



## SAVE THIS DATE

*Saturday, November 14, 2009*

**Opening Day for the Lafayette Library and Learning Center**

*Visit the Lafayette Historical Society in its New Home*

Have your picture taken with Old Betsy

*Grand Opening Ceremonies begin at 10:00 A. M.*

## President's Message

There are so many things to tell you. The Board has been working almost weekly this summer to get ready for the move into our space in the Library and Learning Center. We must consider not just moving boxes from one place to another, but where to put them. We also know there will be treasures that many of you have been holding and are planning to take to our History Room. We want a plan to take in those donations. We also want to have people ready to answer questions about Lafayette's history. Therefore, we must think about training volunteers who will be available to work with visitors. Please read the insert that we have in this issue and consider volunteering your time in the History Room. Fill out the form and return it to us and we will notify you when the training sessions are scheduled.

Having a computer system which will allow us to find photos and news clippings for people doing research is high on our priority list. Our website will also have a new look to go along with our new space. A sub-committee has been established to make recommendations to the Board for those changes. Check [LafayetteHistory.org](http://LafayetteHistory.org) for more information about our activities and Lafayette's history.

See us at the Art and Wine Festival September 19th and 20th. We will have a booth in a new location this year. You can find us in the Plaza parking lot, behind the food booths. Old Betsy will be there in her completed glory - new paint and wooden deck.

Old Betsy will be seen again as part of the celebration for the opening of the New Library and Learning Center. Bring your kids and grandkids and have their picture taken ringing Betsy's bell. The photo will be free as part of LHS's contribution to the many events happening November 14th, beginning 10:00 a.m. A week later we are planning a more intimate celebration in our History Room. Historical Society members will be treated to an old-fashion Ice Cream Social while we show off our new space. We will notify you when the details have been finalized.

Despite all the excitement of having our own space, the reality of having to pay rent for the first time has lead the Board to the very necessary conclusion that we must raise our membership dues. Effective September 1st, there will be a new fee schedule for membership in the Society. Membership dues will

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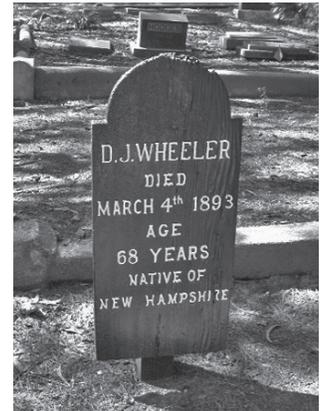
rise from \$10 per year to \$25 for individual memberships, and \$50 for families. Lifetime memberships are now a one time fee of \$250. Long time Life members are encouraged to add to their current membership knowing how much inflation has taken out of the value of your initial contribution. The back of the Newsletter shows the complete list of dues changes. We have also decided to actively seek sponsorships from local businesses. These 'donations' will be recognized on our website.

—Dorothy Walker, President of the Board

## Wooden Markers Restored

Three wooden markers in the Lafayette Cemetery were recently restored as a preservation project of the Todos Santos Chapter of The Questers based in Concord. The Questers organization is a national group that was founded in 1944 as a study organization with "aims to stimulate the appreciation of antiques and to encourage preservation of historical landmarks". One restored marker dates back to 1893 and another marks the graves of Adelaide and Henry Crow.

The work on the markers was completed by John Romo of Serenity Headstones and Monuments. John cleaned the markers thoroughly, repainted the printing and covered them with many coats of polyurethane. He says that they should last about 100 years.



Lafayette Cemetery was founded in the mid 1850s with its first burial in 1854. The cemetery in Alamo received its first burial in 1856. These two pioneer cemeteries joined together as The Alamo-Lafayette Cemetery District in 1937. The district is one of many California Special Districts supported by tax dollars and lead by a board of trustees.

—Nancy Flood



*Editor's Note: Lafayette Historical Society offers tours of the Lafayette Cemetery upon request. Contact Mary McCosker at 284-5376.*

## Thank You to Our Supporters

There are many people and organizations that Lafayette Historical Society must thank for their generosity. Beginning with the Mt. Diablo Nursery and Garden, they supplied the fresh flowering plants that served as the center pieces for the tables at our Pot Luck dinner. The coffee we enjoyed that night was donated by Jeff Klurfeld and Robin Keller of Starbucks Coffee.

We are especially grateful to the Lafayette Community Foundation for their generous grant of \$2,500 to ensure the continued renovations to our "Old Betsy". See her in all her glory at the Art and Wine Festival.

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John Otto has given hours of his time and expertise to help us create a brochure describing our organization. Designing with a committee has been a challenge which John has taken on with professionalism and humor. The results are very exciting. Pick up your copy at Art and Wine and in the History Room.

Liz and Les Simmonds gave us a set of Limogues plates that depict scenes in the life of the Marquis de La Fayette, our City's namesake. They will be proudly displayed once we have our space. Larry Duson, Branch Manager, Bank of the West, Lafayette and Carlos Gomez, Tailor, Moises Gomez & Associates, Lafayette have generously donated funds that will be used to produce materials for special projects.

Now that we are about to move into the new History Room, we must again thank Bill Eames for allowing LHS to keep our archive files in his offices while awaiting our new home. Harvey Eisenberg has allowed us the use of desks and files for our temporary office.

Thank you too to our LHS Board Members for their many hours and efforts to continue the work of this organization.

—Dorothy Walker

## A Town Hall for Lafayette

*Excerpted from a paper written by Ruth Dyer in 1977: Part 1 of three: 1911-1920*



*Town Hall as it appeared after its official opening in May 1914*

established. Among the items discussed was the admission of ladies to the next and all subsequent meetings and the need for a permanent meeting place. By mid-February, 1912, it was voted to build a Town Hall, and the means of financing this venture were initiated. It was estimated the building would cost \$490.00.

Several sites for the building were proposed for purchase and in December, 1913, a generous offer was made: Frank and Rosa Ghiglione would deed property to the LIC and donate \$200 in addition. The offer was accepted, and on this property the Lafayette Town Hall stands today.

In November, 1911, a group of men in Lafayette met at Robert McNeil's Pioneer Store to discuss how to improve the conditions of Lafayette, then a community of two hundred people. Improved roads, fire protection, better schools, additional transportation (most of it offered by the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway), and an assured water supply were needed. The Lafayette Improvement Club (LIC) was

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Fundraising efforts followed to raise money for projects of the Club. After it was agreed a town hall should be built a stock corporation was formed, the Lafayette Improvement Club Corporation. One hundred and eighty shares of the first stock were issued for \$10 each. Par value was \$1.00. Membership in the LIC was offered to anyone who paid \$.50 and helped “to fix the hall”. Income from monthly dances, often \$200 to \$300, was also used to pay for the hall. Later the legality of the stock issue was questioned. In September, 1934, all stockholders



were notified that shares issued since October 31, 1913, were illegal and void. Members were asked to return those certificates and to receive new ones. Many complied. All shareholding was ended in 1941. In this same year the process of replacing the Lafayette Improvement Club with the Lafayette Improvement Association (LIA) began. Title to the Town Hall was transferred from the LIC to the LIA in 1944. In 1953, to insure the validity of the new ownership, title was acquired by the LIA for \$1.00 and “other valuable considerations.”

In October, 1913, a meeting was called by the LIC to receive bids for the new building. None were submitted. The plans were too ambitious in view of the funds available. The building committee worked with an architect to bring the cost down to \$2,000. On November 1, the low bid of \$1,989.50 was submitted. It was accepted, revised and accepted as revised. The bid had been too low because of an error in the lumber bill. Work on Town Hall was delayed because of opposition to the first plans. No banquet room had been provided. It was decided to build a two-story structure with the first floor to be completed later. Day work was hired. The men of Lafayette worked on Saturdays, holidays, and in the evenings. Albert Gerow was the contractor. The Town Hall was completed in six weeks.

On May 1, 1914, the Town Hall opened officially. On the first floor a bean feed was offered. Albert Gerow cooked the beans all night in a rock-lined pit behind the Town Hall. On the following night the Grand Opening Ball was held on the second floor. Children helping to decorate were admitted free.

Years of Saturday night dances followed. Sometimes they were weekly, more often monthly. They began at 9:00 pm; at midnight a supper was served, and the music stopped at 3:00 or 5:00 am. For years, Al Weber’s orchestra from Oakland provided the music. Sometimes 500 people attended. People came from throughout Contra Costa County and the Bay Area. Many came by the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern train, arriving at the West Lafayette station at the end of School Street near Birdhaven Court. Special trains arrived at 9:00 pm and left at 3:30 am. If a dance lasted longer – and they sometimes did – the train would wait until 5:00 am.

The dance tickets sold for \$1.50 a couple, \$.50 for single ladies. Costs were low. The ladies of Lafayette prepared the suppers. A typical supper: boiled ham, potato salad, cheese, olives and pickles, bread and butter, homemade cakes and coffee. The bill was \$6.00. Robert McNeil provided all the supplies at cost. Children helped with the decorations. Wires were strung in the hall and crepe paper was draped. Ferns might be brought from Briones Canyon. In the autumn grape leaves or other colored vegetation made the hall festive. On Monday evenings the Town Hall was cleaned and the dishes washed. Mr. McNeil would start the water to boil in the wash tubs – the tubs in which the potatoes had been boiled on Saturday. After the job was done, the young people danced to the player piano upstairs.

Improvements continued to be made. An art glass window was donated by Mr. Grooles. A sidewalk was build from “Bert Gerow’s Place to the Hall.” Rock from the County was laid from the Lafayette Hotel (on the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Moraga Rd.) to the Town Hall. The cost of hauling was \$130. Donations were accepted to meet this expense. Requests for better lighting at the West Lafayette Station were not heeded.

The Town Hall was a recognized success. As it served the community, Town Hall also served the needs of the nation. During World War I dances proved popular with the soldiers from the Presidio of San Francisco who were camped in Walnut Creek. The Red Cross Society was given use of the Town Hall for summer dances, and in October, 1917, the Lafayette Home Guard gave a Military Ball. The Red Cross dances in 1918 raised \$50 and \$25. At another dance \$50 was raised for the Belgian Relief Committee.

Following the war, additions were made to the Town Hall. Stairs were built at the back, for fire protection. A kitchen was added at the rear of the hall. Concrete was laid and the lower floor of the hall extended back 18 feet. Plumbing was repaired and the windmill also. However expenses were low. For example, the payment on County taxes in October, 1920, was \$15.49. The November PG&E bill amounted to \$2.28.

—*Mary McCosker*

## **LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING**

The Annual Meeting and Potluck at Temple Isaiah was a great success. The facilities at the temple are ideal for meetings with plenty of parking and easy access. George Wasson brought Old Betsy so that we all were able to check out the major refurbishing project he supervised and completed over the winter. Kudos to George for a great job. As it turned out George had taken the fire engine over on the previous Tuesday for a dry run. More on that later.

There were 46 members and guests in attendance. Ollie Hamlin saw to it that a well stocked bar with snacks was available during the social hour prior to sitting down to a marvelous selection of dinner offerings, provided by the membership.

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Dorothy Walker, President, introduced our guest speaker, John Coleman, VP of the EBMUD Board of Directors. He previously had served two terms as Board President. John is very active in our community, as past President of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and is Scoutmaster of Troop 243. Mr. Coleman was careful not to put us to sleep with a plethora of statistics and chose instead to present facts of interest to district residents. For instance: Do you purchase bottled water? You're wasting money — the Mokelumne River watershed provides water that is, in most instances, better than the bottled product and it is available from your tap. And it is environmentally better; no need to manufacture plastic bottles.

The Lafayette Reservoir, although not presently used as a supply source for EBMUD is kept available and is tested regularly. The dam for the Reservoir was begun in 1927. However, the following year the earth gave way and began sliding from its foundation. Work was stopped and a redesign included a widening the base and a reduction of 40 feet in the height. The Reservoir was opened to the public as a recreation area in 1966.

The business portion of the meeting was the essence of briefness. Those Board members whose elected term was about to expire were unanimously elected to another term.

More on the fire engine: On the earlier drive to the Temple, George proceeded up the hill that became steeper and steeper until a point was reached where the carburetor was at a higher level than the fuel tank. The engine coughed to a stop. Fuel will not run up hill and Old Betsy does not have a fuel pump. George, knowing a thing or two about Model Ts, coasted backward down the hill to a level place where he restarted the engine, turned the truck around and backed her up the hill. If you have any problems with your Model T call George!

—Paul Sheehan

## **Update on the new Lafayette Library and Learning Center**

The contractors are working quickly to meet the deadlines for the November 14 grand opening. There are more workers on the site during the week and they have extended their hours to the weekend, according to Ann Merideth, Director Lafayette Community Development.

As the exterior granite and teak installation is completed, the scaffolding around the building is being removed. It is starting to look more real every day. The granite slabs were shipped in numbered large crates and installed on the building according to numbers as noted on the plans. The teak is all recycled teak, thus no new forests were cut to supply our library with teak.

—Marechal Duncan

**Visit our website at: [www.lafayettehistory.org/](http://www.lafayettehistory.org/)**

## Old Betsy is Ready to Move

It has been almost 30 years of residence in our garage and now is the time to move on to new quarters. Back in 1975 (or so) the city of Lafayette and its citizens decided to acquire Lafayette’s first motorized fire engine, a Ford Model TT, and eventually the acquisition was passed on to the Historical Society to maintain. For the years since the acquisition, Old Betsy has been in several locations, but for most of those years she has been in our garage. While here, Old Betsy has gone through lots of improvements and renovations. Those tasks are substantially completed. You all can see her at the Art and Wine Festival in September and at the official opening of the Library and Learning Center in November. She is a fine representative of early history in Lafayette.

The renovations have been accomplished with the generous contributions from many members of our Society, and additional support from the Lafayette Community Foundation, other clubs and organizations, and the faithful efforts by friends of Old Betsy. Thank yous go out to the many skilled (amateur) workers, including some Boy Scouts, who have devoted many hours to dismantling, redesigning, reassembling, painting and lots of unidentified jobs during this time. The most recent renovations we have been assisted by the efforts of carpenter, David Truckner, who rebuilt many of the wooden and metal parts of the understructure. He also helped with painting many of the parts before and after reassembly on the frame. After more than 80 years of life, the wooden understructure of Old Betsy was badly deteriorated and needed replacement with sturdy timbers. All of the metal parts are now powder coated with paint and the rusted metal fasteners have been replaced. We have tried to keep the refurbished

appearance as close as possible to the original appearance with only a few variations where structural changes were needed.

All members of the Historical Society, as well as, residents of Lafayette will be pleased with the present state of Old Betsy. She will be ready for having her picture taken with people of all ages during the grand opening of the Library and Learning Center on November 14. See you there.

—George Wasson



### 2009 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
Program Development: Keith Blakeney.....	284-2221
George Wasson .....	284-4603
Tom Titmus .....	299-2030
Nancy Flood.....	283-3409

### 2009 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

# 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"/> Other _____        |  |

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*Please mail this application to:*

**Lafayette Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 133**

**Lafayette, CA 94549**