

President:
Tom Titmus
299-2030

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Lafayette Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 133, LAFAYETTE, CA 94549

NEWS

Lafayette, California

April 2003

Vol. 30, No. 2

LHS Annual "Pot Luck" Dinner

- Date: Tuesday, May 13, 2003
- Time: 6 pm Social Hour
7 pm Dinner
8 pm Short business meeting to elect officers, followed by—
- Speaker: JEROME WALDIE—U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, including the Middle East
- Place: Lafayette Veterans Hall, Mt. Diablo Blvd. at 1st Street, Lafayette
- Price: \$5.00 per individual, or \$7.50 per family to help defray LHS costs, PLUS your favorite hearty salad or casserole (please bring serving utensils). Membership dues will be collected if you have not already renewed for 2003.
- Questions: Call Dick Johnson (283-0199) or Ollie Hamlin (283-6822)

Jerome Waldie 2003 LHS Dinner Speaker, To Discuss U.S. Foreign Policy

Former Congressman Jerome Waldie will be the featured speaker at the LHS annual potluck dinner on May 13, 2003. Mr. Waldie will discuss U.S. foreign policy, particularly with respect to the Middle East.

Mr. Waldie was born in Antioch and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley and Boalt Hall Law School. He served as Assemblyman for much of Contra Costa County from 1959 through 1966 and became Assembly Majority Leader in 1961. In 1966 he was elected to Congress and continued to serve until 1979. Among his committee assignments, Mr. Waldie was a member of the historic House Judiciary Committee that voted to impeach President Richard Nixon before Nixon's 1974 resignation. After leaving Congress he served on California's Agriculture Relations Board and is presently a member of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

—by Jop Van Overveen

Springtime Designs and Old Leather

As this edition of the *LHS Newsletter* goes to press, a stretch of pleasant weather has encouraged Lafayette birds to build new nests and humans to begin new gardens. As you'll read elsewhere in these

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

Lafayette's 1955 Man of the Year... and Then Some

In 1955 Mathew Howard Stanley, who, with his wife Grace, had lived and worked in Lafayette for 30 years, was selected as Lafayette Man of the Year. Mr. Stanley's far-seeing efforts during those years to improve Lafayette's school system, fire department, water supply, and sanitary district helped transform Lafayette from a rural town into the pleasant, modern community it is today. He has been honored in the names of Lafayette's Matthew H. Stanley Middle School and the Stanley Building on Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Mathew H. Stanley was born in San Diego on September 30, 1888, son of John Stanley, a blacksmith and carriage builder. In the late 1890s John Stanley moved to Alaska, where he became the first mayor of Skagway and was later appointed U.S. Marshall for Alaska. Matthew and the rest of the family did not accompany John, however, but moved to Oakland. There Matthew earned his high school diploma the hard way: he worked a day job at an Oakland lumber company and attended high school classes at night, eventually receiving his diploma.

After serving in the army during World War I and having his own business in Berkeley, he moved to Lafayette in 1925. From 1931 to 1958 Mr. Stanley served the Lafayette County Water District, which later merged into EBMUD, as secretary, general manager and auditor. He also served as auditor for the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, which he helped organize. His early support for the Caldecott Tunnel, which opened Contra Costa County to the west and to the development it en-

joys today, illustrates his commitment to progress in Lafayette and the surrounding community.

One of Mr. Stanley's greatest interests was the improvement of our local schools. He was elected to the Lafayette Elementary School Board of Trustees in the late 1920's. Over the next 25 years he helped oversee the school system's growth from a single three-room schoolhouse with 150 pupils to three schools with 1,800 pupils. Throughout this period of expansion he worked constantly to maintain a high standard of education, actively seeking out the best teachers to achieve this goal.



Mathew H. Stanley's name graces the front of Lafayette's middle school. (Sometime after this picture was taken, it was noted that the second "d" in "Midd" in this picture had gone missing, but the final "le" had returned from vacation.)

Photo: Paul Sheehan

In the 1930s Lafayette residents began forming a high school district to include Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga and Walnut Creek. At that time Lafayette's high school students took the Sacramento Northern train to Concord, a round trip of 2-1/2 hours. The railroad travel left the students little time for after-school extracurricular activities. Student fees paid to the Mt. Diablo School District and the train fares cost Lafayette taxpayers about \$20,000 per year. When the city voted to form the district in 1938, Stanley was elected to the 1939-1940 board of trustees. Acalanes High School, an

the ferry. Eastbound travelers taking the boat from San Francisco at 11:30 a.m. would reach Somersville by 6:00 in the evening “or a little later it may be. The telegraph road is now in admirable order.”

One day a young man who had boarded a stage at Clayton did not return with a group of passengers who had walked to the Summit House on Mt. Diablo—a true travel mystery. Eventually the stage left without him:

“his valise, now at Shattuck & Hillegass’ stable” contained “a pair of pantaloons and vest—black and white checked, a glazed cap and canvas overalls; also eight photographs of his male companions.” But where was he? As far as is known, the whereabouts of this gentleman were never discovered.

As you can see from these details, stage travel in Contra Costa, although tedious and irregular and occasionally losing a passenger, had made remarkable progress in just five years.

(Information from the *Contra Costa Gazette* was found in the Dorothy Mutnick Collection, CCCHS History Center.)

—by *Ruth Dyer*

Jenny’s Bell

A century ago, when teacher Jennie Bickerstaff rang the school bell, it was time for class to start. Now grade school students throughout Lafayette, hearing that same bell, can relive life in early Lafayette. The bell has been added this year to the presentations made to all 3rd grade classes by LHS members Mary McCosker and Emily Haas, as part of the curriculum on local communities.



Miss Jennie Bickerstaff, early day school teacher, 1892, riding Topsy, on her way to school. The dirt road is presently Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Jennie, the town’s third schoolteacher, came with her parents to Lafayette in 1875, when she was three years old. In 1879 her father, James Bickerstaff, purchased an acre of land near Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Dewing Avenue from Elam Brown, on which the Bickerstaffs built their family home. As a young girl, Jennie planted a redwood tree in her front yard. That small tree has grown to be a very tall tree, which still stands in front of Diablo Foods.

Jennie was a student at Lafayette’s second schoolhouse and received a teaching certificate from San Jose Normal School in 1892. She taught at Lafayette’s third schoolhouse, located at the present Methodist Church on Moraga Road, from 1899 to 1902. Miss Jennie, as she was known, devoted more than 37 years to teaching in Contra Costa County schools, including Walnut Creek and Orinda as well as Lafayette. She was married twice: first to Stephen Dewing and, after his death, to William Rosenberg. Although Miss Jennie never had children of her own, her students remembered her as kind and loving. A devoted member of her community, Miss Jennie continued to live in her childhood home on Mt. Diablo Boulevard until shortly before her death in 1964.

—by *Mary McCosker*

Lafayette Historical Society

nal building is expected to become substantially different as it is refined and adapted to suit the needs of the City, its citizens, and library staff. To oversee the City's involvement with this iterative design/consultation/construction process, the City Council has hired Mary Wray and Kathryn Page Associates as Library Building consultants. The Council has also engaged the firm Critical Solutions as construction management consultants for both the Veterans Memorial Building and the new library.

—by *Marechal Duncan*

LHS Web Site

LHS has made considerable progress with the quest to set up a web site. The Lafayette School District is allowing us to use its server, and we anticipate that an Acalanes student will prepare the final elements needed to present information about the Society and Lafayette's history to people with on-line access. As we currently envision it, the site will be installed in early summer and will include information about what LHS is, and the book *Lafayette, a Pictorial History*, as well as links to other historical societies in the county and California.

We would be very happy to receive your suggestions on information that you think might be added to the website in the future. Please contact Dorothy Walker with your suggestions.

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 |
| Historian: Bill Wakeman | 283-3908 |
| 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 |



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

Name: _____ Spouse: _____
 Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____
 Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Membership Categories & Annual Dues: (please check one)

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership | \$100.00 (one time fee) | <input type="checkbox"/> Family membership | \$10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business membership | \$ 50.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Student membership | \$ 2.50 |

Please indicate areas of special interest:

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|--|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual dinner | <input type="checkbox"/> Archives | <input type="checkbox"/> LHS Online | <input type="checkbox"/> Displays | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo collection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landmarks | <input type="checkbox"/> News Clips | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral History | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Engine | <input type="checkbox"/> Programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephoning | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking Tours | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |