

President:
Dorothy Walker
283-3303



NEWS

Lafayette, California

September 2005

Vol. 32, No. 3

President's Message

Hello to all members of the Lafayette Historical Society! I am your new president. I was elected recently by my fellow board members and am honored by their show of support. I have been on the LHS board of directors for the past three years, since enlisting as editor of the Newsletter. (As many of you know, the text editing has been done for several years by our friend Charlotte Robertson, while you do the writing and I handle the other aspects of newsletter publishing, including obtaining articles, layout, printing, and mailing.) During those three years, I have come to realize how rewarding it is to know about our town's history and the important place the Historical Society holds in the community.

LHS is important to our town's future, as well. It is the future that I am particularly excited about. With the new Library and Learning Center, LHS will have a permanent home to display the many objects that have been so generously donated by our members. The history room will also house our photo collection, and Old Betsy will finally get her due, as she will sit right outside the door to greet visitors.

I know that many of our members have wondered when we would be developing a web site. For those who have waited so long, I am happy to say we are within days of having it online: LHS has engaged a consultant to develop the site for us. The website designation is Lafayettehistory.org. The site will be a work in progress, beginning small and expanding as we obtain more information. I am most interested in your feedback about which parts of the site you enjoy most and what you would like to see added to the site.

I want to send my sincere wishes for a speedy recovery to longtime LHS member Ruth Dyer, who is recovering from back surgery. Ruth has been the Society's secretary for a long while and has contributed countless superbly researched articles on Lafayette and Contra Costa County history.

—Dorothy Walker, President

Art and Wine Festival

Please stop by the LHS booth on *Saturday the 17th or Sunday the 18th*. We will be sharing our usual booth with the **Friends of the Library and Lafayette Community Foundation** in front of **The Storyteller** on Lafayette Circle. Come down and support your organization and community.

LHS ANNUAL MEETING AND POT LUCK

On May 10, 2005 fifty-six members and guests of the Lafayette Historical Society gathered at the Veterans Building for the annual meeting and potluck. This was the last annual meeting that we will hold there, as the building will soon be razed in preparation for the construction of the City's new library/ learning center. Many people commented on the meetings and social functions they attended there over the years. It was widely agreed that the floor in the upstairs hall possessed a unique spring reflex that was greatly favored by ballroom dancers in the area.

Don Good introduced Nick Trujillo, the proprietor of Nick's Barber Shop, in the Lafayette Plaza Shopping Center. Nick was congratulated and thanked for his 58 years of continuous business here. Our president, Tom Titmus, thanked Nick and presented him with a letter of appreciation.

Joseph Van Overveen, our program director, introduced the evening's guest speaker: Andrew A. Galvin. Mr. Galvin's presentation gave an imaginary visit, in time with the original inhabitants of the area, emphasizing the cultural elements we share, albeit, with different means and applications. Mr. Galvin is a descendant of the Ohlone, Bay Miwok, Plains Miwok and Pitwin Indians whose ancestral lands comprised the greater San Francisco Bay Region. He is currently President of the Board of Directors of the Ohlone Indian Tribe Inc. and founding member of The California Missions Foundation.

Andrew grew up on an environment steeped in the history and folklore of the Ohlone Indians. He can draw on the stories he heard while sitting around the kitchen table with his cousins. His grand mother – and later his father – recited the oral history of the Ohlone people as naturally as other grandparents read story books to their grand children

Mr. Galvin discovered his calling at the age of eleven while standing over a 4,000-year-old burial ground, unearthed during the construction of Interstate 680. An archeologist guessed that a mysterious red tint on human bones, lying in the soft dirt, might be dried blood. Andrew knew better, reflecting back on sessions at the kitchen table, and explained that ocher, clay colored by iron oxides was used to anoint the grave pits and the people who would be buried there.

Andrew strongly believes that Ohlone People need to know more about their ancestors, and believes archeology and physical anthropology as a way of retrieving some of what his people have lost. He believes that studies of archaeological remains are the only way he can discover what the lives of his ancient ancestors were really like.

Recently skeletal remains and artifacts were uncovered at the site of a security plaza at Rossmore. The obsidian used for arrowheads and tools particularly impressed the archeologists. The obsidian probably came from Napa County and required many days of walking for the Indians to retrieve it. The discovery also indicates an intricate trading system set up with other Indian villages.

For more information on the native Indians who inhabited this area, as well as a plethora of other subjects on local history, visit the Contra Costa County Historical Center in Martinez.

—Paul Sheehan

Recognition for Nick Trujillo

At our annual Potluck Dinner in May, Nick Trujillo of Nick's Barber Shop was recognized for his 58 years in business in Lafayette. Nick's Barber Shop has been open since 1947, serving first, second, and even third generations of Lafayette patrons. It is one of two original businesses that remain the Plaza Shopping Center.

LHS would like to honor other longtime businesses in our city. If you would like to suggest a person or business, please let us know. *Contact Mary McCosker at 284-5376.*

Update on the New Veterans Memorial Building and the New Library and Learning Center

Ann Meridith, Lafayette's Community Development Director, has advised us that the new **Veterans Building** is rapidly nearing completion. The county should be able to take possession of the completed building in early August, after all the inspections are completed and approved. The county will then turn the building over to the Veterans for occupation. As soon as the Veterans take possession and have moved everything out of their present building and into the new building, the City hopes to start demolition of the old Veterans Building. This should be very soon: a mid-October date is anticipated.

At around the same time—at the October 10, 2005 Lafayette City Council meeting (location to be announced)—the architect for the new **Library and Learning Center** will present the construction drawings to the Council and the public for viewing and comments. Start of construction is targeted for August 2006, and the library is slated to open by the end of 2006.

Funding for the Library building is progressing rapidly with the help of all the citizens of Lafayette. Your contributions are solicited and welcomed as you become a part of the first major donor-supported civic project in Lafayette. *Mail your gift to Lafayette Community Foundation P.O. Box 221 Lafayette, CA 94549. As a member of the Lafayette Historical Society mark your gift "FOR THE HISTORY ROOM."*

—Marechal Duncan

Through the Years

The history of Lafayette is much like the history of any other town. First, native inhabitants lived off the land. Then, the first settlers appeared, attracted by the area's natural resources. More settlers followed, some establishing businesses to support the growing community. As the population increased, so did the construction of roads and buildings.

Our town began as a wide-open land inhabited by the Saclan Native Americans, who deserted the area after the Spaniards, and then the Mexicans, claimed the land, calling it Rancho Acalanes.

Continued on Page 4

Arriving in this area in 1847, pioneers Elam and Margaret Allen Brown found the rich farmland they had traveled west in search of and purchased the Rancho Acalanes for \$900. Elam Brown sold pieces of his land to fellow travelers, relatives and other settlers. Businesses were established in the center of town: first a grist mill, then a blacksmith shop and a general store. Fifty years later, Lafayette had become a small town with a population of 150. There were farms, homes, a school, a church, a post office and many other small businesses. Communications relayed by the Pony Express and transportation routes served by the Sacramento Northern Railroad – and later, the Caldecott Tunnel— resulted in great changes that helped Lafayette grow and become part of the larger Bay Area.

Dramatic changes have occurred to this area over the last 600 years. Yet, living in Lafayette today, we are still fortunate to enjoy the landscape of creeks, trees, wildlife, rolling hills and valleys that originally drew the Saclan Native Americans – and later, our early settlers – to this special place.

—*Mary McCosker and Emily Haas*

LHS Comes into the Twenty First Century

LHS is finally on-line: LafayetteHistory.org.! Over the summer the Society engaged a consultant, Tom Jackson, to put together the beginnings of our web site. Web site design is Tom's specialty and we are pleased with what he has been able to accomplish so far. The web site is a work in progress. We envision the site to be a place to find out what LHS doing currently, what we've done in the past (previous newsletters) and our plans for the new history room. There is also to be links to other helpful sites to our community and the history of California. We are looking for suggestions on how to improve the site, so please feel free to contact us at info@lafayettehistory.org.

FIRE ENGINE REPORT

First we want to acknowledge and thank the LAFAYETTE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION for the grant of \$3,000 toward the continued restoration of OLD BETSY. This grant is based on our request for funding of safety restorations on the fire engine in the form of tires and wheels. As best guesses, the spokes on the wheel seem to be original equipment and have serious cracks and splintering, and the tires may be those that were on OLD BETSY when it was first put into service in Lafayette in the 1920s.

Fortunately, replacement of the wheel spokes and replacement of the tires, tubes and liners are parts that are available. The wheelwright is in Sonora, California and the tires, tubes and liners come from a vendor in Pennsylvania. We must get the wheels in shape for replacement of the spokes which requires pulling the wheel and removing the tires from the rims. The metal parts are then sandblasted to a clean state and then sent to the wheelwright. Except for complications in

getting a wheel puller for the larger rear wheels, the job could progress in the next few weeks. Sand blasting is available in Martinez. All of these vendors and our capable volunteers have given valuable advise on how to handle the project. When the wheels are all restored they will be painted and put back on the vehicle.

If all goes well, the wheels will be OFF and back ON in due time and at the same time we will install the Warford Transmission that we acquired last year.

These are safety items in the restoration of OLD BETSY; cosmetic and appearance actions will follow as time and energy permits.

—George Wasson



2005/2006 Directors

President: Dorothy Walker	283-3303
Vice President: Marechal Duncan	283-6812
Treasurer: Paul Sheehan	284-1287
Recording Secretary: Ruth Dyer	283-8312
Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin	283-6822
Archive Retrieval: Mary McCosker	284-5376
Artifact Documentation: Keith Blakeney ..	284-2221
Programs: Joseph Van Overveen	283-3650
George Wasson	284-4603
Tom Titmus	299-2030

2005/2006 Committee Chairs

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	

