Lafayette, California

March 2011

Vol. 38, No. 2

Two Events for LHS Supporters

Lafayette Historical Society's Annual Potluck Dinner

DATE: Tuesday, MAY 10, 2011

PLACE: Lafayette Library - Community Hall, Mt. Diablo Blvd. and First Street

TIME: 6:00 p.m. Social Hour 6:45 p.m. Dinner

7:30 *p.m.* Short business meeting followed by

DISCUSSION: Anne Schnoebelen, Vice President of the Treasure Island Museum Association

Topic: Treasure Island's 1939 Golden Gate Exposition

PRICE: \$10.00 per member; \$15. Non-member 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 - <u>Lafayette.history@comcast.net</u>.

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

More information about the evening program is described below

Treasure Island's 1939 Exposition

Every time I cross the Bay Bridge, I am aware of the man-made island attached to Yerba Buena Island. I've been curious about the events that lead to the development of Treasure Island and its subsequent history. By a pleasant happenstance, LHS was given an artist's portfolio of large prints by the artist Covarrubias. After doing some web research, we found out that Miguel Covarrubias was commissioned to paint murals that symbolized the theme of Pacific Unity for the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition. Our prints were a limited edition folio duplicating those murals. What to do with this treasure? We contacted the Treasure Island Museum Association and met Anne Schnoebelen.

Anne is the Vice President of the T.I. Museum Association. She was the contact person we met to get a tour of the Island and to offer our "treasure" to her group. Anne was so delighted with it that she offered to speak before our members. She has a slide show of the buildings and events that took place during the year-long celebration of Pacific Unity. "Pacific unity was the Exposition's theme, spurred by two major events: the building of the Golden Gate Bridge and the inauguration of Pan American World Airways' China Clipper flights to Asia," Anne explained. After the Exposition closed its doors, the Navy took over the island and many of the buildings were torn down.

There is still more to the history of Treasure Island as San Francisco continues with its redevelopment plans. Having attended many of the planning meetings associated with the proposed changes, Anne will also have information about the Island's future.

Anne's talk will follow our potluck dinner and business meeting. Please make your reservations by calling 283-1848 or contacting us at Lafayette.history@comcast.net.

—Dorothy Walker

President's Message

The History Room is getting into full swing with the coming of Spring. After a slight misstep with our Caltrans/ fossil speaker, which we hope to reprise sometime in June or July, we have two new events scheduled. I hope you will join us.

Our annual Potluck is always the highlight of our year. Please save May 10th to hear how an anonymous donation to LHS lead to meeting our speaker - Anne Schoenbelen, vice president of the Treasure Island Museum Association. Anne is a wonderfully dynamic person, dedicated to preserving the history of Treasure Island. She will present a slide show on the 1939-40 Golden Gate Exposition -the buildings, events and artifacts that made Treasure Island a world famous fair. Join us with your food contribution in the Community Hall at the Library for this informative event.

On April 6th, we are pleased to have Stu Swiedler discuss his historical research in-the-field and in our archive on what has happened to the railroad right-of-way in the last 50 plus years since the Sacramento Northern ceased its operation. Read more in the article later in the Newsletter. We will meet at 3:00 p.m. in the Arts and Science room on the mezzanine floor of the Library. For both of these events, we ask you help us to defray our rental costs with your generous donations.

And generous our members have been! Thank you to so many of you who have renewed your memberships and for the new members who responded to our annual request. One member who prefers to remain anonymous gave \$5,000 to be used for our annual rent. What a relief to know that that expense is taken care of.

One of our major activities for the year will be recording oral histories of long time residents of Lafayette. We may be able to video tape some of our interviewees. If you know of any residents that may be willing to tell us their stories, please let us know.

We are also looking for people who might want to help us on various committees. We are establishing committees as a way to engage our members more directly in the activities of the Society. Membership, Programs and Displays, Photographs, Archives, and Publicity are the Committees we will begin with. Some of the activities you might be able to do from home – Membership, for instance. We would like to contact our members individually about our events and to get their opinions on how we're doing. For those who enjoy writing we can always use articles for our local newspapers. Please think about ways your skills might mesh with our needs. The phone number is 283-1848.

—Dorothy Walker

A Bit of History (excerpted from an article by Dorothy Mutnick-1978)

Adventurers drifted into California in the 1840's, some looking for fertile farm land, some hoping to make their fortunes in the gold fields, others seeking a new life in a new place. A sailing master, William Leidesdorff, born in the Danish Virgin Islands, elected to stay in San Francisco. Thomas Wesley Bradley accompanied Joseph B. Chiles in 1843 on the latter's second overland trip from Missouri to California and to his land grant near Sonoma. Lansford W. Hastings and Napoleon Bonaparte Smith arrived at Sutter's Fort late in 1845. Bradley and

Lafayette Historical Society's Speaker Series

Wednesday, April 6th • 3:00 pm

What's Happened Since the Railroad's Been Gone

Speaker: **Stuart Swiedler** uses live images from his website (<u>The Eastbay Hills Project</u>) to unveil amazing visuals of the changes to the roadbed over the last 50 years

Arts and Science Room—Mezzanine Level

Lafayette Library and Learning Center

Donation requested: **\$10** members; **\$15** for non-members to help defray costs

Limited seating • Reservations-283-1848

See article below for full description

What's Happened Since the Railroad's Been Gone

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Our Speaker Series continues on Wednesday, April 6 at 3:00 pm with Stuart J. Swiedler.

His presentation of largely unpublished aerial images accompanied by ground-based photos follows the 17-mile right-of-way of the presents his internet venture, <u>The East Bay Hills Project</u> that will be online at the time of his presentation.

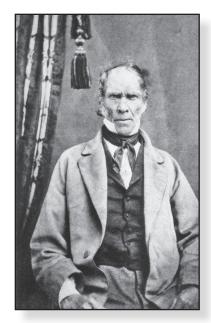
Can you imagine leading a group of hikers, cyclists or motorists along a direct route from the base of the Oakland hills to the oldest section of central Walnut Creek? You see the beauty of the area, including scenic paths, lakes, reservoirs, creekbeds, redwood forests and small communities that have been shielded from major highways and large public centers. You'll discover changes in the landscape brought about by major public works projects, development and preservation efforts that came to a head in the 1950's and 1960's.

Stu Swiedler is an Oakland resident and member of the Lafayette and Moraga Historical Societies. He has put together largely unpublished aerial images accompanied by ground-based photos *following the 17-mile route of the abandoned right-of-way of the Sacramento Northern Railroad*. You'll see highlights and details of Rockridge, Lake Temescal, the Mountain Boulevard Freeway, Montclair, Shepherd and Redwood Canyons, Moraga, Lafayette, Saranap and downtown Walnut Creek.

Stu will show special images including chilling photos of the Sacramento Northern Railroad tunnel connecting Redwood and Shepherd Canyons. He will provide the location of a Roger Heller photo posted on the Web that has baffled experts and share never before published views of the Lafayette "Loop". He will also address the challenge of documenting changes from the 1950's in Lafayette's southern- and eastern-most sections of Burton Valley, Glenside and the section shared with Saranap traversed by Olympic Boulevard.

For questions or reservations please call 925-283-1848 or send your check *made payable to LHS* to P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549.

A Bit of History — Continued from page 2



Smith were present soon after the assembled 'foreigners' had raised the Bear Flag in Monterey in 1846 as part of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

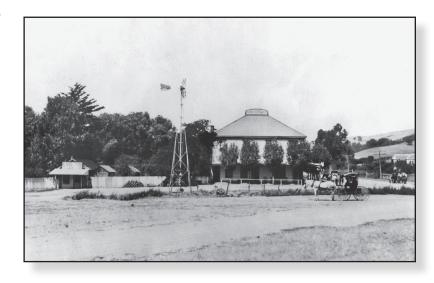
In 1846 one party of emigrants from Missouri captained by Elam Brown tried a short cut to Oregon. Discouraged by the new trail's lack of water and pasturage, they decided to try for California. By the time they arrived in the Fall of 1846, the flag of the United States was flying over Sutter's fort. The party divided from there, several of them going to Chile's Sonoma ranch and a few to Mission Santa Clara. At Christmas, Bradley married one of the girls of the Brown party (daughter of Margaret Allen) and in August, Brown and her mother (Margaret Allen), who had been widowed on the trip, were married. In April, Brown's daughter Margeline and Smith married.

The war over, Brown bought Rancho Acalanes in November 1847 from Leidesdorff. Leidesdorff had purchased the land only ten weeks earlier.

Various relatives of the Browns, 18 individuals altogether, became part of our local scene, many of them for the rest of their lives.

Initially, the existing Mexican form of government was still used. Brown was appointed Alcalde, the local factorum, in March 1848. Brown became a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1849 and served in the State's first legislature.

That so much of the land was held in large grants, the boundaries of which took years to locate, led to ownership uncertainty and instability. The land policy of the United States was to open public land for homesteading. The government surveyed



base line, township and range lines, but postponed the determination of the boundaries of the Mexican land grants. Individuals who took up land before it was surveyed had a possessory claim to it when it was finally sectionalized. A Board established by Congress to ascertain and settle Mexican land titles confirmed, as well as denied, titles of the local ranchos. Rancho Acalanes was surveyed in 1857 and its 3329 acres were patented by the United States. An 1860 deed mentioned a lot number as described on the map of Lafayette while the recorded description of that map gives 1863 as the year it was surveyed. By the time all local ranchos were surveyed, no Mexican grantee or member of their families had any interest in them.

Thank You to the U.C. Berkeley Museum of Paleontology

While we weren't able to bring you a speaker on the fossils found during the boring of the new Caldecott Tunnel, we have had the wonder of looking at similar fossils found in our area. If you haven't already seen the display in the main library, we encourage you to do so. **Dr. William Clemens** (ret.) from the *University of California* created a very informative display including fossils of mastodon bones and other extinct species of our region. The display will remain in the library through the end of the month.

Volunteer and Sponsor Appreciation Event

The History Room, Lafayette Historical Society's first permanent home in the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, opened on November 14, 2010 with much fanfare. A little over a year later a group of volunteers and



L. to R. Dorothy Walker, Sherril Barber, Marechal Duncan & Carol Yates took part in Volunteer and Donor Appreciation Party.

sponsors were honored during the first LHS Volunteer and Supporter's Appreciation Event; festivities included tours of the room, visits with old and new friends, wine, gelato and appetizers.

During the first year in the History Room, more than 25 volunteers welcomed visitors, set up files, worked on archives including newspaper clippings, provided access to information and photos, and transcribed letters and oral histories, just to name a few of the jobs performed; these volunteers put in more than 2100 hours in the History Room alone. Additional LHS projects include the web site, quarterly newsletter and eNewsletter,

articles for local newspapers, a lecture series, displays in the library and elsewhere in town and special occasion visits by Old Betsy, Lafayette's first motorized fire engine. For helping LHS make the Appreciation Day a success we thank the following: the **Susan Foord Catering Service** for supplying wine classes, **The Latest Scoop** for the delicious gelato and the **LHS** Board members for the wine and appetizers.

—Betsy Willcuts

Can You Help Us?

Once again we are asking our readers to help us investigate something (a picture, an article of clothing or a mystery object) that we have found in the History Room and are unable to identify.



This month we have a photo of a mystery athletic team we'd like you to help us identify. The photo was included in the Van Meter collection that we introduced to you in our last newsletter.

Does the "L" stand for Lafayette? What kind of sport do you think these fellows were playing? Is that a football in front of the young men? There's a trophy and "A-'10" written on the original photo – what do you think they won? Do you see something odd in the back row?

Are you as curious as we are about

this photo? Come in to the History Room and look at the original! Or give us a call at (925) 283-1848 if you can help solve the mystery!

—Judie Peterson

THE HUNTERS

The report that a California lion had been seen within a fourth of a mile of our village, on Monday morning last, called out in haste some twenty or thirty gallant hunters armed with rifles and shotguns—though it is said some at eagerness to be in at the death, went to the field without ammunition—and after a tiresome trailing of coyote and dog tracks about the mud flats, the whole party are supposed by small installments to have got safely home without being killed by the lion. But not one of the brave company of lion hunters has since been seen: at least, none who remember to have been of the party.

(Contra Costa Gazette, 01/23/1869)

-Ray Peters

A Bit of History —Continued from page 4

A census of 1852 lists 76 men, women and children living on farms they hoped were on public land, just within or just outside, the present boundaries of the City of Lafayette. A lot of them had assuaged their gold ever.

A tavern or two and a store were located near the blacksmith at the bend in the road from the redwoods to Martinez, then a school and a church. In 1857 the LaFayette post office was established at the store. The road angled from the present Moraga Road (earlier known as Commercial Street) across the area of today's Lafayette School to meet Golden Gate Way east of First Street. Running past Brown's mill, assessed in 1855 for \$4,000, was Telegraph Road which followed a telegraph line across Rancho Acalanes and on to Martinez. By 1860 there were 98 people living in and around LaFayette, 29 on farms on the Rancho Acalanes and 49 others on farms to the southeast.

—Excerpted by Mary McCosker

2011 Directors

President:	Dorothy Walker
Vice President:	Marechal Duncan
Treasurer:	Paul Sheehan
Recording Secretary:	Mary McCosker
Corresponding Secretary:	Oliver Hamlin

2011 Committee Chairs

Membership:	Keith Blakeney
Archives:	Nancy Flood
Walking Tours:	Mary McCosker
Fund Raising:	Judie Peterson
Photo Retrieval:	Mary Solon
Displays:	Laura Torkelson
Fire Engine:	George Wasson
Volunteers:	Betsy Willcuts
	History Room – 283-1848 - <u>lafayette.history@comcast.net</u>

ATTEMPT

On Sunday night last, shortly before 12 o'clock, Capt. L. Anderson was awakened by a noise made by some one who was trying to effect

an entrance at the window of his sleeping room. Quietly possessing himself of his revolver, the Captain cautiously moved toward the door for the purpose of interviewing the obtrusive stranger, but the latter had taken the alarm, and was effecting a rapid retreat. A pistol bullet whistling in close proximity to his whereabouts probably convinced him of the impropriety of prowling around those premises at unreasonable hours.

(Contra Costa Gazette, 02/24/1872)

THE COW

The town was visited on Tuesday evening by a double ender cow, with several duplicate organs besides the heads, a six-legged goat, and some other monstrosities; but the show did not prove very attractive.

(Contra Costa Gazette, 05/27/1871)



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
- ☐ Sponsor Membership \$500.00

Please indicate areas of special interest

- ☐ Data Base Entry of Photos Publicity ■ Research-Genealogy ☐ Photo Collection
- ☐ Telephoning ■ News Clippings
- Displays ☐ Fire Engine
- ☐ Oral Histories ☐ Walking Tours-Outreach
- ☐ History Room ☐ Other

Please mail this application to:

Lafayette Historical Society

P.O. Box 133

Lafayette, CA 94549