"He was close to his folks. This is where he felt he belonged," Bonnie matter-of-factly explained. The couple also was going to build a house - which they did in the 1950s on St. Mary's Road. And, Bill, who was Lafayette's Citizen of the Year in 1993, could always be counted on to provide reliable information about the city's history, and lend a hand when asked.

He was a longtime cubmaster and scoutmaster, and upon retiring from a 30-year career at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory in 1983, the mechanical engineer volunteered his time in civic pursuits. The UC Berkeley alumnus led countless historical walking tours for local school children, chaired the Hospice Tree of Lights, and was a consistent, supportive presence at the city council meetings.

"He'd contribute, but he was not a crusader," said Duncan. "But the fact that he brought so much history that made him an authority."

Wakeman is survived by his wife of 60 years, Bonnie Wakeman of Lafayette; a brother, Jack Wakeman of Lafayette; two daughters, April Wakeman of Walnut Creek and Karen Therman of Eugene, Ore; two sons, Larry Wakeman of Concord and Gary Wakeman of Lafayette; and six grandchildren.

The family is planning a celebration of life service, to be announced and are suggesting that donations be made to the Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549.

*Reproduced with permission of Jennifer Shaw, and The Contra Costa Sun, November 12, 2003.*

If you don't history, you don't know anything. You're a leaf that doesn't know it's part of a tree.

Michael Crichton (Timeline)

## You've Got A Friend in Lafayette!

~ Part II continued from last newsletter ~

On the evening of August 4, 1777, the twenty-two-year-old Marquis de Lafayette, newly a major-general in the Continental Army, was guest of honor at a grand Philadelphia dinner party, at which General Washington was also in attendance. "Although [Washington] was surrounded by officers and private citizens," wrote the reverent Lafayette, "it was impossible not to recognize the majesty of his face and his countenance. The affable and noble manners and the dignity with which he addressed those about him were equally distinguished." At the evening's end, Washington complimented Lafayette on his zeal for the American cause and his sacrifices in order to come to America. Lafayette gladly accepted Washington's invitation to join him at general quarters of the commander-in-chief.

When he arrived at the American camp, however, any hopes of grandeur Lafayette might have harbored were dashed by the eleven thousand poorly armed, ragged men who confronted him. "Their clothes were motley looking, discolored, and many were almost naked," he wrote. Seeing the disappointment on Lafayette's face, Washington attempted to console him. Lafayette snapped to attention and responded, "I have come here to learn, *mon général*, not to teach." This established the first bonds of mutual confidence and devotion that united the two for many years. Later, Washington would address Lafayette as his son and Lafayette would consider Washington his father, neither of them having his own.

On September 12, 1777, news reached General Washington that an American field general had been overpowered by the British and was in danger of annihilation at Brandywine. Lafayette begged Washington's permission to assist with the defense. In no mood to argue, Washington agreed, and Lafayette departed for his first battle.

Under blistering fire, the American soldiers were fleeing in panic. Lafayette, over six feet tall and in full major-general's uniform, seized the men's shoulders and arms and ordered them to turn back: to stand and fight. The Americans halted

their retreat, rallied around him, and took the enemy's charge. In the noise of battle and the excitement of his rallying the troops, Lafayette failed to notice that a musket ball had passed through the calf of his left leg, transforming the glory of his Arthurian quest into the painful reality of soldiering. The following day, Lafayette was loaded into a boat for transport to Philadelphia. "Treat him as if he were my son," Washington commanded the surgeon.

While convalescing, Lafayette, determined to avenge the losses at Brandywine, began a barrage of letters to French political leaders, boldly urging a military and commercial alliance with America and all-out war with Britain. At first, the French Prime Minister scoffed that, if Lafayette prevailed, he would, "sell all the furniture at Versailles and underwrite the American cause."

Far from alienating the court, however, Lafayette's descriptions of the American military situation and reports of his intimate ties to Washington, Hancock, and other American leaders, convinced the French king that, with his direct ties to top American military and political authorities, Lafayette could play a key role in promoting military, diplomatic, and commercial ties between the two nations. The winter of 1778 saw the alliance of France with the United States; and the turning point of the war was at hand.

On October 19, 1781, England's General Cornwallis and General Washington signed the British articles of capitulation, although Cornwallis refused to lead his troops to surrender, sending his adjutant instead to suffer the humiliation of surrendering his sword. The war was over, with the help of the French.

In his parting letter to Lafayette, Washington wrote, "I asked myself whether that was the last sight I ever should have of you? And tho' I wished to say no – my fears answered yes." Lafayette wrote Washington, "No, my dear General, our recent separation will not be a last adieu." But, sadly, Lafayette was wrong and Washington was right. They had indeed said their last adieux. Lafayette would never see his beloved general again.

—Paul Sheehan

## Rancho Acalanes

Spanish explorers came to this area in the 1770's, and the Saclan Indians' lives changed dramatically. Many of the Saclan Indians caught diseases brought by the European Explorers and died. Others did not like the European's ideas of dress, religion, or labor and left the area. Soon, the Saclan villages were deserted.

In the early 1800s, Spanish rule ended in the California territory, and the Mexican soldiers took control of the area. Many land grants were given to Mexican soldiers in payment for their service in the military.

There were 12 land grants established in the Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda area. One of these land grants was Rancho Acalanes, which made up a large part of what we now know as Lafayette. Its borders were Charles Hill Road in Orinda to the west, First Street to the east, the current northern border of Lafayette (north of Happy Valley) to the north, and bisecting where the Lafayette Reservoir is now to the south.

Rancho Acalanes was granted to a man named Candelario Valencia, a sergeant in the Mexican army, in 1834. He moved onto the rancho and constructed a home off Happy Valley Road. Valencia was forced to sell Rancho Acalanes when he fell into debt and could no longer afford to keep the land. He sold the property to William Leidesdorff, a San Francisco financier and politician, in the early 1840s. Leidesdorff never lived on the land and, in fact, may never have even seen it.

*Excerpted from A Town Called Lafayette by Emily Haas and Mary McCosker. The book is available for purchase at the Lafayette Book Store and The Storyteller.*

## Old Betsy Update

In a recent Newsletter I reported that we had acquired a new Warford Transmission. The transmission has arrived but is still on the "to do" list. We'll install it as soon as time and weather permit.

Hubbard Anderson, who was instrumental in finding the new transmission, recently sent me a report from a Texan who installed a Warford on his Model T Ford. The report reads:

I have been driving a two speed rear-

axle for years and thought it was good. Elmer Layne's KC Warford Transmission is fantastic! I put one of these in my '27 Ford and immediately left on a 4,850 mile Model T trip to Massachusetts. On the level ground of Tennessee, I was able to drive at a sustained speed of 45 miles per hour with ease. I never had a single problem even in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. I pulled a 5 mile-8% grade without ever having to use my Ford low gear—even though I was pulling a 1920s Zagelmeyer Camp Trailer. You can shift at any speed and will not get stuck in neutral. And it makes no noise unlike the old original Warfords.

We don't anticipate taking a 4,850 mile trip with Old Betsy, but when we are up and running again the rebuilt engine and the new transmission will allow us to get to events in nearby communities easily. With the lowest of the Warford gear ratios, it will be now be possible to move slowly, as in a parade, without having to shift into and out of gear. The high gear, on the other hand, will allow us to keep up with traffic.

My special THANKS to those who responded to the request for contributions to the restoration project. Jack Moore of Happy Valley gave us a generous contribution, and we usually receive some designated contributions with the annual dues appeal. Thanks!!!

*(Note by reporter: I pull a 27-foot trailer with our 1997 Ford 150 truck and I have trouble keeping up a respectable speed on some long grades. Although I'm not ready to go back to a Model T, I'm impressed that a Model T could pull a trailer up a grade without having to go into low gear.)*

—George Wasson

## The Good Templars Come to Lafayette

Alcoholic drinks were consumed by ancient, pre-literate societies in their rituals and for social purposes. Their medicinal properties are described in ancient Sumerian (c. 3200 B.C.) and Egyptian texts. The most complete collection of Babylonian law, the Code of Hammurabi, contains regulations for drinking establishments and the prices and sellers of intoxicants. Their use has been forbidden entirely by some religions, yet their appeal remains. Brawling Olympic Gods and we lesser humans have reveled in bacchanalian delights.

By the late 1700s modern temperance societies began in the United States; the Independent Order of Good Templars, the first international temperance society, was founded in Utica, New York, in 1851. Accepting both men and women as members, this forerunner of the WCTU grew rapidly. Temperance apostles traveled across the country spreading their message. Nortonville had the first lodge in Contra Costa County. Much later, in December 1882, 42 Lafayette residents formed Lafayette Lodge, IOGT, swearing complete

abstinence from the use of any intoxicating beverage.

Why did the Good Templars come so late to Lafayette? Was it due to the already-conservative nature of its residents? Was it because Squire Elam Brown, a strong proponent of a prohibition clause in the state Constitution of 1849 who refused to sell land to any establishment serving liquor, felt so strongly about intoxicants? ? Was it the strong influence of the pioneer Lafayette Methodist Church?

In any case, for \$1.00 in gold coin, Brown deeded a 210' x 192' parcel of land east of the plaza to Lafayette Lodge No. 277 Independent Order of Good Templars and Subordinate Council No. 1102 of the American Legion of Honor of the Town of Lafayette. The deed provided that if the lodge were disbanded, “the entire interest shall pass to the citizens of the town of Lafayette to be used for public purposes only,” the deed stipulated.

Still lacking seats, the 1,200-square-foot, two-and-a-half-story Lodge building was dedicated late in May 1884. A fundraising night paid for the seating. Then, for the privilege of paying fifty cents for adults and a quarter for children, residents could enjoy local talent performing the drama “Past Redemption” and two farces, “The Persecuted Dutchman” and “A Little More Cider.”

“Lafayette has long been looked upon as a quiet hamlet,” it was said, “a town of the past, but it is no longer; the next generation coming on, intelligent and industrious, the new families coming in who have bought and intend to remain, are uniting with the older inhabitants to make an attractive place. The hall is only a forerunner of what we may expect to see in the ten years to come.” (Col. C.N. Goulding, Grand Worthy Councillor [sic]; Gazette, May 24, 1884)

During the following year, the Methodist Church moved from its former location at Golden Gate Way and Second Street to the Good Templars Hall. It was said that, standing on its little hill, the charming white building was visible for miles. There the church remained until 1927, when it was believed that the resulting increase in traffic along Mt. Diablo Boulevard menaced children as they walked to Sunday School. The hall was demolished in the late 1930s, its lumber was used in homes, and the hill was leveled. Instead of being passed to the citizens of the town for public purposes, as the deed provided, the site became a business location. Today the Good Templars, greatly diminished in membership, continue to exist, but not in Lafayette.

— Ruth Dyer

(using information found in *The Mutnick Collection at the CCCHS History Center*)



## The Latest on the Library

On November 24, 2003 the New Library Committee met to review the latest plans by the architect, Wade Killefer. The plans reflected all the suggestions previously presented by the library staff, the Friends of the Library, the Lafayette Historical Society, concerned citizens, and City staff. After review, the plans were formally approved by the committee.

This set of plans includes the floor plan layout and exterior. The plans show the space allocated for the primary Historical Society work/display area as 366 square feet with an additional 132-square-foot storage area. Portions of the Heritage Area of the main library space, the lobby and other areas throughout the building have also been set aside for public display of LHS archival materials and other displays that will show Lafayette's history. A separate area for "Old Betsy," our 1922 fire engine, will face Golden Gate Way, an excellent location.

Following the committee meeting on November 24, the City Council approved the plans as submitted by

the architect and the committee. Ann Merideth, Director of City Community Development, and her staff are drafting an application to the Office of Library Construction, State of California Library Department for a grant to assist with library construction. This application will be reviewed by the New Library Committee and the City Council on January 12, 2004 and, if approved, will be forwarded to the State on January 16, 2004. In the meantime, the architect continues to work on the details of the interior.

*If you have any question with regard to the new library, please call Marechal Duncan at 283-6812.*

# Lafayette Historical Society CALENDAR

## ANNUAL POT LUCK DINNER MEETING

- Date:** Tuesday, May 11, 2004
- Time:** 6 pm Social Hour  
7 pm Dinner  
8 pm Short business items,  
followed by....
- Speaker:** Betty Maffei, *Director of the Contra Costa County History Center.*
- Place:** Lafayette Veterans Memorial Hall • Mt. Diablo Blvd. at 1<sup>st</sup> Street • lower floor (on 1<sup>st</sup> St.)

May 11<sup>th</sup> will be the date of our Annual Pot Luck Dinner. It will be a nostalgic time, as it is our last time meeting in the Veterans building. (See the article on the new library). The speaker for the event will be **Betty Maffei, Director of the Contra Costa County History Center.** More information will follow in our April Newsletter.

## 2002/2003 Directors

President: Tom Titmus .....	299-2030
Vice President: Marechal Duncan .....	283-6812
Treasurer: Paul Sheehan .....	284-1287
Recording Secretary: Ruth Dyer .....	283-8312
Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin ....	283-6822
Archive Retrieval: Mary McCosker .....	284-5376
Archive Database: Dorothy Walker .....	283-3303
Programs: Joseph Van Overveen .....	283-3650
Keith Blakeney .....	284-2221

## 2002/2003 Committee Chairs

Potluck Dinner: Richard Johnson .....	283-0199
Walking Tours: Mary McCosker .....	284-5376
Newsletter: Dorothy Walker, Charlotte Robertson	
Fire Engine: George Wasson .....	284-4603
Membership: Oliver Hamlin .....	283-6822

