

President:  
Dorothy Walker  
283-3303



# NEWS

Lafayette, California

September 2007

Vol. 34, No. 4



**USS POTOMAC**  
FDR'S "FLOATING WHITE HOUSE"

The **Lafayette Historical Society** announces a two hour  
"History of the Bay" Cruise on the *USS Potomac*  
*Saturday, September 22, at 10:30 a.m.*

Departure from Jack London Square, Oakland. Parking available.  
Docents will also explain the history of this floating museum!

**Cost:** Adults \$35. Youth age 6-12, \$20.

Please send checks as soon as possible so we can get more tickets if  
needed. Deadline, September 10. *Questions?* Call Mary at 925-283-7335.

**Send to L.H.S., Box 133, Lafayette 94549.**

The ship is at the foot of Clay Street in Oakland. A map with instructions will be mailed separately to all ticket holders. Check-in at the ship's office across from the ship is at 10:30 a.m. The ship sails promptly at 11. There will no refreshments other than water on the ship. Eat a late breakfast or bring snacks and sodas.

## President's Message

September is the beginning of my third year as President of our Society. For me it is a time to reflect on what we've done during the past year and what we have yet to do.

During the past year we have been involved in the following projects. The publication of the book *Lafayette*, by board members, Mary McCosker and Mary Solon, is the project we are most proud of. We held a book signing in early July to kick off the sale of the book and have sold nearly 150 copies already. More information on purchasing the book can be found later in the Newsletter. The two authors are graciously donating all the proceeds to the Society.

We have been asked to review design plans for the renovation of the historic building formerly occupied by the A-1 Photo shop on Plaza Way as part of the City requirement for historic buildings. The Board met three times to discuss what we felt would be the most appropriate exterior renovation for the building.

As always, the annual meeting took a lot of planning to make it the success it always is. About 70 members attended and helped with their donations to off-set the costs of insurance and rental of the Veterans Building. Steven Falk, the City Manager, was our very interesting guest speaker. Special thanks goes to Ollie Hamlin who kept track of all of the details.

We now sit, along with others, on a City-initiated committee to develop a mural for the BART station and our photos are part of the décor for the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday party for the Marquis de La Fayette.

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## The President's Message ~ *Continued from page 1*

This month we will again be participating at the Art and Wine Festival in a booth shared with Friends of the Library and the Lafayette Foundation. Please stop by and see us there on September 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>.

We are trying to expand the Society's activities by promoting a bay cruise on the USS Potomac, FDR's yacht, September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Ticketing information can be found on first page and historical info on the

ship is provided later in the Newsletter. If you have any suggestions for more activities, please contact any board member or use our web site at [www.LafayetteHistory.org](http://www.LafayetteHistory.org). The web site is a work in progress. We have added a number of oral history transcriptions to the site which we hope you will find interesting.

## 150 Years of Service... Lafayette's Post Office ~ March 2, 1857-2007

Almost unnoticed, the Lafayette Post Office celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Friday March 2, 2007. How do I know the date? Well, on March 2, 1957 we celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was assistant postmaster at the time. Most Lafayette history buffs know the first Post Office was housed in the old Pioneer Grocery Store at 3535 Plaza Way with Benjamin Shreve as Postmaster for 30 years, after which his son Milton took over as Postmaster. The building currently vacant housed the former Handlebar Toy Shop and A-1 Photo Lab. The Pioneer Store was later purchased by Vince Lombardi and re-opened on the corner of First Street and Golden Gate Way while the original store was taken over by Gordon and Bud Hooper and re-named the "The Market Basket".

Post Office #2. In 1904, the Post Office was located at Tunnel Road (Mt. Diablo Blvd.) and Moraga Road in front of the old Hough house with Carrie Van Meter as Postmaster. This was a 'hole in the wall' Post office serving 11 families. Safeway store replaced the old house.

Post Office #3. In 1927, the #2 grammar school house was re-located to 3535A Mt. Diablo Blvd. and housed the post office, phone company and library all in one building. Some of you old timers may

recall the phone numbers during those years. The Post Office phone number was 27J. Emelia Schutt was the Postmaster from 1927 to 1952. During this period on March 31, 1932, the name La Fayette was changed to Lafayette (reference Post Office cash book in the LHS archives). The #3 Post Office was located near Manual Lucas's Associated Gas Station, and Bill's Restaurant to the East, and Lou's Bar on the West with Richfield and Signal Gas Stations across the street. The Post Office building now houses the "Red Wagon Clothier".

Post Office #4. In 1941, the Post office moved to 3561 and 3563 Mt. Diablo Blvd. at that time next door to Ben Flecture's Cleaners, Lou Winkler's Rexall Pharmacy and Gibson Hardware on the East and Wilson Plumbing and the classic Col. Garrett building on the West. Col. Garrett offered to build a similar building for the Post office but was turned down by the W.P. A. 3561 now houses the "Dutch Girl Cleaners" and "Beauty for You", at this office. Postmaster Schutt took a chance and hired me as a rural carrier in 1948. The Post office attained first class status at this location on July 1, 1949.

Post Office #5. In 1951, Lafayette Post Office moved to a new building at 973 Moraga Road. This was the

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## U.S.S. Potomac information:

- ◆ The USS Potomac was built in 1934 as the Coast Guard cutter Electra
- ◆ In 1936 she was renamed USS Potomac, and served as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential yacht until his death in 1945.
- ◆ The Potomac is 165 feet in length and has a beam of 25 feet, 3 inches.
- ◆ At least one of FDR's famed radio broadcasts originated from the USS Potomac, on March 19, 1941
- ◆ After FDR's death the ship had many owners, including Elvis Presley, and eventually was seized in 1980 in San Francisco by U.S. Customs for her role as a front for drug smugglers.
- ◆ The ship sank in the marina off of Treasure Island.
- ◆ She was sold to the Port of Oakland for just \$15,000. The Port of Oakland headed a cooperative effort with organized labor, maritime corporations and dedicated volunteers to complete a \$5 million restoration
- ◆ The Association for the Preservation of the Presidential Yacht Potomac now operates this National Historic Landmark

*This information and more can be found on the USS Potomac website.*

## New Library & Learning Center Board Seeks Members

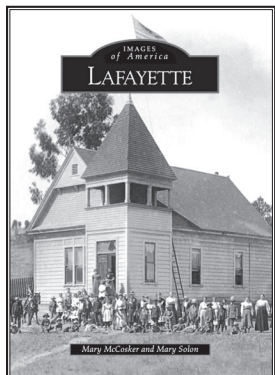
The Lafayette Community Foundation having successfully completed their campaign, raising \$12.5 million to help build the new library in Lafayette, has announced the formation of a new entity--the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation. This new Foundation will take the reins as the primary fundraiser along with the City, county, schools, Friends of the Library, Lafayette Historical Society, and others to support expanded hours, programming, and the collection of funds for building operations at the new Library and Learning Center.

The job of the new Board of Trustees will be to raise funds to create a panorama of programs, with regional

appeal and for people of all ages, from children to seniors. The Board will also coordinate activities of the Glenn Seaborg Learning Consortium, a "first-ever" collaboration among 12 high-profile arts, education, and cultural organizations that will turn the new library into a regional resource and which will bring a wide variety of events, activities and expertise to the new library and Lafayette.

If you are interested in becoming a member of this new Board to ensure the ongoing success of the Library and Learning Center call (925) 283-6513. Application will be accepted and interviews conducted over the course of the summer. The final application deadline is September 14, 2007.

—**Marechal Duncan**



**Images of America  
"Lafayette"  
From Arcadia Publishing**

A short history book with 210 photographs,  
many new to the Lafayette Historical Society

Available on-line at [lafayettehistory.org](http://lafayettehistory.org) with PayPal  
Or Lafayette Historical Society  
P.O. 133, Lafayette CA 94549

Cost of the book including  
tax and postage:

1 copy	\$23.77
2 copies	\$45.75
3 copies	\$67.73
4 copies	\$89.37

*Allow 2 weeks for delivery.*

## Who was LaFayette?

Gilbert du Motier de LaFayette was born on September 6, 1757. By the time he was twelve LaFayette was an orphan. His father having died in the battle of Minden in Prussia and his mother died of an illness in Paris. This left LaFayette one of the wealthiest aristocrats in France. "Burning with desire to be in uniform", he entered the Black Musketeers at Versailles, as a second lieutenant. Among his fellow warriors were three of the King's grandsons. Each would eventually inherit the French Throne.

At eighteen, LaFayette confided that the American Revolution embodied all the principles he believed in and he would go to America to fight for liberty. He found two of his fellow musketeers were as eager as he, and all three pledged to sail together, fight together, and if necessary die together. In the spring of 1777, LaFayette chartered and provisioned the ship *Victoire* with his own money. On board with him were twelve volunteer French officers. Fifty-four days later,

LaFayette's ship reached South Carolina. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, LaFayette and his company set out on the long overland road to Philadelphia.

The arrival of LaFayette in Philadelphia was preceded by many French adventurers who badgered Congress for high rank and salary. George Washington called them men of "unbounded pride and ambition". LaFayette, however, was patient and wrote John Hancock, President of Congress, "After the sacrifices I have made for this cause, I have the right to exact two favors: one is to serve at my own expense – the other is, to serve at first as a volunteer." He further pledged his life and fortune to American independence.

With British troops ready to annihilate Philadelphia, and Congress nearly bankrupt, Hancock saw that LaFayette's name, wealth and ties to the French court might serve the American cause. A deal was

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worked out and on July 31, 1777 Congress passed the resolution: "Whereas the Marquis de LaFayette, out of his great zeal to the cause of liberty, in which the United States are engaged, .... and at his own expense come over to offer his services to the United States without pension or particular allowance, and is anxious to risk his life in our cause. Resolved, That his service be accepted, and that in consideration of his zeal, illustrious family and connections he have the rank and commission of Major General in the Army of the United States."

On August 4, 1777, the twenty-two year old Marquis, was guest of honor at a Philadelphia dinner, at which General Washington was also in attendance. Washington complimented LaFayette on his zeal for the American cause and invited him to join him at his headquarters. When LaFayette arrived at the camp, he found eleven thousand poorly armed, ragged men. "Their clothes were motley looking, discolored and many were almost naked," he wrote. Seeing LaFayette's disappointment, Washington attempted to console him. LaFayette responded, "I have come here to learn, mon general, not teach." This established the first bonds of mutual confidence and devotion that united the two for many years.

On September 12, 1777, news reached General Washington that Americans were being overpowered by the British at Brandywine. LaFayette begged Washington's permission to assist with the defense. Under fire, the American soldiers were fleeing in

panic. LaFayette, over six feet tall and in full major general's uniform, seized the men's shoulders and ordered them to turn back, to stand and fight. The Americans halted their retreat and rallied. In the excitement of battle, LaFayette failed to notice that a musket ball had passed through the calf of his left leg. The following day, LaFayette was transported to Philadelphia. "Treat him as if he were my son," Washington commanded the surgeon.

While convalescing, LaFayette, began a barrage of letters to French political leaders, urging a military and commercial alliance with America and all-out war with Britain. LaFayette's descriptions of the American military situation and reports of his intimate ties to Washington, Hancock and other American leaders, convinced the French king that, with his direct ties to top American military and political authorities, LaFayette could play a key role in promoting military, diplomatic, and commercial ties between the two nations. The winter of 1778 saw the alliance of France with the United State; and the turning point of the war.

—Paul Sheehan



## Old Betsy's Look Alike



While on a vacation, the work on restoration of OLD BETSY is on hold.

There is nothing really new to report as things are now ready for the wheel reconstructions.

While vacationing at Lake Almanor (for about 30 years) we pass through the city of Chester, population (2500+/-) at the edge of the lake. In past years I had noticed a Model T fire engine at the Chester Fire Department and I had wondered whether it still existed, where it came from, what was its state of restoration, and how was it used? I stopped at the Fire Station and inquired about the fire engine and was given a welcome and short history on the engine by the Chester Fire Chief. The Chief even had his crew wheel the fire engine out to the front of the fire station and had it washed and primed for me to take a photo for this report.

The Chester fire engine is a 1917 Model T and so it is older than OLD BETSY. It is not a TT as is OLD BETSY, it appears to be a conversion of a “pickup

truck” as Ford made it. It was acquired by the Chester Fire District some many years ago in the 40s or 50s before Chief Bill Turner became a fire fighter. It came from Humbug Valley (I don't know whether it was in a fire engine form when acquired) and had further restoration in Chester to its present form. They have rebuilt the wheels (as we are doing), painted it red and upgraded several features including adding a starter to replace the crank. It has been used in 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades and the like for several years.

It appears that several cities and fire districts have saved OLD fire engines, some Model T's, and some other makes. Ray Peters sent me a photo of a fire engine he saw in Maine and I have seen many on our travels across the country. If others find fire engines on their travels, send me a photo for our historical files.

—George Wasson

first building in La Fiesta Square. Mr. Garibotti then built several buildings surrounding the Post office, including a La Fiesta Market, Sutton Shoes etc.. At this Post Office the first right hand drive vehicles were put into service. In my humble opinion, these Dodge station wagons were the best ever produced for Post Office delivery, to this day. Also at this Post Office, three loaded long barrel Smith & Wesson six shooter revolvers were installed, each one in a holster at each finance window, just like the wild, wild west. Fortunately none discharged accidentally and were removed a short while later. Across the street was the “new fire house” with former rural carrier Bob Winkel as Fire Chief. The old fire house had been purchased by Mickey Meyers (owner of Mickey Meyers Grocery), dismantled, and re-assembled at Clear Lake where it became a summer home. The front of the house still read “Lafayette Fire District”. The new fire house is now the Old Fire House School. As mentioned earlier the Post Office celebrated “100 Years of Service” at this location 973 Moraga Road. (Design Within Reach furniture is the current occupant of that address).

Post Office #6. On October 4, 1958, at 3498 Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First St. a new Post Office was dedicated. Growing pains required the move to accommodate the increased volume of mail and carriers, (current occupant is the U.S. Bank) Prior to building this Post Office, the entire hill had to be removed before construction. Some of you will remember there was also a hill across the street which was also leveled to build the current shopping center for Luckys. On July 1, 1971 the old “Post Office Department” became the new U.S. Postal Service, a quasi semi-private organization. Under the old P.O. Department, the Postmaster General was a member of the President’s cabinet, which changed with the new organization. Postmasters and Officers in Charge (OIC) at this office were H.T. Crandell, David E. Obera, I.P. Powers, and Arne Nielsen.

<b>2007/2008 Directors</b>	
President: Dorothy Walker.....	283-3303
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Corresponding Secretary: Oliver Hamlin.....	283-6822
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Artifact Documentation: Keith Blakeney.....	284-2221
Programs: Joseph Van Overveen.....	283-3650
Photo Retrieval: Mary Solon .....	283-7335
George Wasson .....	284-4603
Tom Titmus .....	299-2030
Nancy Flood.....	283-3409
Keith Blakeney.....	788-0195
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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	

Post Office #7. June 5, 1976, “A day of infamy”, to paraphrase former President F.D.R.’s WWII speech, was when Lafayette Post office lost their mail carriers and distribution clerks to Walnut Creek in a so-called economy move. Lafayette was to have a brand new Post Office at 3650 Mt. Diablo Blvd. where the “Bambi” building now stands. The Post Office was down graded to two trailers at 3641 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Arne Nielsen was Postmaster at that time.

Post Office #8. June 25, 1979, a permanent building was built at the 3641 location to house a finance station with P.O. boxes, with carriers and sorting still in Walnut Creek. Twenty three years later, 2000, Lafayette finally got their mail carriers back home. Now housed in a “carrier annex” at 3426 Mt. Diablo Blvd. behind Butler Conti Dodge.

—Dave Obera



**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 \_\_\_\_\_