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## Lafayette Historical Society

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# NEWS

Lafayette, California

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## Fall Message from the President

The annual May potluck and meeting, held in the new Veteran's Building, was a great success. We had our largest crowd ever: over 130 LHS members celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the community entertainment group the Laf-Frantics, and a memorable time was had by all. For 30 years the Laf-Frantics donated the proceeds from their sparkling revues to help support our city, and their appearance at the meeting brought back many warm and hilarious memories. (For those of you who missed the festivities, LHS is selling copies of the DVD that was shown at the event. More information can be found later in the Newsletter.)

The Annual Lafayette Art and Wine Festival is coming up September 16 and 17 and LHS will share a booth with Friends of the Lafayette Library and the Lafayette Community Foundation. We hope very much that all our members will support this delightful community event.

We continue to add to the LHS database of photos and artifacts. We want our collection ready for our members to view when the history room in the Library and Learning Center opens. We hope that many of you will be willing to volunteer to man our space once we're open. Volunteers will be asked to host community members coming into our room, helping them learn about our resources and answer their questions

Two Board members, Mary McCosker and Mary Solon, are creating a new book on the history of Lafayette and seek photos that depict life in Lafayette before 1930. They ask if you or your family might be able to lend old photos from your personal collections. Ideally, the Marys would like to use original photos, which can be scanned into our archives quickly and returned. If you can help with this important new endeavor, please contact them directly.

I wish you all many opportunities to enjoy our wonderful community in the autumn days to come.

—Dorothy Walker, President

### *Thank You for Helping LHS*

*For the last year the LHS archiving project has enjoyed space provided by Bill Eames, which has allowed us to keep our extensive photo collection accessible as we continue to catalogue it. Harry Eisenberg has also given us office space, a desk, and additional file space to assist with this project. Dan Lemey and Mary Solon donated two computers and a printer/scanner to facilitate the cataloguing and help prepare the forthcoming LHS book on our city, Lafayette. Mary McCosker and Mary Solon are writing the book. For their contributions, active participation, and encouragement, LHS gratefully acknowledges the donors.*

## The 2006 LHS Annual Meeting

The 2006 LHS annual meeting and potluck on Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup> was the first annual meeting to be held at the new Veterans Hall. In addition, this meeting was special because we were celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Laf-Frantics, who participated in the festivities with us. For most of us, this was the first celebration in the hall. We found that our high expectations were exceeded on every count.

We were particularly impressed by the kitchen that adjoined the meeting space. It includes every food service appliance one could hope for and plenty of counter space.. Best of all, everything works. Although we didn't use every appliance, we came close.

As is our custom, the Annual Meeting started at 6 p.m. with a happy hour. Ollie Hamlin served refreshments on the patio and folks socialized inside and out. Shortly after 7 the potluck itself, which included plenty of salads, entrees, began. Thank you to the many members who supplied this delicious repast.

Following the feast, Dorothy Walker, our president, conducted the re-election of some of the Society officers with dispatch, then welcomed members of the Laf-Frantics and George Wasson, the evening's master of ceremonies.

George, the Society's Fire Chief, a Laf-Frantic member, and honorably retired Lafayette mayor presented a proclamation from the City, signed by Mayor Ivor Samson, congratulating the Laf-Frantics on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He introduced attendees who, over the years, had made significant contributions of time and effort to the Laf-Frantics and their performances. Those people included Bob Metzger, Theron Nelson, Betsy Young, Jeri and Dick Burnside.

The program included a live performance by former members and a screening of a new DVD highlighting Laf-Frantics acts over the years. Bud Dulling, The Man of 3,000 Songs, sat at the piano ready to chime in with the tune, "Alley Cat," should any speakers wander off subject or get too long-winded. (Playing the tune was a common practice during performances if something went wrong or if an act needed to be moved along.)

Dick Smith and Bob Metzger recreated a faintly risqué but very entertaining number, in the Laf-Frantics tradition. The revue on the DVD covered a wide range of "Olio"—short skits, songs and dances, and "black outs"—to melodrama. The presentation closed with tuxedo-clad Jack Peterson leading the audience in "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean": different sides of the room standing for different words that began with the letter "B." You can imagine the pandemonium when we reached, "bring back, bring back, oh bring back my Bonnie to me!". . . Great fun.

The final item of the program was the celebration of Theron Nelson's birthday. We all sang "Happy Birthday." He then blew out a plethora of candles, albeit not enough for his years; and we all ate cake.

—Paul Sheehan

### Art and Wine Festival

Please stop by the LHS booth on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> or Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup>. We will be sharing our usual booth with the Friends of the Library and Lafayette Community Foundation in front of The Storyteller on Lafayette Circle. Come down and support your organization and community.

## The Long and Winding Road

### Tunnel Road



On June 29, 1916, The City Street Improvement Company, headed by James H. Bishop of the Bishop Brothers Ranch in San Ramon, completed a roadway from the Tunnel to Walnut Creek. It was 18 feet wide and five inches thick. It had a bithulic composition coating, according the Contra Costa Courier. The road officially opened on Sunday, July 16, 1916.

On this day four men tallied cars from 6 a.m. until midnight and came up with the following count at the George A. Grimes corner near Walnut Creek:

Motor machines passing:	
Incoming	831
Outgoing	<u>465</u>
Total	1296

A week later, on July 23, the men stopped counting at 6 p.m. “At one point during a certain era of the day, 26 machines passed a given point in 8 minutes.” At the other end of the roadway, there is no mention of the backups at the one-way Tunnel!

The August 3 edition of the Courier noted that Lafayette benefited from the opening of Tunnel Trail: “Several sales of property to home builders of consequence are reported during the week.”

On Saturday, August 26, 1916, a *chamarita* (festival) was held in Lafayette to honor the opening of Tunnel Road with a parade of automobiles from Walnut Creek. Streamers, flags, floral decorations and pennants on the cars identified names from various parts of the County. Cars headed for the Tunnel and “counterlined” back to Lafayette. Machines also came from San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Hayward, and Pleasanton. Sheriff R. R. Veale was the grand marshal.

The many speeches included one by George H. Smith of the Lafayette Improvement Club and another by the former congressman of Oakland, Joseph R. Knowland. The lavish barbecue was reminiscent of the days when “the dons” reigned in the land and dispensed hospitality with a prodigal hand. To lend authenticity to the day’s resemblance to the olden days, the Martinez brothers—Ygnacio of Richmond and Vicente of Walnut Creek, sons of the sire whose name gives title to the county seat—were the presiding genii of the gridirons.” Four great “beeves” were served at the barbecue, along with the usual fixings. In the evening there was a dance at the Lafayette Auditorium.

The paved road spawned more real estate sales and also led to the need for a county speed cop, Ernest Lampe. In March 1917, Lampe was thrown twenty feet from his motorcycle in a collision with an automobile. He was chasing joyriders at

*Continued on Page 4*

40 mph when an oncoming car careened around the joyriders and hit him. He suffered bruises and cuts.

In April, Lampe stopped a speeder and went to court the following month to testify against him. The speeder, who was from San Francisco, didn't appear in court. His fine was increased from \$10 to \$25 after he telephoned the district attorney to say that he wasn't going to be there. Newspaper accounts at the time failed to report how fast the driver was going when he was arrested.

Probably more accidents occurred than were reported in the Courier. In June of 1917, Miss Clara Thomson, Miss Margaret and Lloyd Smith were thrown out of their car when it turned upside-down on the first turn of Charles Hill. They all managed to crawl from beneath the wreck with minor injuries.

Although there were many automobiles by the time the road opened, they still had to share the road with people on horseback and in buggies. In June the buggy of Joe Soares of Lafayette was almost in an accident when an automobile with 3 boys whizzed by, frightening his horse. The boys didn't stop but a passerby obtained their license plate number—24369—which was reported to the authorities. Later that month Fritz Knudsen and his wife were driving on Tunnel Road to Oakland and their car overturned in a ditch when a truck hit them. Also in June there was a new traffic cop, Mr. Keefe, who rode an Indian motorcycle.

Sadly, some accidents were not so minor. Two years later in June of 1919, Officer Raymond Lampe died instantly in a collision while chasing a speeder at 60 mph. He hit a truck in order to avoid an oncoming car. The accident was on Tunnel road

one mile west of Lafayette near the Stutz sign. Born near Lafayette, Lampe left his wife and mother. He was 26 years old.

The road opened many possibilities, not only for commerce and real estate sales but for more and improved roads. In the following years, these included roads in downtown Walnut Creek, to Alamo and Danville, and from Concord to Pittsburg. Using the Tunnel Road, it was easy to commute to Oakland and come home to a country setting in Lafayette at night.

Tunnel Road eventually became Mt. Diablo Boulevard, which was widened and had stoplights added through the years. Highway 24 replaced it as the main thoroughfare to Oakland and Walnut Creek. BART added another means of transit to both east and west. One has to wonder how many cars now pass each 8 minutes on Highway 24 during commute times.

(Source: Contra Costa Courier and Danville Journal)

—*Mary Solon*



## Update on the Lafayette Library and Learning Center

Now that the construction dollars for the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center have been raised through private donations, the State Grant and Lafayette Redevelopment funds, and with project bids expected this fall, the Lafayette City Council held a special session on July 10<sup>th</sup> to discuss how the 35,000 square foot space will be maintained and operated.

At the meeting, the Council reviewed a 22 page Staff report which detailed various funding options, including an annual library parcel tax to keep the library open for 60 hours a week. This is a project that builds upon the community's vision for a "library of the future," combining library and education services for adults. Teens and children, and ever-growing book and materials collection, a community hall and performance venue and life-long-learning opportunities through innovative programs offered by the Glenn Seaborg Consortium partners.

"Until the money was raised for construction there was no reason to talk about maintenance or operations", said Steve Falk, Lafayette City Manager. Unlike the current library on Moraga Road' which is owned and operated by the Contra Costa County, the City will be the sole owner and operator of the new library when it is built in late 2008.

"It is clear that a new library is needed in Lafayette", said County Librarian Anne Cain. "The existing building is bursting at the seams, yet despite these constraint, it attracts more than 500 users every day, making it one of the most frequently used libraries in the County system. If Lafayette follows the experience in other communities, usage will increase significantly once the new library is open".

The City Council reviewed the information presented and invited comments from the large audience in attendance. After a discussion that went on for almost three hours, the Council declared its satisfaction with all the input received and asked Staff to continue reporting monthly as the project progresses.

Incidentally, the Lafayette Historical Society had more people in attendance, than any other group and we all had Lafayette Historical Society name tags.

This is a very exciting point in the campaign for the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center with the demolition and material clean up of the old Veterans Memorial Building finally completed. We all look forward to receiving the construction bids later this year.

In the meantime, the Lafayette Community Foundation is actively engaged in ongoing efforts to control library building costs given the continuing rise in construction material costs. To that end, they are seeking gifts of building materials and products and they need your assistance. Working with the City, they have identified opportunities for "in-kind" donations ranging from lighting, rebar and plumbing fixtures to landscape plants.

Your help in providing them with leads to individuals or companies would be greatly appreciated. They are on a tight frame with soliciting in-kind gifts, as everything must be coordinated with the construction project schedule. Therefore, they need to have all in-kind gifts identified and approved by early September.

If any member can suggest anyone who might be able to help, please call Chris Schiavello at 925-935-2374 at your earliest convenience and they will contact your referral.

—*Marechal Duncan*

## Old Betsy Does Double Duty

Old Betsy is still up on blocks in my garage, waiting for new wheels with new spokes and tires, but that doesn't mean that she has not been useful—at least to me. As I have said in many newsletter items, we keep Old Betsy in the garage to protect her from the elements. I may not have mentioned before, however, that this is a little inconvenient for the Wassons, in that she takes up one of our garages spaces. To make up for this, I have traditionally used her for other duties while in storage.

The Wassons go on an annual camping vacation with a group that we have joined for over 30 years. Even though our camping is not rugged tent camping, it still requires a lot of bits and pieces to be brought together in preparation for departure. We have a trailer and a truck to pull it, and our children (now adults) and grandchildren (ages 10 to 18) are in the camping group. You may suspect that, because we have a truck, there are several requests from the rest of the family for us to carry some of their necessities in addition to our own. Even though we suggest that they carry their own requirements, we still always end up with some things that are passed on to us. That is where “the other use for the fire engine” comes in.

I assemble all our camping gear, gathered from various storage places within our home, and set it out on Old Betsy's bed. From there the “stuff” is transferred to our truck or trailer. This way it is easy for me to select various items and find the exact

place for them in the truck. This convenience assists me in gathering and placing all the items, and in that sense it is a help in preparing for our vacation. I look at this help from Betsy as our reward for keeping her well protected over the years.

You might ask, “What does that have to do with anything historical?” Here is the RUB! We have been going to the same place for over 30 years and find that the area is more and more crowded each year. When we first went there, properties that at least had a view of the lake could be purchased for about \$10,000; now there are few if any lots that have such a view and—even without lake access—these lots are in the \$100,000 to \$250,000 (and up) price range. We have enjoyed our camping trips for all of these 30-plus years and expect to enjoy many more. Our children and grandchildren will have to fight the crowds at what used to be a less crowded lake. This is not new: history shows that there are now and always will be many more people in California than when we started camping in the 1970s—and last I looked—no new lakes were being created. We should have bought a lot when we first went there!

Old Betsy has done her job for us again this year, and when the Library and Learning Center is completed and she moves to another garage stall, we will miss her and the convenience of having a “staging” platform on which to assemble our camping needs for packing into the truck and trailer.

—George Wasson

### Laf-Frantics DVD Available

Rene De La Briandias is to be congratulated on his fine DVD, which compiles numerous acts performed by the Laf-Frantics. For the most part, the material was recorded by amateurs on home movie cameras. Much of the material had faded over the years and required a great deal of effort and skill to produce the final product.

If you would like to relive this collection of skits, we are offering copies of the DVD for \$10, which includes \$5 for the production and \$5 as a tax-deductible contribution to the Lafayette Historical Society. Send your check to Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549. A copy of the program of the Laf-Frantics 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion will be included.

*P.S. Some people who have already purchased the disk were not able to play it on their equipment. This is due to differences in DVD players which require a different type of disk. If you cannot make your disk play, please contact the Historical Society and we will get you a working copy.*

# Looking Back in Lafayette

*Excerpts from the Lafayette Sun from years past:*

**Spring 1976 (30 years ago):**

- ◆ Miss Jennie’s redwood tree at Diablo Foods has been reborn following a fire on May 9 that gutted the store and burned the tree. Credit for saving the tree goes to Percy Whitten who has been watering it non-stop for the last 11 weeks.
- ◆ 100 people enjoyed the first Lafayette-Langeac Bastille Day Picnic at the Lafayette Reservoir on July 14 to honor our French sister city.
- ◆ Phase one plans for improvements on the community center property at 711 St. Marys Road were given the go ahead by the Lafayette City Council. The plans would bring together the two Little League fields on the property. The estimated cost is \$250,000.
- ◆ Lafayette celebrated the Bicentennial of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with a Horse and Carriage Days Parade that included more than 50 groups.
- ◆ World Savings advertised 8.06% annual yield on 6 – 10 year savings accounts of \$1,000 or more.

**Spring 1966 (40 years ago):**

- ◆ The Lafayette Council was asked to support a stiff sign ordinance, according to a resolution by the Lafayette Design Project, in the hope of beautifying downtown Lafayette.
- ◆ Designs of the new traffic signals for five of the crucial intersections in downtown Lafayette are now underway by the State Division of Highways. BART will partially pay for the signals along Mt. Diablo Blvd. at Happy Valley Rd, Oak Hill Rd, First St., Moraga Rd. and Dolores Dr.
- ◆ Roos /Atkins (in the Broadway Shopping Center in Walnut Creek) offered clothing for “Dad’s and Grads” in a June issue.
- ◆ A GE 4000 BTU/room air conditioner was offered for sale at Simon’s in Walnut Creek for \$109.95.

—**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
Archive Retrieval: Mary McCosker.....	284-5376
Artifact Documentation: Keith Blakeney.....	284-2221
Programs: Joseph Van Overveen.....	283-3650
George Wasson.....	284-4603
Tom Titmus.....	299-2030
Mary Salon.....	283-7335
Nancy Flood.....	283-3409

**2005/2006 Committee Chairs**

Potluck Dinner: Richard Johnson.....	283-0199
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 \_\_\_\_\_