

President:
Tom Titmus
299-2030



NEWS

Lafayette, California

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President's Message

Continuing congratulations are in order for all of the Lafayette folks who worked for and obtained that multi-million dollar grant from the California Public Library Construction and Renovation Bond Board.

But the first stones of the new library have not been set yet! The state grant requires matching funds, and that generally means a dollar-for-dollar private funding effort. The immediate Lafayette community has received considerable support from our neighbors at the high-profile Glenn Seaborg Learning Consortium and some U.C. Berkeley campus luminaries, among many others. Even with a consortium among those in our uphill push for funds, we still require a broad continuum of gift giving to qualify for matching funds. A significant portion of the new library and learning center will be dedicated to Lafayette historical recognition. The LHS Board and all our members have, and will continue to, support the drive toward the August 2005 groundbreaking date, which is tied to the completion of the new Veterans Building. Next time you drive along the west end of Mt. Diablo Boulevard, take a look: construction has been moving rapidly. In the meantime, in preparation for our move to the library, Dorothy Walker, Mary McCosker and Gary Willcut have begun pulling together the archive database in preparation for the lengthy cataloging process.

My thanks to and commendation of the membership for your generous support. And best wishes to all of you for the New Year. We're looking ahead to an exciting year!

—*Thomas Titmus, President*

New Library Update

When Anne Groden, Chair, Lafayette Community Foundation, returned to Lafayette after she and our team made their successful presentation to the state of California, she reported the following:

“Lafayette’s dream for a ‘national model’ library and learning center moved a little closer to reality with the news on November 29 that the project was selected to receive an \$11.9 million grant from the California Public Library Construction and Renovation Bond Board. The award will help fund the public portion of the private-public financing of the new library, easing the City of Lafayette’s financial obligation, and ensuring that the current timeline for the completion will be met. Lafayette was competing for the grant monies with 72 other state libraries. Insiders believe that the innovative nature of the project assisted Lafayette’s case—the Library will be home to the Glenn Seaborg Learning Consortium, a visionary collaboration among 12 high-profile arts, education, and culture organizations including the Oakland

“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.”

Museum, Lawrence Hall of Science and Chabot Space & Science. The project will also serve as a regional resource for all residence of the East Bay. The Lafayette Community Foundation's private campaign to raise an additional \$11 million (\$9 million for construction, \$2 million for endowment) in matching funds, as required by the state grant, is moving forward thanks to all the early donations. They are currently at \$7.5 million pledges with a gap of \$3.5 million to close".

Congratulations and thanks to Ms. Groden and the Community Foundation for their excellent work. We are grateful and pleased that the LHS is to be an integral part of the Library.

Groundbreaking for the New Lafayette Library and Learning Center is scheduled for late summer 2005. Current architectural plans include a very spacious work and display room for the Lafayette Historical Society's archives, a storage area, and a special display room for our 1920 fire engine, Old Betsy. All the LHS space will face Golden Gate Way on the ground level floor, making it easy for passersby to see the window display with Betsy as well as inviting them to enter.

We need the support of all of the LHS members to make the LHS area of the Library a reality. Please send in your gifts to Lafayette Community Foundation Box 221, Lafayette, CA 94549, and please note that your gift is earmarked for the Lafayette Historical Society area. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to telephone me at (925) 283-6812.

—*Marechal Duncan*

Lafayette Supports the Union Cause

Although Lafayette's residents had given a plurality of their votes to Southern Democrats, they actively supported the Union cause. Once the Civil War had begun, the Contra Costa Gazette reported on their wartime activities—and those of a few dissidents: Nonetheless, Californians were very generous with financial support for the injured soldiers of both North and South (Contra Costa's records noted, "We may add. . . that the rebel soldiers in the hospital participate in the benefits"). They raised over a quarter of all money received by the new U.S. Sanitary Commission, which was formed by Unitarians and became the forerunner of the Red Cross. Of the million dollars that came from the state, over a third was from San Francisco.

In support of the Sanitary Commission, the Executive Sanitary Committee of Contra Costa met in Lafayette and resolved to appoint subcommittees within the county to raise funds for war relief and to report weekly the names of all who subscribed and the amounts given. The

Flag Staff Mutilation

Last Sunday night, at Lafayette, in our county, an attempt was made by some person or persons to cut down the flag-staff standing near the Methodist Church and within the yard that embraces same. Fortunately, the noise of the axe aroused some of the neighbors who hurried to the place. But the guilty parties ran rapidly away, leaving the axe in their flight. It is possible that the means of identifying the actors in the midnight effort may be accessible. . . . It could hardly have been the deed of religious fanatics, for the Church belongs to those who are heartily loyal to the flag of our Union. It certainly was. . . neither a brave nor a manly act, for then it would have been done publicly and in open day.

The fears of Southern sympathizers in California that had prevented a military draft in the state turned out to be exaggerated, but although 15,000 California men joined the Union forces, comparatively few of them served in the East.

Continued on Page 3

Executive Secretary in Martinez would see that this information appeared in the Contra Costa Gazette. "We desire to be the banner county," the Committee said, although its resources did not match those of San Francisco. In response to pleas from the Women's Central Association of Relief in New York for money, lint, bandages, and hospital clothing, Contra Costa County sent \$2,770.50 by the end of October 1862; along with funds for "stimulants," to Washington.

Funds were raised in various ways. Throughout the state, "Sanitary Fund Boxes" were set up at polls during elections. Precinct inspectors and judges were responsible for putting up the boxes and collecting the funds. By this means, Pacheco raised \$108.50, Clayton \$127.05, Antioch \$37.60, Martinez \$46.75, and Alamo \$14.00.

Although they could not vote, the ladies of Lafayette did their part for the Union, too. In 1864, when Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson ran on the Union Party ticket, the ladies combined politics and beneficence:

Feasting at Lafayette

Last Tuesday the Union ladies of Lafayette got up a splendid dinner for their Union friends upon the spot where Union speeches had been delivered in the course of the Presidential canvass. While their husbands and brothers were voting, they were preparing the dinner and after all had partaken of the dinner, then the ladies also claimed the liberty of depositing their votes. Instead of putting their votes into the ballot box, however, they in ladylike style, put them all into the Sanitary Fund box. The result of this voting of theirs with that of their Union friends, was the sum of \$75.00 contributed for the relief of our wounded and suffering soldiers.

This lively event was followed in 1865 by an **Entertainment at Lafayette:**

The young ladies of Lafayette will give an entertainment on Monday evening, consisting of tableaux, etc., for the benefit of the Sanitary Fund. We hope they will be liberally patronized. We have no doubt the entertainment itself will be amply worth the price of admission, and then there is the additional satisfaction of contributing to a noble cause. They have our tanks for an invitation to be present.

In these ways the tiny village of Lafayette did its part in supporting California's contribution to relief efforts during the Civil War.

(Wartime politics will be covered in another article with Lafayette adding to the liveliness.)

—**Ruth Dyer**

In preparation of this material, the Dorothy Mutnick Collection at the CCCHS History Center was valuable.

Early Schools and Teachers

After Elam Brown had settled his large family in Lafayette, he realized that his children needed to be educated. He convinced Benjamin Shreve, a gold miner passing through Lafayette, to take on the job as a teacher, and in 1852, Lafayette's first grammar school was built. It was located on Golden Gate Way between First and Second Streets. Shreve taught 12 students that first year.

By 1871, the town had outgrown its first schoolhouse, so a new one was built on the site of the present United Methodist Church on Moraga Road. When that school, too, became too small, a new, larger school was constructed on the same site in 1893. That building later became the Methodist Church, which stands on its original site today. The second schoolhouse was later moved to 3535

Mt. Diablo Boulevard where it has housed several different businesses over the years.

Lafayette's early schools were much different than our schools today. There were no high schools or middle schools, no playfields with play structures, no indoor plumbing, no multi-purpose rooms with kitchen facilities and no electricity. School houses were wood-framed buildings with one or two school rooms and were supplied with only slates, pencils, crayons, paper, ink, writing quills and a broom, and were heated by a wood-burning stove. Students ranged from the age of five to 15 years old and progressed through the grades backwards. When you entered school you were in eighth grade (equivalent to today's first grade), regardless of age, and the highest level in school was first grade. The school calendar consisted of only two weeks of vacation during the school term: one was for attendance at the County Fair and one was during the State Teachers' Institute. Although there were only two weeks vacation during the school term, weather conditions usually prevented school attendance during the winter rainy season – November through March – because of difficulty traveling on paths and roads.

Jennie Bickerstaff, who became the town's third schoolteacher, came to Lafayette with her parents in 1875 at the age of three. Her father, James, purchased an acre of land from Elam Brown in 1879 and built a family home near Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Dewing Avenue. As a young girl, Jennie planted a small redwood tree in the front yard of that home. The small tree has grown to be a very tall tree, which today stands in front of Diablo Foods.

Jennie was a student at Lafayette's second schoolhouse and received her teaching certificate from San Jose Normal School in 1892. She taught in Lafayette at the third schoolhouse from 1899 to

1902. Miss Jennie, as she was known, also taught in schools in Walnut Creek and Orinda.

Altogether, Jennie Bickerstaff devoted more than 37 years to teaching in Contra Costa schools. Later in life she married Stephen Dewing, and after his death, wed William Rosenberg. Although Miss Jennie never had children of her own, she was remembered fondly by her students as kind and loving. Miss Jennie was a devoted member of her community and lived in her childhood home on Mt. Diablo Boulevard until shortly before her death in 1964.

—Mary McCosker

*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 To Get Facelift

As we've written before, the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center has designated a great spot for Old Betsy on the outside of the building along Golden Gate Way. The present plans include a picture window that will showcase the fire engine and other early Fire District items. A Library and Learning Center Fund Drive will begin early in 2005, and Betsy has been asked to be there as one of the attractions.

This means that Betsy's caretakers must make her look presentable very soon, so that the entire community will be proud of her. We are pleased that her engine and transmission are in good shape, thanks to the help of LHS members and other community members. Now her appearance will be enhanced by sanding, stripping, and applying new finishes on the wooden sides and metal rear fenders. In spring, as soon as the weather and temperature improve, we can get started working outside. When that time comes

Continued on Page 5

we may send out a call for able-bodied persons to assist with our efforts. Anyone who wants to volunteer can call me (283-4420) or others of the Historical Society board.

To make our work easy, we have received a generous contribution from the Lafayette Women’s Club, and we are working on another possible source of funds to upgrade the wheels and tires. Our thanks to the Women’s Club, and—from Betsy and me—our best wishes to all for a rewarding New Year.

—George W. Wasson

New Self-Guided Tour of the Lafayette Cemetery

Julie Wegher, a senior at Acalanes High School, is developing a self-guided tour of the Lafayette Cemetery as her Girl Scout Gold Award project. Emily Haas, one of our local history experts, has been assisting Julie. The guide, in pamphlet form, will identify the graves of early Lafayette pioneers and other notables who are buried here in Lafayette. Copies will be available at the Lafayette Library, the Chamber of Commerce offices, and the cemetery early in 2005.

—Mary McKosker



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