




Lafayette, California


April 2018

Vol. 45, No. 2

**The History Room is Open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 10-2
Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library**



Lafayette Historical Society's *Speaker Series*



The Marquis de La Fayette

"The story of Marquis de La Fayette"

Speaker....Norm Tuttle, former Lafayette Councilman and Mayor, will speak about the Marquis de La Fayette

Dates.....Sunday, May 6, 2018 – **Reservations Requested**

Time.....**1:30-3:00 p.m.** – Registration begins at 1:00 p.m.

Place.....Lafayette Library & Learning Center – Community Hall

Donation Requested–\$10.00 LHS members; \$15.00 non-members requested
Kids under 14 Free with paying adult

This will be the **Historical Society's Annual Meeting** – Dessert and Beverages will be served.
For questions or reservations please call (925) 283-1848 or email Lafayette.History@comcast.net

Please join us for an informative program about the man after whom our city is named and who played such an important role in the establishment of our nation. Our speaker, Norm Tuttle, grew up in Lafayette, attended local schools, and returned to live in Lafayette as an adult, serving on the Lafayette City Council and as Mayor.

Please visit our newest exhibit in the display case in the Lafayette Library:

The history of Mt. Diablo Boulevard from a dirt road when it was first known as the road to Oakland or Tunnel Road to Highway 75A to today's four lane thoroughfare that defines our City.

LE MARQUIS DE LA FAYETTE'S FINAL RESTING PLACE



Sometimes life brings together unexpected coincidences. I, who have lived in Lafayette most of my life and am on the board of the Lafayette Historical Society, and La Fayette, the man, came together unexpectedly.

My son and I planned a trip to France last year which included two weeks in Paris. I searched for an Airbnb apartment and was repeatedly turned down for the less expensive ones because of the length of our stay. Finally one was agreed upon in Picpus. Picpus?! I had never heard of it.

It turned out to be very nice, and while a ways out, still accessible and a good experience to be in a non-tourist area. Because it was not for tourists, there were few public car parks and we had to walk a good distance every day to where our car was parked. (My son loved driving the Paris roundabouts with the chaotic traffic and also the one car width alleys! I'm not being sarcastic, he really did.)

Every day we walked past some large doors in a wall with a small sign that mentioned 1,306 dead and 1794. That is all I could get from it, not speaking French. I finally discovered that there was a private grave yard in there and a mass grave. We eventually found a day when the gate was open and went in, only to discover that La Fayette was buried there!

During the French Revolution, a guillotine was set up in Picpus. They executed about 50+ people a day for 6 weeks. The families of the executed could not stand the idea that not only were their loved ones killed, but they had no idea what happened to their bodies! A brave young woman was determined to find out. She hid in the bushes and watched until the middle of the night when a tumbrel loaded with that that day's bodies left the execution place. It went only a few blocks away and into the garden of a convent where a mass grave had been dug.

Once the families found this out, they were determined to do something. The climate was exceeding dangerous, so all meetings were secret. They pooled money and managed to buy the convent's garden! Years later, when things were safe for aristocrats, they marked the mass graves, built a small church that listed all of the names of people executed and buried (dumped) there. 1,306 people are named on the church walls.



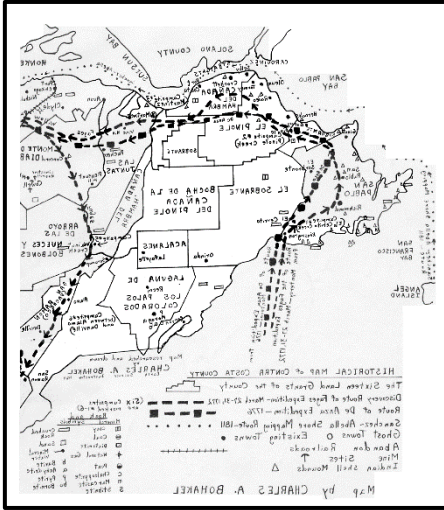
Subsequently, when family members died, they wanted to be buried near their loved ones so a private cemetery was created next to the mass graves. Only a small wall separates the two. No one from La Fayette's immediate family was executed, but his wife lost her sister, mother and grandmother. They are in the mass grave. She died first and was buried next to the small wall. When La Fayette died, he was buried next to her.

An American flag flies over his grave and there are tokens of respect left from various U.S. patriotic organizations over the last 100 years or so. He has soil from the battlefield at Bunker Hill spread on his grave. Every 4th of July, the mayor of Paris, the United States ambassador, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, Paris Branch, gather for ceremonies at his grave.

It was moving to find La Fayette's grave right near our apartment so far from home.

Laura Torkelson

LAFAYETTE "TRIVIA"



How was the name “Acalanes” derived?

Candelario Valencia was a Mexican soldier who fought in the war of independence against Spain in the early 1800s. When he verbally applied to the Mexican governor for his land grant, he selected the name “Los Sacalanes” for his rancho to honor the Saclan Indian tribe that lived in the area of his grant. Governor Vallejo missed the first “s” in Sacalanes and the grant was thus recorded as Rancho Acalanes. Valencia couldn’t read and was unaware of the mistake, so the name has been carried down through the years as Acalanes.

When was this community named Lafayette?

The Lafayette post office was put into operation on March 2, 1857, with Benjamin Shreve as Postmaster. This was the second time he had applied for a post office grant in this area. His first application had been denied because he’d selected Centerville as the name and there was already a Centerville post office near Fremont. So La Fayette was Shreve’s second choice, selected perhaps because his wife, Adaline, had come to this community from La Fayette County, Wisconsin with her family. Certainly both places, as do many other cities, towns and counties in the United States, take their name from the Marquis de La Fayette, hero of the Revolutionary War. The spelling was changed to its present form in the 1920s.

That brings up another interesting question.....what was the community called before 1857? At one time the community was known as Dog Town, Brown’s Corner, and Brown’s Mill.



Did you know about the Acalanus post office?

The Acalanus post office was operated from May 30, 1854, until July 3, 1855, with Milo J. Hough as postmaster. Mr. Hough operated a hotel in Lafayette at that time, so it can be assumed that the post office was located in the hotel. But that brings us another question.....where was the hotel located? Some think it was on the southwest corner of Moraga Road and Mt. Diablo Boulevard, others think it was near the corner of First Street and Golden Gate Way.

From a story by Bill Wakeman, October 1993



The Lafayette Historical Society lost of its most intrepid members when Ruth Bailey died recently. Ruth served as a History Room volunteer, newsletter contributor, Board member, and LHS supporter. Her humor and wit will be missed by all who knew her. One of the many articles she wrote appears below.

Torrential Rains Not New in County History...and Neither are Droughts

By Ruth Bailey

Even though this current January was dry, at least we can read about local winters awash in rain a century and a half or two ago. The January 15th, 1965, *Lafayette Sun* took a look back at the rainfall records left from the California Mission era.

“That rainstorms in 1805 created statewide havoc was verified by the records of Southern mission padres. Proof of the record-breaking 1861-62 deluge was corroborated later when water marks were found in trees in the San Joaquin Valley, showing that a former flood had been fully six feet higher.

“The padres recorded a rainfall in 1819 so great that rivers changed their beds. Historians mentioned the winter of 1825-26, 1840 and 1846-47, when great numbers of stock were lost by drowning.”

From the same sources we learn of extremely dry years. In fact, the Native Americans told of a year in which no rain fell at all—the drought of 1824, which caused cattle to die by the thousands. And the year 1831 was so dry [here I heard the voice of Johnny Carson’s audience calling out: “*How dry was it?*”but I digress], Historian William Heath Davis wrote, that rancheros killed thousands of horses to preserve what little feed there was for their cattle.

Official weather records were kept beginning in 1849. From that year to 1914, Contra Costa County experienced 11 floods, and there were 21 drought years.

A 1970 history of the Municipal Utility District (entitled *Its name was M.U.D*), reported that the winter of 1850-51 had been unusually dry, a mere 7.1 inches of rainfall, and by summer the springs and creeks carried far less water than before. “Few at the time might have guessed, but the problem of water was to become the most vexatious and turbulent the area was to have over the next 60 years. It only grew more complex as communities expanded and natural water sources disappeared.” And 1860 was a short rain year, as well, and what water there was quickly ran off the denuded slopes, where trees had been clear-cut to provide lumber for the fast-growing Bay Area.

But according to William Brewster, in his journal *Up and Down California in 1860-1864*, “Between November 1861 and January 31, 1862, 102 inches of rain fell in the Valley, which was one vast lake 250–300 miles long and 20–60 miles wide. The winds made high waves of the cold, muddy waters that beat to pieces farm dwellings that had withstood the flood waters.

“The course of the river itself could be told only by treetops. River steamers were used to get to ranches 14 miles from the river. Isolation from the east, where the Civil War raged, was complete. Bridges and roads were destroyed, so that the Overland could not operate. [Beginning in 1857, the Overland Mail Company carried mail from St. Louis to San Francisco twice a week.] Even the telegraph was not working, for in the Sacramento Valley, for some distance, the tops of the poles were under water. An eye-witness account of the view from

Mt. Diablo was that the San Francisco Bay appeared small compared to the muddy sea to the east.

“Warehouses along the waterfront and their contents of wheat were swept away. Recurring floods brought more mud and silt from upstream that filled the slough and overflowed into the town.”

And one additional peril: “In 1862 the Bay Area was issued a rattlesnake warning, as the rattlers were washed down from the mountains on floating debris,” Brewster reported.

As the song goes, we’ve seen fire and we’ve seen rain....along with sunny days we thought would never end. A photo from the LHS archives demonstrates our local rainfall. The picture is of Dick Francis water witching during the drought of 1977. Any bets on how 2015 will turn out?



ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral Histories which date from the 1970's have been stored on tapes and disks in the History Room. Many of these tapes have recently been digitized and are available for viewing on the Historical Society Website – lafayettehistory.org. In the top row on the website you will find Archives/Oral Histories which will take you to the oral histories. Below is a list of the tapes that have recently been added to the website. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

Joyce Allen Stewart is a member of one of Lafayette’s oldest pioneer families, the Allens. Her father, Harold Allen, was born in Lafayette in 1889. Her grandfather, Albert Allen, was born in Lafayette in 1869. Joyce was raised in Lafayette and was a member of the first class to graduate from Stanley School in 1954. She shares her memories of growing up in an earlier era, when the most common mode of transport was a horse.

Louis Armanino was born in Italy in 1881. He came to the United States at the turn of the century and eventually settled in Lafayette where his uncle worked on a farm. In this interview, which was conducted in 1980 when he was 99 years old, Mr. Armanino describes how he worked as a laborer helping to install the water lines and power lines that would make possible the later population growth in Contra Costa County.

Natale Martino (1888-1977) gives us a sense of what daily life was like in the farm-centered rural area of the Springhill Valley. In 1919 he purchased a farm house on today’s Martino Road where he raised his family. He described how he used farming practices that he learned in Italy to create a successful fruit and vegetable farm.



Jim Martino was the fourth child of Natale who bought a house with 100 acres in the Springhill Valley in 1919. Jim, who helped operate the farm after graduating from high school, says that his father won many prizes for his pears and other fruit. Jim also remembers that his father would leave at 3 am in his Model T truck to get his fruit to the market in Oakland. In the 1940s it became harder to make a living farming fruits and vegetables so the family began selling off their land. After returning from service in World War II, Jim began working in construction on many of the homes built on property that had formerly been part of their farm.

Effie Root Stahle was a member of the Root family who bought a 500 acre farm in Happy Valley in 1904. The property was known as Locust Farm because of the huge locust trees which stood in front of the house. Nathaniel Jones, a former owner, planted the trees grown from seeds brought from the eastern United States. Some of the trees are still standing today along Happy Valley Road



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Your Name _____

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_____ Individual Membership \$25

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_____ 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

