



## Mark Your Calendar!

### Annual LHS Potluck Dinner

**Date:** Wednesday, May 12, 2010

**Place:** Lafayette Library – Community Hall, Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street

**Time:** 6:00 Social Hour  
6:45 Dinner  
7:30 Short business meeting followed by:

**Celebration of 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Pony Express  
and Lafayette's Place in Its History**

Speaker, Tom Crews from National Pony Express Association

**Price:** \$10.00 per person donation requested to help defray LHS costs  
PLUS Your favorite hearty salad or casserole (please bring serving utensils)

Dessert and coffee provided by Board Members

**Reservations requested:** Please call - LHS 283-1848 or email – [office@lafayettehistory.org](mailto:office@lafayettehistory.org)

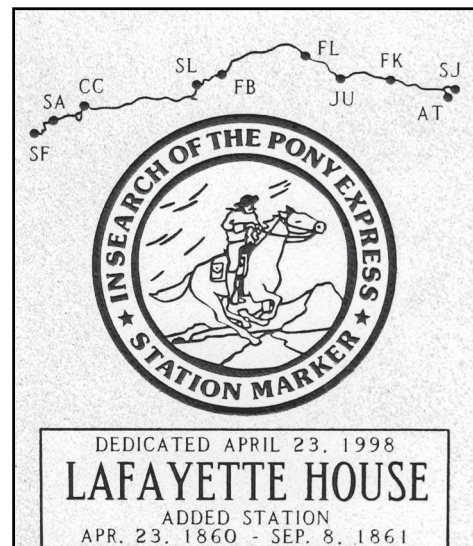
**Questions:** Call Mary McCosker – 284-5376 or LHS 283-1848 • Tues., Thurs., Sat. • 10 - 2

## The Pony Express Stops in Lafayette

*Excerpted from Newsletter articles April and November 2007 by Mary Solon.*

On April 3, 1860, the mail was put in the mail pouch and the rider left St. Joseph Missouri for points west. In San Francisco on this same April 3 at 4:00 p.m. James Randall left with 85 letters to board the Antelope at the wharf and traveled to Sacramento. There the mail was transferred to another rider and the eastbound overland service began. For the first part of 1860 there were weekly rides from each direction. A total of 308 runs were made for a distance of 616,000 miles. Lincoln's inaugural address in November, 1860 made it from St. Joseph to Sacramento in 7 days, 17 hours for publicity and political reasons. Thirty-five thousand letters were ultimately carried by the Pony Express. Californians sent more than half of the mail,

they were so eager for news. Only one to two shipments were lost depending on accounts and only one rider was killed —by indians.



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It was not easy for the westbound riders arriving in Sacramento to make connections to San Francisco. Riders often missed the boat which left Sacramento at 2 p.m. on Saturday with no service on Sunday. When they had to ride overland from Sacramento to Oakland the route went through Davis, Fairfield, Cordelia, Benicia, by ferry to Martinez, Pacheco, Walnut Creek, Lafayette and Oakland.

Lafayette and these other towns became “added stations”. Lafayette House, run by N. P. Lake, was the hotel and way station on the southwest corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard at Moraga Road where a Pony Express monument stands today. The rider came in from Martinez, changed horses, galloped through Orinda, over Fish Ranch Road, then down Claremont, Telegraph and Broadway. He then caught a ferry for the crossing to San Francisco. After the first unofficial run through Lafayette the Pony Express stopped twice more in 1860 and 17 times in 1861, always westbound.

## President's Message

Another year, and its time for the Annual Pot Luck Dinner! I hope you look forward to this event as much as I do. Along with our own celebration of finally having a permanent home, it is the 150th year of the Pony Express which rode through Lafayette some 20 times over the course of its history. This year's speaker is Tom Crews from the National Pony Express Association. His presentation will include a slide show. We are pleased to be celebrating this event upstairs in the Community Hall of Lafayette's Library.

We want to include the public in the event, so we are publicizing it in the newspapers. We are asking you to make reservations to assure that you have a place at the event. As usual, are asking everyone to bring either a salad or a casseroles (including serving utensils). No dietary restrictions this time. Board members will provide dessert and coffee. Come early as the Library will be open and parking spaces are limited.

The History Room is doing well with a steady stream of visitors. We have been open for business for almost five months now. Betsy Willcuts is doing a great job coordinating volunteers with meaningful jobs that need doing in the Room. We can always use more volunteers. Please consider joining us for a two hour shift weekly or bi-weekly. Betsy and Barbara Boyle are starting an oral history project and would like your input. See their article below. We are planning to have a speaker in June or July on the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway Company and its subsequent owners. See the display of its route, as well as, pictures, tickets and train schedules upstairs in the main Library. Thank you to Bob Lewis for putting this display together. LHS will be participating in Lafayette's Earth Day celebrations by having the History Room open on Sunday April 25th, from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Earlier in the day Sustainable Lafayette will begin the events in Plaza Park with a farmer's market. We will provide walking tours of the downtown area. Old Betsy is expected to be out on Golden Gate Way to draw people into the History Room. Come by and say hello.

This is the last printed Newsletter you will receive unless you contact us. In order to curtail our costs, the Newsletter will subsequently be sent by email to those of you with email addresses. If you want to receive a printed copy, you must be a current member and contact us directly saying you want the Newsletter through the mail. Call us at 925/283-1848, email or the old fashioned way – by mail.

A final reminder to a few of you, please renew your membership with the Historical Society. Dues are our primary means of support and our ability to pay our rent. For those of you working for corporations, we ask that you find out about their policy for donating to non-profit organizations. *As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Lafayette Historical Society would be eligible for such donations.* **Keep us in mind!** Thank you.

**—Dorothy Walker**

## LHS Speaker Series: THE SAKLAN

On February 18th, LHS members and guests gathered for the first in a series of lectures on the history of Lafayette. The presentation was held in the Arts and Science Room of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. The presentation was given by Mr. John Nutley, President of the Rossmoor Historical Society.

The Saklan Tribe were members of the Miwok group, their territory extended from Lafayette to the San Pablo Creek and on to the San Ramon Valley. The abundance of creeks and mild climate produced plenty of easily trapped animals and a ready supply of wild plants, fowl and fish. Herds of deer, elk and antelope also were plentiful. Acorns were a staple for most tribes in California and the Saklan were no exception. Entire families joined in on this important harvest. The acorns were stored in granaries, large baskets elevated on stilts to keep animals from getting them. The kernels were worked into meal by repeatedly pounding them with a stone pestle and ground into meal. The meal was made into mush by putting it into closely woven water-tight baskets and water added. Hot stones were placed in the basket until it thickened.

The Saklan Indians were active traders. They traded animal hides with the Coastal Miwoks for fish and shells. Shells, such as abalone, could be used as tools or jewelry. Obsidian, a volcanic glass, was the material of choice for crafting knives and arrowheads. The source of obsidian was the mountains to the north, home to the Lake Miwok.

The Saklan certainly were a fascinating people. They were good stewards of the land while it was in their care. We owe them our respect and appreciation.

—Paul Sheehan

## Notes on Pearl Van Meter

One of the interesting things about volunteering in the History Room is to help people who come in for research and discovery. Little did we know how much we all would learn!

When Barbara Hough Sisson contacted us, she wanted to know about her great-great grandfather, Orlando Hough. She had found him in Nilda Rego's, *Days Gone By*. Nilda forwarded her e-mail to LHS. Our reply



This closeup of an "Oldtimers' Reunion" in 1934. There are 64 people in the full photo. Shown here are from left, William Hough, Mrs. Sturgeon, George Sturgeon, Carrie Mae Van Meter, Mrs. John Volker, Margaret Dewing (*Jennie Bickerstaff*). Front row from left, Mabel Boardman Faulkner and George Brockhurst.

was that we had typed copies of Orlando Hough's letters, some copies of handwritten letters and some articles. Also, we had photos of Will Hough, Sadie Roscoe Hough, Frank Albert Hough, Carrie Hough Van Meter and her daughter, Pearl Van Meter, but none of Orlando Hough. We told Barbara that Carrie and Pearl were buried in the Lafayette Cemetery. Barbara came down from Humboldt County and went to the

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cemetery. She found a relatively new tombstone for Carrie Van Meter but nothing for her daughter Pearl. And the cemetery did not have any records for Pearl's gravesite. The next day when Barbara related this to the History Room volunteers, we thought it was odd as we had seen Pearl's name listed on the ledger at the cemetery.



Perhaps the most endearing photograph in our entire collection, Pearl Van Meter and Carrie Van Meter, date unknown.

the Elam Brown families. (Elam and Margaret came out in the same wagon train. Margaret's husband died on the trail. Elam and Margaret married some time after they arrived in California.) What was Pearl's husband's name? E-mails went back and forth. Pearl's husband was Warren Charles Allen.

Mary McCosker had more contributions. For years Mary had saved in her garage the newspaper-size bound Lafayette Suns. These now reside in the History Room and we were able to find Carrie Van Meter's obituary. Mary also pulled out copies of a ledger that Carrie kept at the Post Office, she being the postmaster from 1904 to 1926. Mary also found in Dorothy Mutnick's *California Poppies* and *Even a Few Mommies* a reference to Carrie Hough's marriage to C. L. Van Meter, called Connie. Carrie filed for divorce in 1902. There was also a reference to Pearl's gravesite near the Hough and Allen plots in the Lafayette Cemetery.

We were also able to supply to Barbara copies of photos of the Van Meters, a few Houghs, Carrie's house and the Post Office. Barbara is now working on a family history of the Houghs. There are so many descendants to a great-great grandfather, perhaps one of the them will have a photo of Orlando Hough. The facts related in this article make history interesting. Sometimes historical or genealogical inquiries lead to Dead ends. But often they take us down unexpected and fascinating paths, opening new doors to family knowledge.

Barbara was given the Hough folders to peruse. Pearl Van Meter was known to have seen a chiropractor in Oakland on the day of her death, been stricken while in the old Kennedy Tunnel and died at Fabiola Hospital in Oakland. In one of the other Hough folders, Barbara found a copy of an inquest into Pearl Van Meter's death in 1922. See photo. It turned out that Pearl Van Meter was actually married to an Allen! And she was listed in the cemetery ledger as Pearl Van Meter Allen. None of the volunteers knew this!

Mary McCosker contacted LHS member Tami Mullins who is doing a genealogy on the Margaret Allen and

This is a copy of the inquest of Pearl Van Meter Allen, dated 11/14/22. Pearl died November 10.

—Mary Solon

## A Town Hall for Lafayette: Part 4: The Fifties and Sixties

Although the Town Hall was becoming most-known for dramatic presentations, its uses continued to be varied. In 1951 and '52, it was occupied almost every day by organizations such as: The Catholic Church for religious instruction; Lafayette Elementary School for music; League of Jewish Women; Lafayette Playshop; Cub Scouts; Dad's Club; PTA and Lafayette Improvement Association (LIA). Occasionally a school assembly was held there. It was a polling place, Mrs. McAllister used it for soldiers (probably from Camp Stoneman), vaccinations were offered, and performances by the Lafayette Playshop and Straw Hatters were rehearsed upstairs.

In mid-1953 County inspectors found 29 electrical violations. The Town Hall needed to be brought up to standard as a theater. A committee was appointed to see if the Town Hall should be abandoned.

Apparently the code provisions were met.

In 1955 - 1956, the Dramateurs first rented the Town Hall. Since the Straw Hat Review was no longer performed in the Town Hall, the Dramateurs concluded a lease agreement with the Lafayette Improvement Association. Three plays had been given "in the round" in the summer of 1955: "Gigi", "The Fourposter", and "The Guardsman." The following summer two more productions were played, although the stage continued to be in "unsafe" condition. By the end of 1959 the Dramateurs had spent over \$7,000 on improvements including a new stage, better lighting and sound equipment, permanent seats, and interior decoration. A list of subsequent productions includes – "Teahouse of the August Moon," "The Rivals," "Death of a Salesman," "Dracula," "Hamlet," and the ever-popular "A Christmas Carol" gives some indication of the scope and talent of the Dramateurs.

In 1964, Russell Bruzzone, grandson of Frank and Rosa Ghiglione, appeared before a meeting of the LIA Board of Directors. The Ghigliones had deeded the land on which Town Hall stands to the Lafayette Improvement Club. Mr. Bruzzone notified the Board of his intention to build a medical-dental building near the Town Hall. He stated that Moraga Road would become a four lane

highway and the adjacent land should be commercial in use. Rezoning the land in the area of Town Hall was discussed. At the conclusion of its meeting with Mr. Bruzzone, the Board restated its support of the existing zoning. They were firm in their intention that the zoning surrounding this civic building be maintained: single unit family residential. Its policy, the Board continued, "is a matter of public record." At its meeting of July 1964, the Board of Directors discussed what action it should take in view of a letter from attorneys representing the Ghiglione and Bruzzone interests. This letter noted that ownership of the Town Hall should revert to his clients when it no longer was used as a town hall. The Board retained an attorney and entered into a quiet title action. The trial was held in February 1966. Evidence of the gift from the Ghiglione family was presented by the Lafayette Improvement Association. No one appeared to contest the Association's claim. The LIA won the case by default and retained title to the Town Hall.

During an inspection of Town Hall in 1964, the Deputy State Fire Marshall noted a "greater than normal fire and life hazard." Further inspection by the County Building Department found electrical problems, building rot, sections without a foundation or slipped from the foundation. The building "would fail" in minimum wind or earthquake loads. The LIA hired an independent engineering firm to inspect the property. This resulted in unexpected and welcome findings: the building was basically in good condition, and safe from a structural standpoint. The damage was repairable. The engineers dug down to the foundation "which appeared to go down six feet or so, and was stated to be adequate for a six-story building," and was securely fastened to its foundation. The minimum engineers' estimate to bring the Town Hall up to code for 300 person occupancy was \$28,500.

Ultimately the Lafayette Improvement Association and the Dramateurs voted to work together to make the Town Hall a safe public building. The south side windows were boarded in. Fire sprinklers were installed throughout. New restrooms were built, new floors laid, and better exits constructed. Heating and cooling equipment was

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installed, new auditorium seats were put in place, and the lighting improved. For the stage a new floor, lighting and other equipment were installed. Outside the building landscaping, paving, and lighting were added. The LIA voted \$2,000 toward the cost of the remodeling. The Dramateurs organized a "Save the Town Hall" drive with a goal of \$50,000. Holding a series of rummage sales and other fundraising activities, the Dramateurs began to attain their financial goal. By July 1965 they had raised \$10,000. In November the first phase of renovation was completed. The building was ready now for use by the Dramateurs, but not the general public. The following February the building was ready for use by the public.

The LIA drew up a ten-year lease with the Dramateurs. The terms included a division of responsibility for insurance and for the interior, exterior, and landscaping. The Dramateurs must allow the building to be rented to "compatible parties" of good reputation, such as Lafrantics. The Board of Directors of the LIA must be able to meet here. Yearly rental was set at \$600.

For years the Lafayette Improvement Club, and later the Lafayette Improvement Association, provided the citizens of Lafayette their only form of local government. Matters of traffic, zoning, and signing became of increasing concern. Periodically the LIA considered incorporation of the community. It worked with members of the "Lafayette Council" (representatives from the LIA, Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, and the Lafayette Design Project) in a study of all aspects of incorporation. Three incorporation elections were held. Debates had been sharp; opinions were strong. In July 1968 the citizens voted in the affirmative: Lafayette was to become a City. The LIA continues to meet in Town Hall, but it is no longer the sole voice for the community at large.

The 'old Town Hall' stands as a symbol of Lafayette's past and of its future. There people are entertained delightfully and discussions of community issues take place. It is our legacy from public-spirited men and women who settled Lafayette. Many people worked to build the Town Hall; many struggled to keep it standing. There it is, sturdier than ever. It has been worth the trouble.

*Excerpted from a paper written by Ruth Dyer in 1977*

—**Mary McCosker**

(Editor's note: The next Newsletter will continue to document Town Hall's long history. Mary McCosker, LIA Board member, will fill in the story up to the present).

## Trains in Lafayette?

The Lafayette Historical Society exhibit now on display in the Lafayette Library shows the history of the railroad in Lafayette. The present Lafayette-Moraga Trail follows the path of the abandoned railroad right-of-way.

Rail service started in 1911 with service being provided by the Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railway Company. In 1920 service was taken over by the San Francisco-Sacramento Railroad Company and then sold to the Sacramento Northern Railway Company in 1929. Passenger service ceased in 1941. Freight service continued until the line was abandoned in 1957.

On display are pictures of the railroad during its period of operation and a map showing the route of the railroad through eastern Lafayette. The map shows the approximate locations of the Reliez, Lafayette, West Lafayette and Glenside flag stops. Tickets and train schedules are also part of the display.

—**Bob Lewis**

## Enrich Our Present & Future by Recording the Past

Who are the pioneers, citizens and families who made Lafayette the vibrant community it is today? Can you help us find their names and addresses so we can record their stories?

Join the Oral History Project which offers many volunteering opportunities including but not limited to research, interviewing and transcribing tapes.

Call or email us with your information, interest or questions.

Barbara Boyle - 283-8685 - Oral History Chair  
Betsy Willcuts - 283-0706 - Volunteer Chair  
Email - [office@lafayettehistory.org](mailto:office@lafayettehistory.org)



## Can You Help Us?

Periodically we ask our readers to help us investigate something (a picture, an article of clothing, or a mystery object) that has come up in the History Room that we are unable to identify.

Do you know the Brunk Family? While we were moving files into our History Room, we found a file labeled “Brunk Family”. There was quite a collection of information, but there are many loose ends and we don’t know who created the file, who donated the original photo, nor where the information came from. Several pictures were in the file including the attached.



The photo of the couple standing behind the “Brunk’s Corner – 1849” marker is an original photo and has the following caption on the back “Photo Sept. 6 – 1938, Compliments of Earl Brunk, uncle of Harry Brunk. The home in the background is open today as the “Brunk Pioneer Homestead” and is listed on the National



Register of Historic Sites”. The photo of the Lafayette Post Office with the men and young boy is a high quality black and white copy of a photo. The “Slow Down” photo is also a high quality black and white photo with the same boy as the Post Office picture. The Historical Society has an extensive photo archive and none of these photos is in the archive. We do not know if the photos taken in Lafayette are related to the Brunks.

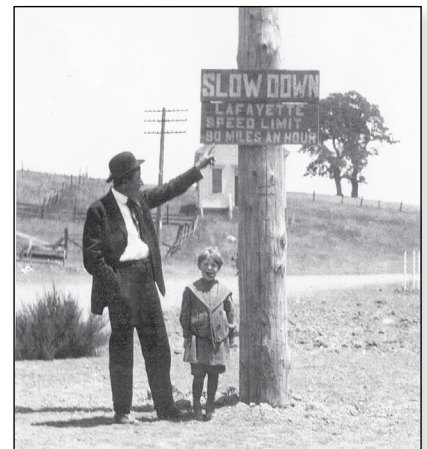
### 2010 Directors

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
Newsletter: Dorothy Walker .....	283-3303
Volunteers: Betsy Willcuts.....	283-0706

There is a very detailed list of “Kinship of John Harrison (Jack) Grubb” included in the folder. Mr. Grubb is the great grandson of Harrison Brunk. Earl Brunk’s name is not included in the kinship.



If you have any information that can tie the Brunks to Lafayette or identify the individuals in the photographs, please get in touch with the Lafayette Historical Society by giving us a call at 925.283.1848 or send a note to [office@lafayettehistory.org](mailto:office@lafayettehistory.org).

—Judie Peterson

# 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 _____               |

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*Please mail this application to:*

**Lafayette Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 133**

**Lafayette, CA 94549**