



Lafayette Historical Society's Speaker Series

Indigenous Peoples of Lafayette - The Saklan

Speaker: **John Nutley**, *President, Rossmoor Historical Society*

Thursday, **February 18, 2010**

3:00 p.m. in the Art and Science Room (*Mezzanine Level*)

Lafayette Library and Learning Center

Limited seating • \$10 donation requested

For more information see article later in this Newsletter

An Old Fire Engine's Thoughts

By Old Betsy as told to George Wasson

This is a transcript of what might have been a message from "Old Betsy," the 1920 Model T Ford fire engine owned by the City of Lafayette as spoken (if she could speak) to George Wasson:



Photo courtesy of John Otto

I now look elegant and am functional as an artifact of early Lafayette.

During the week of November 9-13, I traveled to most of the elementary schools in Lafayette, where others invited all to participate in the opening of the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center. All were invited to "ring" my bell at the schools and later to have their picture taken with me at the library opening. I even attended the Veterans Day activities at the Veterans Memorial Building with my driver (a veteran of World War II).

Thank you, Lafayette, for rescuing me back in 1977 when I resided at a collection yard in Pleasant Hill. I am Lafayette's first motorized fire engine and served Lafayette in the 1920s and 1930s. I might have been sold to someone out of the area or sold as scrap, but fortunate for me, the citizens of Lafayette decided to acquire me for the city and ask the Lafayette Historical Society to maintain and refurbish me.

For about 30 years I resided in the garage of George and June Wasson while my engine, wheels, tires and exterior structure were rebuilt. Thanks to a lot of citizen support,

On Saturday, November 14, I was able to lead the parade from the old library to the new library and to transport Mayor Don Tatzin to the opening ceremonies, along with Elam Brown (Ray Peters), the city founder. After the day's festivities, and many photo opportunities, I was escorted to my new residence in an elegant room where I am visible to all through a large window on Golden Gate Way.

I will be viewable and available for other events in the years to come, if others will assist the city and the historical society in my ongoing life. I am at least 89 years old, but expect to live for many more years.

Thank you, Lafayette, for rescuing me and giving me this new residence in your library; come see me and visit the Lafayette Historical Society room to see other artifacts of early Lafayette. My former location was fine, and I hated to leave, but I am sure that another car is now happily residing in my space in the Wasson garage.

Editor's Note: Much appreciation and thanks are due to George and June Wasson who hosted Old Betsy in their garage for over thirty years. Without their hospitality, generosity and care, Old Betsy might not remain as a visible part of our city's link with the past. *Thank you George and especially June!!*

A New Home for the Lafayette Historical Society

On Saturday, November 14 visitors were officially welcomed to the new Lafayette Historical Society Center. Old Betsy, the 1920 Model T fire truck, led the parade from the old Library to our new space in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center and then posed for photographs with hundreds of library enthusiasts large and small. Throughout the festivities Board members greeted visitors who came to see the room and the artifacts displayed in our cabinets. Members of the Board spent many hours the preceding week moving boxes and artifacts into the new space, among them Peter Thomson's anvil, Jennie Bickerstaff's school bell, and Elam Brown's Bible and lantern. The Center is open to the public Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 10 am-2 pm. There are many interesting things to view and to purchase there so please stop in for a visit. Our entrance is on Golden Gate Way between First Street and the entrance to the Library parking lot.

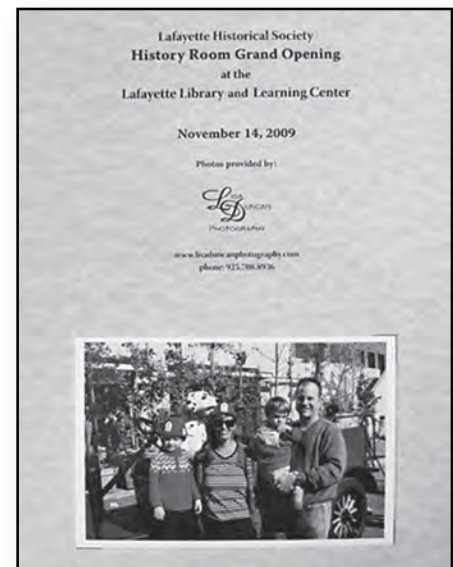


Photo given to families participating in opening day ceremonies for the new Library.

President's Message

The welcome mat is out. Come in and visit your History Room. We are open every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Volunteers are needed to greet our visitors. We have begun to hold Orientation and Training sessions for those of you that have a couple of hours to spend with us. Betsy Willcuts has been coordinating the time slots and making sure we are fully staffed. Find her article and phone number further on in this issue. We had a very successful Opening Day with close to 200 free photos taken of children and their families next to Old Betsy. The following week we welcomed our members to an Ice Cream Social in our new home. Nancy Flood saw to all the details that made this event a success.

A new responsibility we've taken on is to provide display items in the Library's history corner. The first display is of Lafayette's earliest residents – the Saklan. We must thank the Rossmoor Historical Society for the loan of their artifacts for the part of display upstairs. Other items are from our collection of artifacts.

Now that we are officially in our new space, we must again thank Bill Eames for the use of space for the last couple years. This space allowed us to begin cataloguing our photo collection which was so instrumental in developing the book Lafayette, written by Board members, Mary Solon and Mary McCosker.

Continued on page 3

President's Message *(Continued from page 2)*

The biggest thanks of all is directed to George and June Wasson for the sacrifice of their garage for thirty years. George put in endless hours and supervised the restoration of Old Betsy. She is truly beautiful! Thank you George. Now for our New Year plans. We hope to have a **Speakers Series** throughout the year. So far we have confirmed two speakers. John Nutley of the Rossmoor Historical Society will be speaking on Thursday, **February 18th** at 3 in the afternoon. He will be discussing the Saklan Indians –earliest settlers of Lafayette. (Look for further information later in the Newsletter). **Tuesday, May 11th** will be our annual **Pot Luck** and the speaker is John Crews discussing the Pony Express and the times it stopped in Lafayette. The Pot Luck will be upstairs in the new community room in the Library complex. I hope you will all be able to join us for these events.

I want to encourage your participation in the Society in any way that works for you. We have a web site that allows you to contact us at any time (www.lafayettehistory.org). The phone numbers of the Board members are listed in the Newsletter and you can come in and talk with us directly at the History Room, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays -10 to 2. Hope to see you there.

—*Dorothy Walker*

The Saklan

Lafayette's earliest settlers were the indigenous peoples—named the Saklan. Most of the information we know of them are from artifacts, some found on the surface soil after a rain, others dug up under supervision of archeologists. John Nutley, President of the Rossmoor Historical Society will give a presentation to interested people in the first in a series of lectures on the history of Lafayette. Mr. Nutley has presented this interesting topic to many audiences in the County. He will discuss what is known about how these people lived their daily lives He has developed a video to explain what is known of these people. He will then go on to talk about how these people fared when the Spanish arrived in Alta California. There will be time for questions after the presentation.

The lecture and presentation will be held in the Arts and Science Room in the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center (Mezzanine level). Enter on the First Street side of the building. A ten dollar donation is requested to defray our cost of room rental and other expenditures of the Society. The seating is limited to 40 people. The date is **Thursday, February 18th** at 3:00

Future presentations will include—the Pony Express and the importance of the railroad to Lafayette. We are interested ideas from our members about other topics they would like to see as part of this series.

Ice Cream Social

Lafayette Historical Society members were invited to attend a special celebration of the opening of our first official space located in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. They were welcomed by President Dorothy Walker and treated to yummy gelato provided by Keith Blakeney. Longtime LHS Board members Ruth Dyer and Ollie Hamlin joined us. The Historical Society has been waiting for over forty years to finally have a place to organize and store our historical information and artifacts. A grand time was had by all fifty who attended. Please come by to visit and join our organization if you are not already a member.



Board members attending the Ice Cream Social celebrating the Historical Society's new History Room

A Town Hall for Lafayette: The War Years and Beyond—Part 3

Excerpted from a paper written by Ruth Caroline Dyer in 1977:

On January 5, 1942, a letter of inquiry was received from the federal government regarding use of the Town Hall as a barracks. Six non-commissioned Marines from the Navy Preflight School at St. Mary's College were allowed to rent one room for \$5 each, monthly.

Community activities continued, but the emphasis changed. The PTA worked on plans to operate the Recreation Center. A Lafayette Horse Show Association Dance netted over \$300, proceeds given to the Civilian Defense Council. Consideration was given to turning Town Hall over to the USO, but the Navy men at St. Mary's did not have sufficient time away from Preflight School to make this feasible.

Work continued on the Town Hall. A sign reading "Lafayette Improvement Club" was authorized. \$75 was voted for refinishing the dance floor. Sheriff Miller was asked for "No Trespass" signs, since several windows had been broken and the rear door broken in. The Club hoped the signs would make it possible to prosecute the vandals.

On November 18, 1942, fire broke out in the Town Hall. At the time one enlisted man was housed there. No direct cause of the fire was ever named. Damage amounted to \$1,255.52. Insurance covered the loss. At the time of the fire the entire building was designated a Red Cross First Aid Station and Refugee Collection Center, one room was used by the Disaster Relief Committee of the Red Cross. In order to repair the fire damage it was necessary to procure materials through the War Production Board Projects Requirements Plan. Parts of the second floor siding to the peak of the roof would have to be rebuilt and wiring must be repaired, as well as the auditorium floor.

It was several weeks before authorization for materials were received from the War Production Board. Meanwhile a tarpaulin was secured on the damaged roof. Should new tenants be sought? The men who had been renting the room were transferred. In February, 1943, the Navy Preflight School took the bunks out of Town Hall. It was voted to keep the room available for meetings, but it could be re-rented if desired.

Weeks of discouragement followed the fire. Perhaps the Town Hall should be scrapped. It was suggested that Universal Pictures might be willing to make an offer for the lumber. With the estimates of rebuilding parts of the Town Hall running from \$1,800 to \$2,000, its sale for used lumber might be the wisest course. With receipt of a check from the insurance company covering the fire damage, and approval from the War Production Board, the spirits of the Lafayette Improvement Club members rose. Insurance coverage was raised to \$6,000, the value of the building; War Damage Insurance also was taken out. By April, 1943, all repairs except those requiring some wiring had been made.

There arose an opportunity to rent the Town Hall for school use. Due to wartime restrictions construction of new classrooms at the Lafayette School would not be possible. It was proposed that the lower floor of Town Hall be remodeled into two temporary classrooms. This would free the school auditorium from being used as a school classroom. The school district would undertake necessary construction. After the Second World War, in 1947, classes were again held in the Town Hall. For six months in 1949 kindergarten met there. By that time the Lafayette School District paid a rental fee of \$35.00 monthly.

Continued from page 4

Types of uses of the Town Hall and activities of the Improvement Club were also changing. The Club recognized the need to bring more businessmen into membership. This was especially necessary since it was in the process of changing into the Lafayette Improvement Association. There was some concern that title to the Town Hall property might revert to the original family ownership. In order to prevent this, the Improvement Club deeded the property to the Lafayette Improvement Association in 1944 and again through another deed in 1953.

The question of gambling arose in connection with an old timers' dance and the dance held at the time of the 1944 Horse Show. The Board of Directors ruled that if gambling were to take place a person must be at the door to see that no school children were admitted. This was not sufficient assurance to some members of the Lafayette community. Notice of disapproval was received from the Men's Club of the Lafayette Community Methodist Church. It expressed "opposition to any and all illegal means of raising revenue for any cause however good." The Men's Club further requested "the law enforcement agencies to enforce the laws...in regard to gambling without fear or favor." Residents of Lafayette received a mailing from Frank P. Westfall advising them of illegal gambling devices—including 20 slot machines, roulette wheels, and gaming tables—to be used at two dances in August. Taking part in the dance were the Lafayette Improvement Association, the Lions Club, the American Legion, and the Dad's Club. The sheriff and district attorney, Westfall said, reportedly had agreed not to interfere. Appeals to the organizations to give up their plans failed.

It became necessary to formulate additional policies regarding dances. The Town Hall was not to be rented for regular public dances, but for social occasions, annual dances, and similar functions on occasion. Meanwhile Town Hall was being used regularly. In October, 1946, these organizations met there: the Rugby Club, Western Electric, the Playshop, the Boy Scouts, and the Girl Scouts. During the next month the Viking Club of Berkeley High School held a dance, paying a \$30.00 fee.

It will be recalled that early in the history of the Town Hall church groups had taken an interest in activities there. In 1944 it was agreed to allow any religious organization free use of the Town Hall. The executive secretary of the San Francisco Bay Cities Baptist Union made the first request, for rental of the Town Hall for one year. Permission was granted. For a fee of \$5.00 a Sunday the Baptists had use of the building from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and from 7:00 to 9:30 pm on Sundays and some afternoons. The Baptist Church in the Valley used the premises for ten months in 1947. This congregation formed the Pleasant Hill Community Baptist Church. During the following spring the Town Hall was the location of the Assembly of God.

Dancing classes began again also. Grace A. Lowell from Berkeley held classes on Thursday and Friday afternoons, paying \$5.00 weekly for five hours' use of the building. Fund-raising for a new town hall was proposed. A wishing well would be available at the Lafayette Fiesta Plaza. It was anticipated that pennies from children would be the main source of money raised there. House-to-house solicitation of funds was also planned. Local newspapers promised their cooperation in the campaign. However, a new building was not constructed.

For four summers beginning in 1947 the Town Hall was the location of the popular Straw Hat Reviews. Performances were six nights a week. Eventually the "Straw Hatters," organized by John G. Denver, Maryesther Wood Denver, and Elizabeth Berryhill, paid a summer's rent of \$710.00. Many residents of the Bay Area knew of the Town Hall only as a theater. In December 1950, a massive earth slide closed all four lanes of the highway west of Orinda. It was necessary to cancel two performances in the Town Hall.

—Mary McCosker

If These Walls Could Talk

The building now called the Hen House is one of the oldest buildings in Lafayette. It is at 20 Lafayette Circle under a big oak tree, between Storyteller and the Roundup. According to an oral history by Edith Hunt Sterling, her aunt and uncle, Joe and Alice Hunt, built the building in the early 1920's.



From Edith Hunt Sterling's oral history: "How the building looked in the 1920's. On the left is my aunt Alice Hunt. On the right is Fred Bennett who built the short order restaurant. The children are not identified."

But there is a little story before that. Because of arthritis Joe could no longer work in the fields and the Hunts went into business. From Edith Sterling's oral history, "It was an ice cream and hot dog stand in the center of town on Tunnel Road (now Mt. Diablo Blvd.) It was right across from the Lafayette (Plaza) Park and the hotel which were situated on the corners of Moraga Road and Tunnel Road. The Post Office was on one side of their stand and the town's blacksmith shop was on the other side. They sold ice cream, hot dogs, soda pop, peanuts, candy, cigarettes, coffee and beer. My aunt and uncle rented the small home located in the rear of the property. The home belonged to Peter Thomson, the town blacksmith."

"Sunday's were an extremely busy day for my Aunt Alice as people in those days would have an early Sunday dinner at home before venturing on their ride out into the country. This usually took them to Alamo, Danville or in the Concord direction. On the way home they would stop at Lafayette at my aunt's stand (which was also known as "Mother's Place") for an evening snack of hot dogs, soda, coffee, etc."

"When the Tunnel Road was widened in 1920 my aunt and uncle had to give up their little road stand. They then bought a piece of property at the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Hough Avenue and built a new building. It contained an inside counter, and tables for serving food which included light lunches and dinners. Later, after my uncle Joe died, my aunt Alice leased the corner of her property to an oil company. Her building was moved around the corner facing Hough Avenue and a service station was built on the corner. Hough Avenue has since been renamed Lafayette Circle."

Mother's Place was also known as Ma's Kitchen or Ma Hunt's Kitchen. The sign on the building in a photo provided by Edith Sterling says "Miller's Quality Ice Cream".

A Mrs. Euphemia Speyer, longtime Lafayette resident, remembers that one of the first five Lafayette telephones was in this building. The Lafayette Inn occupied the building in the 1930's and the owner, Lou Borghesani, changed the name to Lou's Bar. The bar's claim to fame was that any winner at the Horse Show who would ride into the bar on their horse was given a free drink! The horse was given a carrot. Lou moved to another location a year before the building was relocated in 1938.

In the 1940's the Lafayette Sun newspaper, run by Mr. Morse, occupied the building. After that the building housed a used furniture shop. In the 1960's there were two parts to the building, a Happy Acre Realty Company



From 1969 Squire newspaper article: "The present owner of the building, Mrs. Nancy Rousso, operates a realty office in the other half of the building". Also, "Its present proprietors are Mrs. Barbara Gros of Orinda and Mrs. Julie Hendrikson of Lafayette."

Continued on page 7

and the Trading Post. Mrs. Nancy Rouso operated the real estate company and owned the building. The Trading Post sold antiques. The proprietors were Julie Hendrickson and Barbara Gros. At this time the building was painted red with white trim.

Over the years the building housed an insurance company and a book store. In 1983, at the time of Edith Sterling's oral history, the building was called the Nifty Shop of Futures Explored.



Hen House, building detail as it looks from the south side of the building.

The building is now called the Hen House. A sign on the side of the building also says, "Haute Bohemian, Vintage Atelier, Bits with a Flair". At this time the building has no insulation or stove. The foundation is earth with the remnants of 6 inch tree stumps under the floor. The walls are not necessarily perpendicular. But what it lacks in plumb it makes up for in aplomb. Elizabeth Kirkpatrick is the proprietor of 8 years.

People enjoy seeing vintage antiques in a historical building. Many customers come in and talk about previous owners or renters. And oh, if those walls could talk!

—**Mary Solon**

The Door Story

Lafayette's third schoolhouse, built on Moraga Road in 1893, can be seen in several locations in "Lafayette A Pictorial History." Page 32 shows the schoolhouse in a 1915 photograph, to the left of (then unpaved) Moraga Road. One of the famous doors is shown on page 35 in a picture taken in 1899. The figure at the top of the steps before the open door has been identified as Jennie Bickerstaff, teacher from 1899 to 1902. On page 38, the closed doors are clearly present in a 1941 photograph of the addition under construction for the sanctuary of the Lafayette United Methodist Church.

The doors lost their prominent location at the base of the belfry when the church was again renovated in 1983. Since the church had earlier been designated as a Historic Landmark, renovation was to have been reviewed by the Lafayette Historical Society. As president of the Society at that time, it became my responsibility to observe the construction. Unfortunately, the plans had already been approved and the work was well under way when I began my observations. In spite of that lapse,

we were able to save the original south wall of the building, which remains today. The doors, however, at that time lay in an undistinguished heap of demolition debris in the middle of the floor.



Continued on page 9

Historic Wedding Gown Restored

The Lafayette Historical Society recently restored a beautiful wedding gown and shoes. They were on display for the opening of the History Room in the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

The bride, Katie Mae Barnes, wore the gown on June 6, 1909 when she married Sumner Hodges in Berkeley. The dress was donated to the historical society in 1971.

Sumner was the son of Albert E. Hodges and Hattie Donner Hodges and the grandson of Samuel Hodges who located on Reliez Creek and Old Tunnel Road in 1848. Sumner was born in Walnut Creek on May 16, 1885 and the family moved to Lafayette some time later. He attended Lafayette School and graduated in 1900 (a photo of this class is on file in the history room). Sumner graduated from Berkeley High School in 1904 and worked in San Francisco for a short time.

Katie Mae and Sumner moved to fifty acres of land in Lafayette, which had been in the Hodges family for nearly one hundred years, in 1950.



—*Nancy Flood*

History Room Volunteers

Since November 14th, with the grand opening of the History Room, a small group of volunteers mostly from the LHS Board have welcomed visitors, set up displays, arranged photos and boxes of files, as well as taking an inventory of the materials, set up data bases of members, outfitted the room with supplies, and done many tasks to make the History Room a welcoming place.

If you are interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities, please drop by the History Room on a Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. or call Betsy Willcuts at 283-0706.

E-Newsletter

LHS is again going to send out the Newsletter to all members with email addresses. The same information you've found in this Newsletter, will come directly to your home. In time we hope this will be the way we reach the majority of our members. We would appreciate your feedback in this endeavor. Please contact us at www.lafayettehistory.org. If you have other ideas for improving our communication, please let us know.



Continued from page 6



“What will you do with this stuff?” I asked the contractor, (carefully) toeing the doors.

“That old junk?” he said. “We’ll take it to the dump.”

“Can I have it?” I asked.

“Sure,” he said, obviously glad to get rid of it.

Some of “that old junk” now decorates the upstairs of my old (1876) house. The doors were stored in my garage, along with a lot of the other “old junk” belonging to the Society.

Time came (2000) when the old garage fell into such a state of near collapse that it needed to be torn down and replaced. The Society was notified that they must relocate all the “old junk.”

To my consternation, the doors disappeared at that point. In spite of my asking everyone (nearly everyone, as it turned out), no one had any knowledge of the doors. Repeatedly, I asked every historic person I encountered about the doors. At last, on November 14, 2009, at the Grand Opening of the new Lafayette Library, I asked Paul Sheehan He was the right person. He delivered the doors on November 24, 2009.

When they’re all dressed up, they’ll want to go to church again - where they belong!

—Ray Peters

2010 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
Fund Raising: Judie Peterson	876-0628
Photo Retrieval: Mary Solon	283-7335
Program Development: Keith Blakeney.....	284-2221
George Wasson	284-4603
Tom Titmus	299-2030
Nancy Flood.....	283-3409

2010 Committee Chairs

Historian, Ruth Dyer	283-8312
Walking Tours: Mary McCosker.....	284-5376
Fire Engine: George Wasson	284-4603
Potluck Dinner: Oliver Hamlin.....	283-6822
Membership: Oliver Hamlin.....	283-6822
Newsletter: Dorothy Walker	283-3303
Volunteers: Betsy Willcuts.....	283-0706

Annual Dues Due

A reminder to LHS members – January is the time to renew your memberships. This year it is particularly important that we have the support of our members. The privilege of having a room in the new library brings the responsibility of paying rent. Although our rent is reasonable for the space we’ve been given, we still must pay almost \$5,000 in annual rent. Memberships are our primary source of income. The Board authorized the first increase in dues since LHS was incorporated late last year. The membership dues are now: Student Membership \$10.00; Individual Membership \$25.00; Family Membership \$50.00; Life Membership \$250.00 (one time fee); Sponsor Membership \$500.00. *Thank you for your support.*

Lafayette Historical Society Membership Application

(Please photocopy form for additional names)

Name: _____

Spouse: _____

Address: _____

City-Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Membership Categories and Annual Dues

(Please check one)

- Student Membership \$10.00
- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Family Membership \$50.00
- Life Membership \$250.00 (one time fee)
- Sponsor Membership \$500.00

Please indicate areas of special interest

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity | <input type="checkbox"/> Data Base Entry of Photos |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research-Genealogy | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo Collection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephoning | <input type="checkbox"/> News Clippings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Displays | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Engine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral Histories | <input type="checkbox"/> Walking Tours-Outreach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Other_____ |
-

Please mail this application to:

Lafayette Historical Society

P.O. Box 133

Lafayette, CA 94549