

President:  
**Dorothy Walker**  
283-3303



**NEWS**

Lafayette, California

April 2007

Vol. 34, No. 2

**Mark Your Calendar!**  
**Annual LHS Potluck Dinner**

DATE: **Wednesday, MAY 16, 2007**

PLACE: Veteran's Memorial Building, 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**

DISCUSSION: **Steven Falk, Lafayette City Manager**  
Topic: **Future History Happens Now**

PRICE: \$10.00 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

Please join us at our Pot Luck Dinner, *Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>*. This annual get-together will feature Lafayette's City Manager, **Steven Falk**, as our speaker. We will again hold the event at the new Veteran's building.

Since our last newsletter, an important milestone has occurred in our City's history. **March 2, 2007** was the **150<sup>th</sup>** year of U.S. postal service to the town, giving us our official identity. I hope you all saw the interesting article in the Contra Costa Sun on the history of the postal service in our town. **Dave Obera**, an LHS member, provided the information for the article.

The Board wants to acknowledge the generous donation from **Nancy Soule Walkup** of a number of trophies, photos and ribbons won at the Lafayette Horse Show. The Horse Show was an annual event in the town from 1935 to 1943 and drew great crowds from throughout Contra Costa County. They will be displayed once we get our history room in the new Library and Learning Center. (I hope many of you went to the groundbreaking ceremony on April 20<sup>th</sup>).

Since January, one of our new accomplishments has been a monthly article that LHS members provide to a new publication, Lafayette Today. This activity will help LHS fulfill one of its principal missions, which is to continue to keep Lafayette's history alive and accessible to members of the community. With your help in writing and researching, we will continue to give our neighbors information on the history of our community. We hope the articles will also bring new members to our organization.

The Historical Society has been asked to review the proposed renovation for the Handlebar/A-1 Photo shops on the Plaza. The 1850s building was home to the Pioneer Store and also housed our first post office and telephone exchange. It is designated a "Place of Historical Interest" by the City. Our review is the first the building will go through before the proposal is seen by the city council.

So a lot is cooking, and there's lots of activity to participate in. First step:

See you at the Pot Luck!

—**Dorothy Walker, President of the Board**

## The Pony Express Stop in Lafayette

The Pony Express has a short but romantic history and it includes the town of Lafayette! This is Part One of a two-part article. Part One will describe the need for the Pony Express, the companies that built it, and its relay stations, riders and the horses. Part Two will discuss the mail, the saddles, actual rides from St. Joseph, Missouri and San Francisco, and why Lafayette was a station.

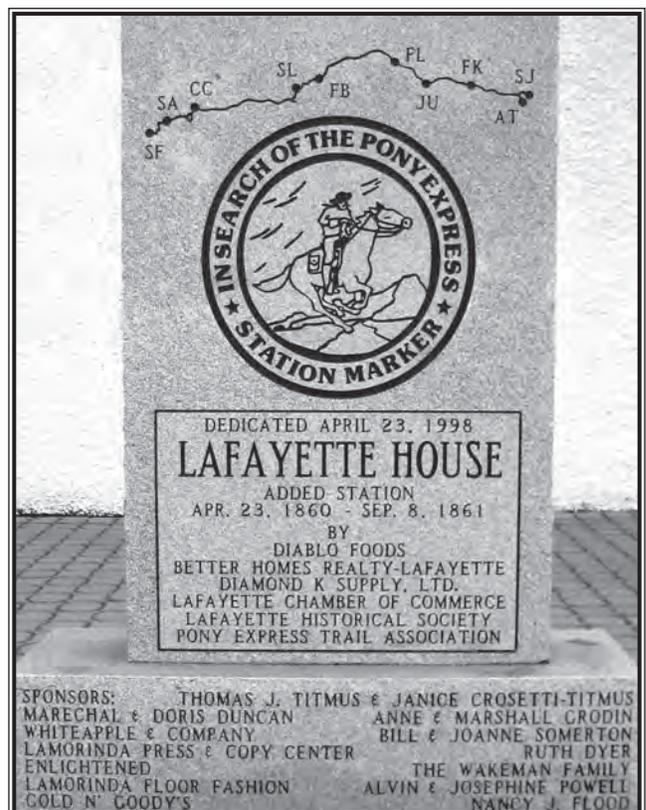
In 1845, to get mail from Washington D.C. to California could take up to six months by sea and only a slightly shorter time if the mail crossed the Isthmus of Panama by pack mule. By 1860, it took just twenty-five days for mail to go the southern route from St. Louis by way of El Paso, Texas on stagecoaches to Los Angeles and then San Francisco. But this was still a long time for people at either end of the continent to wait for news. After much searching, a central route that was almost due west was proposed. It was much shorter, but its use in winter had yet to be proven.

One of the main reasons to set up faster mail service was the rumbling of an impending Civil War. The U.S. Government wanted to keep California and all its gold as part of the North. In addition, many people who had emigrated to the gold fields wanted to hear from relatives back home.

In the 1850s, a company named Russell, Majors and Waddell was a freight outfitter to the Army and to travelers on the Oregon and Santa Fe trails. In 1857 they had a large financial loss after

54 of their wagons were destroyed in the Utah (or "Mormon") War. They were not reimbursed by the government, which made their finances shaky. The company hoped to make up for this with a contract to carry the mail to California, since they already had overland stage stations for mail and passenger service between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City.

On January 27, 1860, William Russell of Russell, Majors and Waddell learned that California Senator William Gwin was supporting a contract for California mail service in Congress. The initiation of the service was contingent on its readiness by April and on mail delivery within ten days, an almost unbelievably short time in those days. The service would run along the central route, which



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would be open all year, even in winter. The proposed central route, which cut hundreds of miles from previous routes, was necessary to the Government because Texas was leaning to the South, and in the event of war mail would not be able to be carried via the southern route through El Paso. The outermost train stop and telegraph terminus from the east was in St. Joseph, Missouri. It was decided to make this the starting point for the express service.

Russell, Majors and Waddell created a company named the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company to set up the relay stations. (The C.O.C. & P.P. later became known to its employees as "Clean Out of Cash and Poor Pay".) Incredibly, the C.O.C. & P.P. set up over 150 relay stations between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento in time for the first ride barely two months later. They had a head start, as some of the eastern stations were already in use for their stage operations. But other areas proved difficult for station construction. There were no trees for buildings in the desert areas, so adobe stations, dugouts, and tents had to be used.

Word went out that riders weighing less than 125 pounds, who were of good character and could handle horses, were to be hired for \$50 to \$100 a month. Many station keepers and stock tenders were hired, along with eighty riders. Stations were from ten to twenty-five miles apart. Later, stations were mostly ten to twelve miles apart, about the

distance a horse could gallop between stops. Riders were to ride from 75 to 100 miles a day. They were to ride day and night in every month of the year, regardless of the weather. Each rider was given a Bible and was required to take an oath forswearing fighting, drinking, and profanity. The Pony Express rider to become most famous in his later years was Wild Bill Cody.

The horses were to be less than 14.5 hands in height and weigh under 900 pounds. These measurements were slight for horses and led to the name of the Pony Express. However, ponies were not used. Top dollar was paid for the horses, and it is believed that horses alone cost \$87,000. Also, provisions were made for the horses to have good feed to maintain muscle strength and stamina. One rider later claimed he outran Indians because his horse was in better shape than they were.

Like their riders, the horses needed to be wiry and fast for the prairies. Morgans, thoroughbreds, and pintos were used on the eastern end of the ride. Smaller, tough animals of California stock (mustangs) would be used for the rough mountains and deserts. One rider claimed that he had to get on the horse fast and start out at a gallop because some of the horses were bucking broncos. Galloping was the only way to keep them from bucking! Although at least

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one reference notes that horses were branded to deter thievery, there is no known “Pony Express” brand.

After all their work, Russell, Majors and Waddell failed to get the government contract for C.O.C. & P.P. The contract was awarded to the Butterfield Overland Mail Company in March of 1861. But Russell, Majors and Waddell did get a subcontract for service from the Missouri River to Salt Lake City. Sadly for them, the Pony Express never made money for C.O.C. & P.P., which was taken over by the Overland Mail Company. Records for C.O.C. & P.P. have not survived.

[A footnote: Joseph Nardone, national Executive Director of the Pony Express Trail Association and prime mover promoting the historical significance of the Pony Express Trail with Congress, spent years searching through archives looking for the famous advertisement: “Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Not over 18. Must be expert riders. Willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.” He concluded it was a hoax, finding no reference before 1902. Mr. Nardone was present for the Lafayette dedication of the plaque in Plaza Park in 1992.]

Next issue: read about the type of mail sent, the mochila or special mail bag, the actual first routes starting the same day from St. Joseph and San Francisco and the reason Lafayette had its own relay station.

–*Mary Solon*



## Margaret “Jennie” Bickerstaff

Margaret Jane (“Jennie”) Bickerstaff came to Lafayette in 1875 when she was three years old. After two years the family went back to Pennsylvania because of her mother’s ill health. Returning in 1879, her father built their house on the narrow, graveled main street in town. Even then there was traffic on Mt. Diablo Boulevard: buggies, wagons-farmers hauling hay and grain to market-and sometimes a “traffic jam” of four and six horses.

As a young girl, Margaret Jane helped plant a garden by her house, which included a redwood tree. Although the house no longer stands, the tree remains near Diablo Foods as a remembrance of Miss Jennie. The Bickerstaffs' nearest neighbors were the Houghs, and Jennie's closest friend was Carrie Hough. The Houghs lived where the Lafayette Safeway is now. When she grew up, Carrie Hough became Mrs. Van Meter, Lafayette's first postmaster. The post office also housed Lafayette's first "library," a box of books.

By the time Miss Jennie was twenty years old, she had graduated from both the Lafayette public school and San Jose Normal School. When her education was completed, she began a teaching career that was to last until her retirement in 1936. From 1892 to 1907 she taught at Glorietta School and then at the old Moraga School, receiving a salary of \$60.00 a month. She was at the Lafayette School for three years, at Pacheco for six and a half, and at Walnut Creek for twenty-one. In the beginning of her career, she taught students from the first grade to the first year of high school, all in one room. As a young teacher she traveled to school by horseback: five miles to school by way of the county road and three more miles over the hills. There were five gates to open and one was a shoulder gate where it was necessary to dismount, put a shoulder to the gate and open

it, lead the horse through, shoulder the gate to close it, mount the horse and ride on. Later she used a horse and cart.

Margaret married Lafayette pioneer Stephen Dewing, thus acquiring a readymade family of six grown children: three sons and three daughters. Sometime after Dewing's death, she met her second husband, William Rosenberg, in a harmonica class in Santa Cruz. She died in 1964 at the age of 93 while living in a retirement home in Oakland with her husband.

—*Mary McCosker*



## Old Betsy

### More about the Wheels

There is more to rebuilding the wheels for OLD BETSY than might appear. As I have said before, a Model T Truck has tires on a rim, a rim on the wheel, and wooden spokes that connect the rim to a hub. The hub holds the spokes all together to fit onto either the front or the rear axle. The rear axle wheels have a brake drum attached to the hub.

For OLD BETSY, I took the rims off of the wheels and then found I had to take them to BIG O TIRES to get the tires off the wheels. The old rims don't fit on any modern tire repair equipment. It required a lot of hand labor to free the old tires from the rims (those tires were attached to those rims probably 40+ years ago); to be more precise, the rim is a "split rim" to make the job easier.

Next, the wheel was to come apart, but after many years of tightening, the bolts and nuts were stuck fast and rusted in place, so some of the nuts did not release easily. For three of the four wheels, everything came apart with only some extra effort. BUT, the fourth wheel presented a problem. One last nut holding the brake drum to the hub WOULD NOT RELEASE. I could not get it to turn off.

Here is where good friends and expert mechanics with LOTS OF EXTRA TOOLS surfaced. I

hesitate to give the whole name of my expert because I once told a client about him and he had a devil of a time refusing to help the client. But CHARLIE (he is the husband of my wife's cousin) came to my rescue. With his tools, he was able to cut the nut off the last bolt and to free the brake drum from the assembly.

All done?—not so easy! The hub would not budge to release the spokes. After fabricating a SPECIAL TOOL and using his heavy duty press and about 20 tons of pressure, the hub finally came apart for Charlie.

Now all four wheels are in pieces and ready for sand blasting and rebuilding with new spokes.

Stay tuned for the next installment in the saga of getting OLD BETSY her new shoes (tires).

—George Wasson



## Lafayette Library & Learning Center

As reported in our local press, the same company that built the Orinda Library will also build Lafayette’s new Library and Learning Center.

C. Overaa & Company of Richmond was the City’s choice to build the library at Mount Diablo Boulevard and First Street. The company submitted a bid of \$29.5 million, the lowest of four bids that went as high as \$34.4 million; City officials had initially estimated the work at \$28.8 million. With the cost of land, construction, consultants, and furniture, the library price tag is slated to total \$43.3 million.

C. Overaa & Company is a 100-year-old company that, in addition to the Orinda Library, has built Livermore Civic Center Library, and the Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek. Presently it is also building the Lafayette Mercantile, an office and retail project with parking in downtown Lafayette.

The project was made possible by the partnership among Lafayette Redevelopment Agency, Lafayette Community Foundation, the State of California, and the Contra Costa Library. Construction has begun. The groundbreaking ceremony for the Library and Learning Center took place April 20th onsite.

—*Marechal Duncan*

### 2006/2007 Directors

President: Dorothy Walker.....	283-3303
Vice President: Marechal Duncan.....	283-6812
Treasurer: Paul Sheehan .....	284-1287
Recording Secretary: Mary McCosker .....	284-5376
Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin .....	283-6822
Archive Retrieval: Mary McCosker .....	284-5376
Artifact Documentation: Keith Blakeney.....	284-2221
Programs: Joseph Van Overveen.....	283-3650
Photo Retrieval: Mary Salon .....	283-7335
George Wasson .....	284-4603
Tom Titmus .....	299-2030
Nancy Flood.....	283-3409
Keith Blakeney.....	788-0195

### 2006/2007 Committee Chairs

Historian, Ruth Dyer .....	283-8312
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 \_\_\_\_\_