

President:
Dorothy Walker
283-3303



NEWS

Lafayette, California

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Bus Trip to Newly Renovated Bancroft Library

Personalized tour by Dr. Robert. Hirst, editor of Mark Twain papers

Wednesday, February 18 – 12:00

Meet at old Luckys/Whole Foods parking lot

\$10.00 donation

See accompanying article

Bancroft Library Tour

Lafayette Historical Society has been able to arrange a tour of the \$64 million newly renovated Bancroft Library on the U.C. Berkeley campus. Dr. Robert Hirst, last year's Potluck speaker, offered LHS a tour of this historic building. On Wednesday, February 18th we will finally be able to enjoy that opportunity. Hopefully we also will get to see the Mark Twain papers that Dr. Hirst has been editing.

We will meet in the parking lot of the old Luckys Store (soon to be Whole Foods), and leave promptly at 12:30. The bus will take us directly to the Bancroft. The tour with Dr. Hirst will begin at 1:00. Depending on how long we spend there, we may be able to also get a tour of the main library. The number of people the bus can accommodate is 40. Keith Blakeney is the coordinator for the trip and will be taking your reservations. Please contact him at 284-2221 or 788-0195.

President's Message

Happy New Year! We have a lot to look forward to this year. As you will learn elsewhere in the Newsletter, we have a target date to open our History Room! It will be the dream so many of you have had for our Society – a permanent home. We will need your support now more than ever, both to volunteer and to provide funds to keep us in the new Learning Center. The Board is hoping we will be able to have our doors open at least three days a week. We will want to have two people manning our space and greeting guests during that time. Can you help? Give us your ideas on what you'd like to do to support our new venture.

The Historical Society will also be needing to raise money to keep us in our space. The City will be charging us for utilities and maintenance in proportion to their costs. We are looking for ways to add to our treasury to keep the roof over our heads. We are proposing to have trips and talks to bring funds to LHS. The field trip to the Bancroft Library is a start. Please join us on February 18th. Dues and donations are other ways of making us financially secure.

It's that time for our *annual* dues request. An envelope is included to make it easier for you to remember us. For those of you who are life time members, won't you consider giving a little extra to support our mission of education and document the progress of our City.

—Dorothy Walker, President of the Board

New to the Archives

The Lafayette Historical Society still has a box of photos to be catalogued and scanned. Most of the photos have no identification or year on the reverse. Photos of people, lost to history, are particularly sad. From time to time we will ask our readers to identify photos of individuals. Today we look only at photos of a document, a truck and land.

1553 Invitation to the Midsummer Ball, 1919.



This exquisite invitation was printed just a few years after Town Hall opened. Notice it says Lafayette Auditorium. Think of a hot summer night, dinner prepared by the ladies, dancing to live music and a train ride home. Contributor unknown.

1554 Truck



This photo does have an inscription on the reverse: "Students gathering scrap metal to help the war effort, circa 1943-1944. What a different time it was when all commodities and food were precious. Contributor unknown.

1557 Farm - two views



This photo was given to Joan Merryman prior to 1980. The inscription on the envelope, with cross-outs, only adds to the puzzle— "Old photos found on at Reliez Valley Station R. near 740 Glenside Rd. by Lafayette City Employees." There was only one photo in the envelope. With the layout of the hill behind this small farmhouse, it should be easy to figure out the location – were there not any intervening houses and trees as there are now. A close-up of the farmhouse shows there are telephone poles and wire on the road. The house has an orderly small garden covered with what appears to be glass, like an unenclosed greenhouse. What other features can you make out in the garden? If you know the location of this house, please contact any board member.

—Mary Solon

Lafayette....the Beginning

(Excerpted from an article by Fern Powell Davis, Lafayette Historical Society Curator – 1972)

In the beginning during the 1850's, there was a small cluster of buildings somewhere along Golden Gate Way east of First Street. Bordering on the street there was a store, a hotel, and a schoolhouse. Evidence has been found that our town did not at first center around the Plaza. There was a good reason for this since Moraga Road did not exist, but rather the road from Moraga to Martinez came down around Jonas Hill, veered to the east and came down through Silver Springs. The only bridge spanned the creek along about Second Street. This was an important thoroughfare for the logging wagons from Canyon and Moraga where they were cutting redwoods as fast as they could and hauling them to the boats at Martinez to build the growing town of Yerba Buena (San Francisco).



LAFAYETTE LOOKING EAST—This picture was taken about the early 1900's showing the buildings on what is now Mt. Diablo Blvd. Left to right: the Post Office (building with one window), Methodist Church, Plaza Square (fenced), Lamp's Hotel on the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Moraga Road.

Nowadays along Golden Gate Way we have our problems of a right angle turn, stop lights and divider strips, but the urgent problem then was the winter floods from the creek. So buildings were moved and new ones built on higher ground around the Plaza area. Our early pictures show the Wayside Inn, the Geils building, Benjamin Shreve's Pioneer Store, Stark's Meat Market, Elam Brown's Grist Mill, Peter Thomson's blacksmith shop, and the Good Templar Hall. And that's about all there was to

it except for a few scattered homes, small ranches, and the prosperous Elam Brown's acres of grain and Nathaniel Jones' "Locust Farm" at the entrance to Happy Valley.



BUILDINGS ON GOLDEN GATE WAY, 1880's—Buildings across from the Plaza in the late 1880's. Left to right: Two story building is the Way Side Inn, built in 1894, the Geil building built in 1880, and the Pioneer Store built in 1864. The last three buildings are still standing in 1975 (two of them with false fronts).



LAFAYETTE MEAT MARKET—Daley Meat Market, with Mrs May Daley Starks standing in front of the building



LAFAYETTE PLAZA CIRCA 1910—Left to right, McNeil's Pioneer Store, Stark's meat market, and the hotel.

Continued on Page 4

Just getting to Oakland in 1862 was a hazardous journey. Orlando Hough of Lafayette wrote to his fiancée, Emma Rasset, in New York on March 14, 1862: “A man came down here the other eve and offered me five dollars to have two trunks taken over to Oakland (that is 8 miles from here). Not having anything urgent to do at home I told him I would go down for him in the morning. In the morning I caught a horse, went up where the trunks were, tied them together with one on one side and one on the other and away we started over the mountains following what we Californians call a trail. Novel writers call them mountain passes and York state people would call them cow paths, and I call them bad places to go with a horse in wet time. One man lost a fine horse last Tuesday going over the same place. He had what we call a green horse that wasn’t used to the mountains. In the widest places those passes are not more than 2 feet wide. His horse stepped out of the path and rolled down the mountain some 75 or 100 feet. You will see by this, Emma, that the mountains are a little slantindicular here. I find everything different here from what is in the States.....”



CHRISTMAS BALL, 1867 — Program for the Christmas Ball, 1867,

Lafayette, now known as a “bedroom community”, was in the 1920’s a summer home place for San Franciscans and Oaklanders who build cottages for

vacations in the warm sunshine. Local residents held dances in the new Town Hall and advertised the events in the newspapers. Trainloads of out-of-towners came out on the Sacramento Northern Railroad and danced all night on the springboard floor of Town Hall. Ladies of Lafayette served suppers of ham, turkey, potato salads and confections of cream cakes and the like, and in the early morning hours party-goers boarded the train for home.

Update on Lafayette Library and Learning Center

According to Ann Merideth, Director of Lafayette Community Development, the new target date for the opening of our new Library is **October 17, 2009!**

The lack of rain in Lafayette has really helped the construction staying on schedule, as there have been a minimum of weather delays. The granite order, which had caused concern, has been rectified and is on its way. It will be installed in February or early March. October is not very far away, so start planning how some of you are going to help in staffing our Historical Society Room.

—Marechal Duncan

Annual Dues still just **\$10.00**

Life Memberships **\$100.00**

Let us scan your family photos and make them a part of Lafayette’s History

Find us on the web at www.Lafayettehistory.org

Old Betsy Shows Off

My past newsletter entries have always been about the progress in reviving OLD BETSY. This is something different. For those of you that know about Model T Fords may know that the first Model T was sold in 1908, so 2008 was 100 since the origins of the car that was start of OLD BETSY, the 1920 fire engine. We are now beginning the second century of Model T's. There have been many changes and improvements in cars and fire engines in those 100 years. Next time you see a modern fire engine think about how the fires and medical emergencies might have been handled here in Lafayette many years ago.

Every time I take OLD BETSY to an event whether it is a parade, an exhibit for community events or the Art & Wine Festival, I get into conversations with someone that has a story about their experience with a Model T and some with OLD BETSY. Such was the case this year at the Art & Wine Festival. One of Lafayette's residents came to where OLD BETSY was part of the Historical Society's booth and volunteered that he had driven OLD BETSY many years ago. That was Bob Mussano who was a firefighter in the Lafayette Fire District and later in the Consolidated Fire District.

I talked with Bob about his adventures with OLD BETSY and learned the following. Bob said that he drove OLD BETSY with school children on board around the Lafayette School area (Moraga Road, Moraga Blvd., First Street and School Street) on special occasions probably in the late 1950's. He also drove OLD BETSY in parades and the like as a part of the JayCees who acquired OLD BETSY after she was retired from the Fire District. After time in the armed services, Bob joined the Lafayette Fire District and had many years of experiences in that activity. OLD BETSY was the first motorized fire engine in the Fire District and was long out of service when Bob was on duty. Driving a Model T is like bicycle riding; once you learn how you don't forget! I asked Bob how he learned to drive a Model T, his answer was that his brother had a

Model T and taught him how to drive it.

I can't let space go by without saying that there are still things to do on OLD BETSY before she moves from my garage to the new Library and Learning Center. Any one wanting to participate will be welcome. We have sanding and painting of wooden parts to finish, some metal parts that can use some tender loving care, and other beautification projects that will put ODL BETSY in better shape for the move to her new home.

—George Wasson

2009 Directors

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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 _____