

President:
Dorothy Walker
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NEWS

Lafayette, California

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Winter Message from the President

I hope your holidays were enjoyable. Although many of us just want to hibernate after all the excitement of being with friends and family, LHS, which has many new activities poised to begin, won't be able to sit back in January. First, we expect to publish a monthly historic column in the new local publication Lafayette Today. Lafayette residents should be getting a copy at their homes beginning in January, and I hope you'll enjoy the columns. Two of our Board members, Mary McCosker and Mary Solon, are furiously writing the newest book on Lafayette's history. It will be a pictorial description of our town's development, published by Arcadia Press. In our next Newsletter we hope to provide information about where you will be able to get your copy. And, of course, there is the continuing effort to organize our photos and artifacts in anticipation of moving into the new History Room at the Library and Learning Center sometime in 2008. See the update in this issue. We wish to thank Bill Eames and Harry Eisenberg for their continued loan of space for our "office," where we are doing our archive documentation and book preparation.

Late last year the Board regretfully accepted the resignation of Ruth Dyer, our long time Board member, Secretary, and mainstay of Lafayette Historical Society. Ruth submitted her resignation because of continuing medical problems and the expectation of additional surgery. One of our founding members, Ruth has actively participated in all of our activities, most notably as the greeter at our annual pot lucks. Ruth has always been the one person we can always refer to when we get an unusual question from the public. She either knows the answer, or knows where to get the answer. She has agreed to be available as our historian in residence when questions arise, the Board expects to formally acknowledge her long time service when she is well enough to accept our heartfelt thanks in person.

It is January, and with this month comes our request for your annual membership contribution. We have enclosed an envelope with this newsletter and hope you understand the renewed need to continue to support the work of this organization, now that we are taking on so many additional projects. We are so looking forward to this new year while we prepare to move into our permanent location. Please join us.

Best wishes, to all of you.

—Dorothy Walker, President of the Board

Lafayette's Hidden Cemetery

Although it is a small community, Lafayette is actually the home of three cemeteries. Most people know of the two large cemeteries off Reliez Valley Road, but many overlook a third small cemetery nestled in the hillside at the east end of Lafayette. The little Lafayette Cemetery is one of two cemeteries that make up the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District, which is supported by taxes paid by residents of the two cities.

This cemetery is probably located in Lafayette because of early settlement by the Hodges family in the early 1850s. According to a state census in 1852, Medford Gorham had originally claimed the quarter section of land that is today's cemetery. In the fall of that year, David Hodges and his family settled another section to the north of Gorham's plot. Hodges and his wife Louisa had a large family that included two sets of twins. In 1854 their daughter Henrietta, who had been ill with tuberculosis, died and the family needed a place to bury her. A corner of Gorham's land was south of the road to the redwoods (today's Pleasant Hill Road) and near the Hodges' homestead. Henrietta was laid to rest on the top of a small hill at this location, becoming the first recorded burial in Lafayette. Other burials on the same site, including two infants in 1858—one a Hunsaker child and the other from the Renwick family—followed.

By 1874 this portion of Medford Gorham's land had become known as the "Grave Yard," because of the many early settlers buried there. Gorham had had some legal difficulties with respect to the final ownership of the land. For \$338.85 in gold

coin, he purchased some 22.59 acres, including the cemetery property, from a speculator. Two days later, on October 19, 1874, he signed over the deed to the 4-acre cemetery to the Directors of the Lafayette Cemetery Association for just \$100 in gold.

Until 1937, relatives and friends of those buried at the cemetery planted trees and shrubs and cared for the site. That year the Board of Supervisors established the Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District in response to requests and petitions from local voters, and the District continues to oversee the cemetery. Trustees from local communities are appointed by the Supervisors to serve terms on the board of the district. Since 1937 purchase of plots for burial has been restricted to residents and taxpayers of the district. Burial plots are still available for purchase today.

—*Mary McCosker*



The Diaries of Henry Toler Brown

The following family information was provided by Sybil Brown Wilkinson, who lent the original Henry Toler Brown diaries to the Lafayette Historical Society for transcription.

Henry Toler Brown, adopted grandson of Elam Brown, was born in 1859. When he was two his mother, Catherine Toler, died in childbirth. Henry, an older sister, and the baby were taken in by Warren and Laura Brown. Laura was Laura Hastings, sister to Henry's father, Lansford Hastings. The baby died, the older sister died at age 11, and Henry was adopted by the Warren Browns.

By 1896, the year of the first diary, Henry had married Annie Willebrand and had four children. They lived in Elam Brown's house on Hough Avenue. At that time the children's ages were: Stella, age 15, Lloyd, age 10, Chester, age 6 and Sybil, age 3. Sybil was born in the house on Hough.

At first glance the daily entries seem to be brief and factual. But, with further reading, a picture of day-to-day nineteenth-century life emerges. Life in this farming family was probably typical. The boys helped in the fields. The children went to school. Chester, Lloyd and Sybil all got chicken pox.

Henry was a farmer, and the diary contains many notations on the weather and when grain was planted and reaped. Fields were plowed in November through January. In 1896, wheat and oats were sown in the first two weeks of the year although the fields flooded on January 19 and 20. Three weeks later the fields were plowed and barley was planted. On March 4, it snowed. More barley was purchased and planted in late March, although he does not mention whether this planting was on the same land. Hay was harvested from May to early July. Commercial hay balers were hired in mid-July. Sometimes hay

was stored in the old church, which, according to Sybil Wilkinson, was at the corner of Oakland Avenue and Mt. Diablo Blvd.

The family also obtained food and protected its crops by hunting rabbits, squirrels, quail, coons, and doves and rabbits. Poison was put out for squirrels on a number of occasions. Deer were not mentioned, although a mountain lion was seen carrying a rabbit.

Henry's farming equipment included a gang "plough," a single plow, a commercial seeder from Thomson, and a "Champion mower." He refers often to planting all types of vegetables, picking berries and orchard fruit, and putting up preserves. He also made entries about all of the farming chores: keeping the equipment working, hoeing potatoes, selling fruit and grains, selling eggs, moving cattle, digging the well deeper, fixing the bridge, mending fences, and selling stock. Peter Thomson, Lafayette's early blacksmith, is mentioned a number of times for fixing the wagons. Henry also ran up quite a bill with the blacksmith, bills of \$43 and \$58 within one month.

Not all Henry's bills were paid in cash. One year in late October, rain leaked into his bedroom. A week later, at Humboldt Lumber Company, Henry traded hay for shingles. A few weeks later, he noted that the shingles were in place and the scaffolding removed.

The family were members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Henry practiced songs with Jennie Bickerstaff, Ada Shreve and others. He sang in church and mentioned the songs he sang. He took lessons from Professor Toler, probably for voice. He attended prayer meetings. Brother Streeter, Brother Darling and Elder Kirby preached in the evenings. There were ice creams socials and donations to the church.

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On March 20, 1897, Stella and Henry attended a meeting at Mrs. Giles's building about building a hall. They organized a library society. Henry was elected president and Mr. Williams was elected secretary. Henry's reading included "Miles Standish," "The Count of Monte Cristo," "Robinson Crusoe" and "Little Lord Fauntleroy." Some of these he read to the children.

Stella had her sixteenth birthday party with 90 guests. Chester's party had 60–70 guests. Stella took elocution classes. An ice cream maker was a big hit in the family, as shown by the many references to it. One year the family went camping in Mitchell Canyon for a week and two 10x12-foot tents were rented. Bathing and shaving were infrequent enough to be mentioned when they actually did occur!

Henry's family went to Oakland often, whether to sell grain, go to the dentist, or hear Joaquin Miller at the Expo. One time it took an hour and 50 minutes to get to Oakland by buggy. Henry also went to the City for equipment, Fourth of July festivities, and glasses for Annie and Stella. Although he occasionally went to Martinez for jury duty and to pay taxes, he traveled to Oakland more often. However, he did travel to the Martinez cemetery with his stepmother "Auntie Laura" to put flowers on the grave of his stepfather, "Uncle Warren."



This is the annual birthday picnic party for Henry held on July 4, 1916, in the back yard of his new home on Moraga Road.

Left to right: Stella Mullikan (daughter of Henry); Mullikan children, Ramona, Gynth and Armina; Leela Stevens; Mrs. Ruth Stevens; Annie Brown (Henry's wife); Stevens twins, Anna and Dorna; Sybil's grandmother, Margaret* Willebrands; Winfred Stevens; Delmar Mulliken; Kenneth Brown (boy); Guy Hamilton (Sybil's first husband); Sybil Brown Hamilton; Warren Brown; Edna Root Brown (mother of Kenneth and Warren); Henry Toler Brown.

* nee: Keating – from Ireland

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He also mentions trips to Oakland and San Francisco to look at windmills and tanks, but does not mention these things later. During 1896, however, Henry signed an agreement with the Napa Oil Company for drilling on his ranch. The lease was signed with Mr. Sontag, granting the "privilege" of boring for oil 3 months later. Alas, the dreams of black gold never materialized.

Sometimes Henry's entries were curious for what they did not say. On 4/10/96, "Byron's wife jumped into the Bay." On 6/20/97, he notes, "Earthquake today." On 1/7/98, "Durrant hanged." The only reference to a telephone appears in the 11/25/98 entry, when they were notified that Grandma Hastings was dead. She was Laura's mother.

At the end 1898, Henry listed his assets of 20 horses and 36 cattle by name or description. He accounted for music lessons and orders for the "Young People's Song Book." He summarized the summer days on which ranch hands worked and how much they were paid. The 1898 Hay Account listed 636 bales of oats and wheat for Henry, and Auntie's account listed 325 bales of wheat and "volunteer."

Lafayette is forever indebted to Henry Toler Brown for his diaries with their colorful contemporary depiction of a typical family and farm a hundred years ago. Orphaned at two, he had the good luck to be adopted into the Brown family. Later, in these diary years, his own young family did not suffer for food or shelter, yet they worked hard for everything they had. They participated in the strong community ethic that prevails in Lafayette today.

Looking Back in Lafayette

Excerpts from the Lafayette Sun from years past:

January 1977 (30 years ago)

Businesses advertising in the Lafayette Sun in January 1977:

- ◆ Lafiesta Foods ◆ Sutton's Shoes ◆ Loray
- ◆ Capwell's ◆ Little Daisy ◆ Park & Shop

Anyone remember any of these?

- ◆ The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) staff recommended that incorporation of Lafayette be approved. The staff also recommended that the southern border of Lafayette extend almost to Campolindo High School and disapproved Reliez Valley's application for annexation to Walnut Creek.
- ◆ A \$5.5 million bore for an aqueduct that will carry 200,000,000 gallons of water/day will begin soon, necessitated by the planned construction of BART and the widening of the freeway [Highway 24].
- ◆ Coffee prices are being raised in Lafayette restaurants as a result of world-wide coffee shortages. In January 1976 a pound of coffee cost \$1.30; in January of 1977 a pound of coffee costs nearly \$3.00. Cups of coffee in area restaurants cost between \$.25 and \$.50/cup.

January 1967 (40 years ago)

- ◆ A permanent site for a new Lafayette Post Office had been selected on the east end of Mt. Diablo Blvd. (site of our current Post Office) to replace the site on Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street.
- ◆ Televents (provider of television service in the area) announced a rate hike to \$6.70/month for 1300 Lafayette residents north of the freeway.

UPDATE ON THE LAFAYETTE LIBRARY & LEARNING CENTER

The Library architectural plans are now complete. The city has hired an associate of the general contractor who built the new Veterans Building to review the plans for our new Library and point out any possible change orders that could occur, so that they could be corrected before going to bid. This could save many dollars later, as change orders are always very costly.

The project is planned to be placed out to bid in this month, January 2007, and we hope to have the groundbreaking in early spring.

Old Betsy

More about Model T Tires

Old Betsy's Wheel and Tire project is still not completed, but it is progressing. Whenever I think of the tires, I remember my first experience with Model T tires. This almost becomes historical in that it happened way back in 1940.

Stratt Woodruff, my best friend through grammar and high school, owned a 1915 Model T and we spent a lot of time working on it. During the summer of 1940 we decided to drive it to the New York City World Fair. He was working in Ocean City, New Jersey and I was working at a Boy Scout Camp in suburban Philadelphia. We planned to leave from Ocean City and drive to the Fair in New York City. We were both almost 17 at the time and saw no problem with the trip. Stratt's grandmother wanted us to take her 1935 Packard, but we said NO WAY.

The trip was about 125 miles from Ocean City to New York City, then another 70 miles out to and back from my Grandfather's house in Amityville, Long Island, and then another 100-odd miles back to suburban Philadelphia where we lived. It seemed like an easy trip to two young men.

Here is where the "tire" part of that experience comes in. On the way to New York City we had about ten flat tires. We didn't have a spare tire or rim. To repair a flat tire at that time you took the rim off the wheel, removed the tire from the rim, pulled out the inner tube, patched the tube with a "hot patch," replaced the tire on the rim, and remounted the rim on the wheel. We became VERY experienced at doing that on the way to New York. We also had two unexplained engine failures that (luckily) seemed to correct themselves because after a rest we started the engine again and were on our way. We took the ferry across the Hudson River because we did not want to have a flat or engine failure in one of the tunnels under the river.

Our two days at the Fair were worth the trip, but getting back to Amityville at night our generator quit and we were driving in the dark. The next day we found a junkyard and got a replacement generator, and we were on our way again.

The trip from New York to Philadelphia was almost uneventful until we passed through North Philadelphia. At that time, that part of

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Philadelphia still had cobblestone roads, and we rumbled along just bouncing on the cobbles. We didn't know until we got onto a smooth road that in fact we had a new flat tire. One more tire repair and we made it to our homes in suburban Philadelphia, none the worse for the trip and more experienced at driving a Model T than one might expect.

As I look back on that trip, a father, grandfather and soon-to-be great-grandfather writing this newsletter entry, I wonder how Strat and I convinced our parents that we were safe taking this trip of about 350 miles. You must remember, of course, that the roads then were not as crowded as they are today, and our speed of 25 miles per hour was not likely to put us in harm's way. We were never more than five miles from some help and usually right in the middle of a town, because of course there were no freeways at that time.

Strat died this year; he was a prominent physician in Bryn Mawr, Pa. We recalled and relived that trip many times. Although our experiences on that trip began my love affair with Model Ts, I won't need to use my flat tire expertise with Old Betsy. When she gets her new 2006 tires and wheels, there will be no such problems with flat tire as we had on that trip more than 65 years ago.

—George Wasson

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Name: _____ Spouse: _____

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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:

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