



Lafayette, California

April 2017

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LHS Annual Meeting

Please join us for our Annual Meeting on Sunday, April 30 at 2 pm in the Community Hall at the Lafayette Library. In past years this meeting included a Pot Luck Dinner with “finger-licking good” food but this year there will be dessert and coffee and a presentation about the history of the libraries of Lafayette and the building of the new Lafayette Library. Panelists will include Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk, former Foundation Board Member Gwenn Lennox, longtime Friends of the Lafayette Library Board member Mary Ann Hoisington, and Susan Weaver who was Librarian during the transition from the library on Moraga Road to our new Library in 2009. Please join us for an interesting and informative program.

The Historical Society Turns 50!!

In 1967 Fern Powell Davis and Joan Merryman were members of the board of the Lafayette Library Association (now Friends of the Lafayette Library). At that time Mary Paige of the Lafayette Design Project asked the library board to store a considerable amount of their records and reports. At the request of Fern and Joan a historic committee was appointed to function as part of the library board. Members were selected who were descendants of pioneers and others interested in Lafayette history: Fern Powell Davis, Jane Putnam, Bernice Mills, Ruth Holten, Ruth Dyer, Joan Merryman, Jack Hageman, Angela Broadhead, Alice McNeil Russi, Fr. William Abeloe, Theodore Murphy, Sandy Kimball, Paul Ogden, and Nancy Flood. The Lafayette Historical Society was born!!

The purpose of the committee was to collect and preserve materials about the history of Lafayette such as photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, diaries, maps, documents and other records. The committee was also interested in the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and landmarks in Lafayette.

Over the years historical projects were undertaken by the committee: the grave stones of Elam and Margaret Allen Brown at the Alhambra cemetery in Martinez were repaired; Peter Thomson’s anvil was located and donated; Elam Brown’s “Paul Revere” lantern, which he brought on his covered wagon journey to California in 1846, was given to the committee by Jennie Bickerstaff; the Plaza Park and two buildings on Golden Gate Way, the Wayside Inn and the Pioneer Store, were dedicated as “California Points of Historic Interest”. Photographs were collected and catalogued, oral histories of many of the old timers were done, and a book about the early history of Lafayette was written (*La Fayette from Rancho to Suburb*). Walking tours of downtown Lafayette began in 1971 and Old Betsy, the 1920

Model T Ford fire truck, the first engine used by the Lafayette Volunteer Fire Department, was purchased and returned to Lafayette.

Fifty years later the Historical Society Board and volunteers continue to discover, collect and preserve historical materials and disseminate this information through programs, publications, exhibits, and the Internet. Please visit the History Room to view our collection of materials from Lafayette's past. The room is open Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 10-2.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Lafayette's Hidden Stories

With a visit to the LHS History Room you will find a number of artifacts from Lafayette's past including the lantern that came across the country with Elam and Margaret Allen Brown or you can visit the LHS Website (www.lafayettehistory.org) and listen to stories from pioneers and more current Lafayette residents. Below is a sampling of oral histories on the LHS Website; check back often as a committee of volunteers will be adding additional histories in the coming months.

Oral History: Ann Skram

Ann's family moved to Lafayette in 1946/47. Her parents built a home with a swimming pool on a one acre lot on Redwood Lane in Happy Valley. At that time Happy Valley Road was lined with huge walnut trees all the way into town and was mostly agrarian.

Oral History: George Wasson

George has made numerous contributions to the growth of Lafayette from a small town to the thriving community it is today. He and his family moved to Lafayette in 1957, he became involved in the incorporation campaign, and served as Lafayette's mayor in 1976.

Oral History: Irene Bunker

Bunker moved to Lafayette in 1913. Her house was built in 1906. She describes the early days of Town Hall, its dances and dinners, the Horse Shows, parades, and the Improvement Club. There was a great sense of community in Lafayette. Money was raised by volunteers for needs in Lafayette.

Oral History: Patricia Whitehead Wendt

In the late 1940s, Patricia's grandfather purchased 4 acres, and her father one acre, in Happy Valley. They chose the location because they wanted to live in the country with walnut trees and plenty of land.

Oral History: Barbara Langlois

Barbara Langlois was appointed to the City's Planning Commission in 1973, only five years after moving to Lafayette from El Cerrito. The next year, she won election to the City Council, and in 1975 she became the first woman to serve as Mayor.

Betsy Willcuts and the Oral History Project Committee

ARCHIVE COLLECTION IN THE HISTORY ROOM

Some recent additions to the archives of the Lafayette Historical Society include a cane made by Andrew Allen, son of Margaret Allen Brown, from willow branches cut along one of the local creeks. The cane was donated by William McNeil, grandson of Andrew Allen. It is a very special addition to our collection and is on display in the History Room.

Our collection contains items from many eras of Lafayette history. We have received a metal yardstick advertising the Lafayette Building Material Company, a dance bid from a college Barn Dance in 1940, and information on the SFO Helicopter Airlines from the 1960s.

Items such as Elam Brown's lantern, horse show trophies, bottles from our local dairies, Peter Thomson's anvil, and the well-known "molasses barrel" are on display as well as a beautiful wedding gown and slippers, baby clothes, and a silver dresser set. All of these items are on display in the History Room or can be viewed on request.

Come in for a visit. If you have any items you might be willing to donate, including old photos, please let us know.

Nancy Flood and the Archive Committee



A LOOK BACK IN LAFAYETTE HISTORY



After having thought to be lost or misplaced, Elam Brown's candle lantern was discovered in the vault of the Central Library in Pleasant Hill. Joan Merryman and Librarian Tom Gates located the lantern packed in a Challenge Butter box in which Jennie Bickerstaff Rosenberg had kept it for many years. Brown brought the lantern across the plains in 1846 to Lafayette, and in June 1879 gave it to his friend and neighbor, James Bickerstaff. In turn, Jennie kept the lantern until 1960 when she gave it to the County Library for safe keeping. The lantern will now remain in the possession of the Lafayette Historical Committee providing a safe place for its display in the Lafayette Library.

*From the Lafayette Historical Society Newsletter
October 1969*

THANKS TO OUR NEWEST VOLUNTEERS

If you stop by the History Room you may be greeted by one of our new volunteers who keep the space organized and up to date. Without them our doors could not open and our exhibits and projects would not be available to the public. Thank you to Jay Nelson, Heidi Amster, Sharon Freitas, Effie Herrick, Andrew Van Etten and David Van Etten

OLD BETSY

We hope that many of you noted that Old Betsy was not in the History Room at the Library and Learning Center during much of October and November last year. The absence was because of a wheel “break down” and the necessary repairs.

In October while being towed to an event in Alamo, a tire came off of a rim on the left front wheel. In modern times all that is needed is to put on the spare tire and wheel. Not so with a 1920 Model T - we don't have a spare. After much searching and assistance from others we had our rim refurbished, tire repaired, and readied for installation. Now we had to be ready for the December Christmas event where we take Santa to the Plaza Park in Old Betsy with a police escort.

But now we needed a wheel assembly for the left front wheel because our refurbished tire and rim were not ready. John Kallio, who has several restored cars (including another Model T), took a wheel off one of his cars and installed it on Old Betsy. At the right time Old Betsy was mobile again and Santa was transported to the Plaza Park on time and returned to the library after the event was over.



Our refurbished tire, tube and rim are now back in place on Old Betsy thanks to many who provided needed assistance including John Kallio, the Lafayette Police Department who arranged for towing and storage during the repairs, and others who are collectors of “original” Model T parts.

George Wasson

2017 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

On February 7 the Lafayette Historical Society mailed 156 membership solicitations. Board member John Otto designed simple cards that could be mailed and returned in enclosed envelopes.

Because of the drive, LHS now has 14 new members - Thank You!

We have collected \$450.00 in *Family Memberships* and \$775.00 in *Individual Memberships*.

The most important thing that happened as a result of our membership drive was that many people also made financial contributions in addition to the membership dues. Several donors made large gifts and together with the additional donations the total was more than \$3,100.00.

Few people understand that the Lafayette Historical Society depends on individual donations and membership dues to support the efforts of the Society and the History Room. LHS pays the City of Lafayette more than \$5,000 annually in rent.

Melisande Hubbs, Board Member and Membership Chairman

LAFAYETTE SCHOOLS

The first schoolhouse was located on what is presently called Golden Gate Way between First and Second Streets. There is no information concerning costs of the building and lot. It was started in the winter of 1853 with Benjamin Shreve as the first teacher. In August of 1854, he married Adaline Gorham who had come West with her family from La Fayette County, Illinois. He started a general merchandise store near the first schoolhouse. Later he moved the store to Plaza Way (where Sideboard Restaurant is located today). In 1857 he applied to have a post office in his store and needed a name for the community. When his suggestion of Centerville was denied because another community had chosen that name, he chose La Fayette.



Schoolhouse #2 was located west of today's Lafayette United Methodist Church on Moraga Road. It was built in 1871 at a cost of \$825 on a lot that cost \$41. There was one unique feature about this school...the numbering system. It was reversed from the numbering system in present day schools. Students started school in the eighth grade and graduated from the first. This numbering system changed when schools

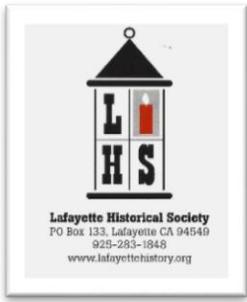
became twelve year schools. Grade advancement was not automatic. Students had to achieve a grade of 70% or better on tests given in October and May to advance. This building was moved to Mt. Diablo Blvd. in 1925 and became the post office, library, and telephone exchange. It now houses Douglass Designs, a home remodeling company.

Schoolhouse #3 is now part of the Lafayette United Methodist Church. It was built in 1893 at a cost of \$2000 on property that cost \$400. It remained a schoolhouse until it was sold to the church in 1927 when the current Lafayette School was built.



Schoolhouse #4 is the present Lafayette Elementary School, now located on the corner of School Street and Moraga Road. When it opened, the building had three classrooms with first, second and third grades in one room, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in another, and the seventh and eighth in a third room. After graduation the students either went to San Ramon High School in

Danville or Mt. Diablo High School in Concord. Those attending Mt. Diablo High School would ride the Sacramento Northern Railroad to school, but those going to San Ramon School would transfer to a bus in Walnut Creek for the trip to Danville. In January 1927, the school had five rooms with two grades per room and the fifth room became the kindergarten in the early 1930s. The graduation ceremony was held at Town Hall located across School Street from the school building. It was one of the biggest social events of the year in Lafayette. Everyone in town would attend the graduation to congratulate the new graduates.



LHS

Board of Directors

- Ruth Bailey
- Larry Blodgett
- Marechal Duncan
- Nancy Flood
- Sande Hubbs
- John Kennett
- Mary McCosker
- John Otto
- Judie Peterson
- Laura Torkelson
- George Wasson

Return Service Requested

YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MATTERS:

Your Name _____
____ Student Membership \$10 (thru high school only)
____ Individual Membership \$25
____ Family Membership \$50
____ Donation \$ _____

Thank You

- How to donate:
- By mail in the enclosed envelope
 - In person at the History Room
 - Online: www.lafayettehistory.org

Make checks payable to the Lafayette Historical Society

Please mail this application to:

**Lafayette Historical Society
P.O. Box 133
Lafayette CA 94549**

