



Lafayette Historical Society

NEWS

Enlightening Our Community

Lafayette, California

April 2019

Vol. 46, 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*



Place Names of
Contra Costa County

"Shadows on the Hills"

Speaker.....William Mero – author of "Shadows on the Hills" – his talk will explore a few of the aspects behind our historic place names.
Dates.....Sunday, April 28, 2019
Time.....**3:30-4:30 p.m.** – Registration begins at 3:00 p.m.
Place.....Lafayette Library & Learning Center - Don Tatzin Community Hall

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

For questions or reservations please call (925) 283-1848 or email Lafayette.History@comcast.net

Place Names of Contra Costa

Why are place names important? From the Native Americans to the various European settlers, each wave of migration left their mark upon the land. Many names have long since disappeared but are still found on old maps and documents

Some names have interesting or amusing stories attached to them. Others have been misunderstood. Several have mysterious origins and some have fascinating historic events associated with them.

William Mero will briefly explore a few of these aspects behind some of our historic place names. This compilation stems from years assisting researchers and genealogists at the Contra Costa County Historical Society.

Col. Garrett's Story: The Old Mans' Dream for Our Town

From the *Lafayette Sun*, January 8, 1965 by Jane Putnam (Sun Staff Writer)

A planned Lafayette business section with the charm and aesthetic individuality of Carmel. This was the dream of the late Col. Manuel Mordecai Garrett, early Lafayette businessman and civic leader, whom his wife lovingly called "the old man" in the tradition of the infantry in which he served.

In the early 1920's the colonel was one of the first and most vocal proponents for incorporation of the area. He fought an early battle against unification and was instrumental in shaping the Lafayette School District.

He persuaded the authorities to build the tunnel through the Oakland hills and to improve the roads leading to Lafayette.

He won the battle for bringing East Bay Municipal Utility Company's water to Lafayette, and was a charter member on its board.

We heard of the colonel's dream through the Lafayette Design Project, whose officers arranged a rare interview for us with the colonel's widow, Mrs. Edith Traynor Garrett, who lived in Happy Valley for over 45 years. The story told by the gracious colonel's lady, and embellished by her friends, has all of the elements of a good novel.



Col. Garrett and "Master"

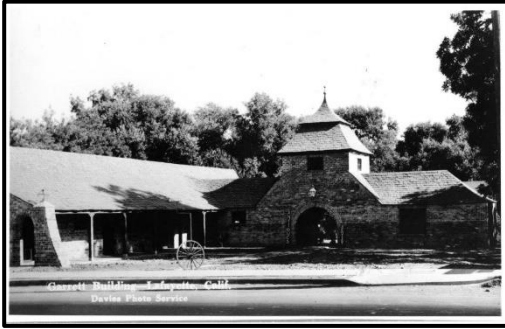
Mrs. Garrett was a Spaulding from Honolulu. Her neighbor described her as "such a lady that her feet never touched the ground". And her hands had never been dirty till she and her husband "went to ranching" in Happy Valley. The colonel was a two-fisted infantryman from Missouri. He was retired from the service in 1920 because of poor health although he had led a robust life here for 36 years. They had been married for 13 years and had never spent two Christmases in the same place, having been stationed all over the world, from Texas to India. With their two small children, they came to Contra Costa and started to house hunt. With typical Garrett determination, when the colonel saw the two-story, frame farmhouse at 3667 Happy Valley Road, he bought it without dickering about the price. Mrs. Garrett recalls it was high for the time, even though it included 100 acres of land. She also remembers, wistfully, they could have bought an additional several hundred acres – mostly hilly terrain – for \$600.

The delicate young matron was terrified at first by the wilds of Happy Valley. There were only a few neighbors, along ways away, and no telephones. The coyotes and the hoot owls raised a ruckus in the black valley nights. "I couldn't leave the children out of my sight," she said.

Mrs. Garrett persuaded the colonel to take an apartment in Berkeley for them during that first winter. However, when they returned in the spring, she learned to be a rancher's working wife – and love it. Now she says of the valley, "It's too improved!"

The colonel entered the real estate business. When he decided to build an office in 1938, he traveled throughout the state to decide what town the budding Lafayette should be patterned after. Carmel became his model. Then, with the meticulous manner which typified everything he did, he looked everywhere for an architect. When he saw Mrs. Margaret Crest's home in the Montclair district of Oakland, he settled upon its designer, Architect Carr Jones of Orinda. Jones built the artistic "Garrett Building" at 3565 Mt. Diablo Boulevard. It was intended to set the

standard for Lafayette's business development. Not only was the building designed with an eye for beauty, but it was functional as well. For the first time in Contra Costa, a slate roof and radiant heating were used. The colonel's dream is described by Mrs. Mildred S. Lloyd in her history of Lafayette written for the primary grades of the Lafayette Elementary School, this way: ".....Lafayette was a sleepy, little, quiet hamlet with people enjoying a rural life, raising a few chickens or a horse as they pleased. Then, one day in the 1930's, a group of energetic real estate men, led by Colonel Garrett, persuaded the authorities to construct a low-level highway tunnel through the Oakland hills and to improve the roads leading to Lafayette. They planned out what



the business center of Lafayette should look like and then erected one structure in this design. Then, they vigorously invited people 'to come and live in Lafayette'." The colonel had gone to Alameda County Supervisor Thomas Caldecott, after whom the tunnel is named, to persuade him of the need of the tunnel.

After the completion of the Garrett Building, the colonel suffered a defeat which some believe was the turning point in the way the business district developed. Col. Garrett had

ordered enough brick and slate to give to the town for the construction of a post office next to his building. He thought it would be "a good start for a little town." During the depression days of the Works Projects Administration, his offer was turned down. A large, white stucco, box-type building was erected next to the colonel's office. The brick never used for the post office went into a new home for the Garretts, which they built behind the original farmhouse.

The rambling one-story, artistic contemporary home is the new house which the colonel never wanted to move into. He spent the last four years of his life there. From the time they moved in, until he died in 1956, his wife and neighbors recall, he talked of the new house as if it had been his idea all along.

The colonel's disillusionment over the post office didn't stop his interest in civic affairs. He and other early civic leaders used to stay up until all hours of the night discussing incorporation, unification, water and other issues which still occupy the local limelight. One of the Lafayette men with whom the colonel shared his dreams was Walter Wood. For many years, Col. Garrett served on the board of trustees for the Lafayette School District. He fought unification of the district with Mt. Diablo Unified School District. The battle for local control won, he was instrumental obtaining William Ellis as superintendent.



Lafayette Post Office 1941

Another crusade in which he was successful was in keeping EBMUD water for Lafayette and not going along with Walnut Creek men who tried to sway the town to the California Water Company. The colonel was a charter member of the EBMUD board of directors, as well as of the American Legion.

He was considered the local authority on political matters, both national and local. Often, he went house to house on a crusade – always in pursuit of excellence for his hometown, As is the way with men who know dazzling victory, he had his share of defeat. But there are those who are sure that the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation's Report for the Lafayette Design Project in 1961 was a glorified rebirth of the colonel's dream.

Membership Update 2019

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their memberships:

Chris Coons	Dick and Laurie Morrison	Michelle Fanto Chan
Greg Snyder	Kathy and Allen Hopkins	Jeffrey Klurfeld, Jr.
Oliver Lane	Jeannine and Patrick Kikkert	Erling Horn
Don Jenkins	Joe and Lynda Azalde	Dr. Robert Van Galder
Truman Burns	Peter and Robin Frazier	Carolyn Campbell

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

The Pony Express Stop in Lafayette

Excerpts from Mary Solon's article (available in the History Room)

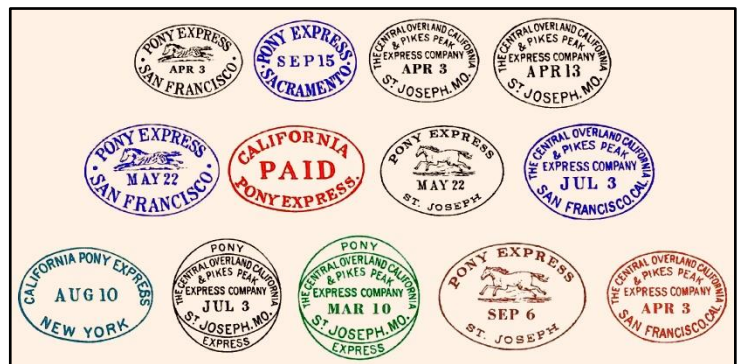
The Pony Express has a short but romantic history and it included the town of Lafayette!

Due to long delays in getting mail or communication from Washington D.C. to California, a better mail service was needed for faster delivery. In 1845, it could take up to 6 months for mail to get to California by sea... In 1860, it took 25 days for mail to go the southern route from St. Louis...to Los Angeles and then San Francisco. After much searching, a central route that was almost due west was proposed. It was much shorter, but its use in winter had yet to be proven.

The reasons for faster mail service included the rumblings of an impending Civil War. [Also, a reason for using the central route instead of the southern one.] In addition, there were many people who had emigrated to the gold fields who wanted to hear from relatives back home.

In the 1850's a company named Russell, Majors and Waddell was a freight outfitter to the Army and to travelers on the Oregon and Santa Fe trails... Their firm already had overland stage stations for mail and passenger service between the Missouri River and Salt Lake City.

On January 27, 1860, William Russell of Russell, Majors and Wadell learned that California Senator William Gwin was supporting a contract for California mail service. The service was contingent on its readiness by April and delivery of mail in 10 days. The route would be the central route... Russell, Majors and Wadell created a company named the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company to set up relay stations...



Incredibly, they created five geographic divisions, hired division managers and set up over 150 relay stations between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento in time for the first ride barely two months later...some of the eastern stations were already in use for their stage operations. But other areas proved difficult...there were no trees in the desert areas requiring adobe stations, dugouts, and tents to be built.

Word went out that riders weighing less than 125 pounds who were of good character and could handle horses were to be hired for \$50 to \$100 a month. Many station keepers, stock tenders were hired, along with eighty riders. The stations were from 10 to 25 miles apart. Later, stations were mostly 10 - 12 miles apart, about the distance that the horses could gallop between stops. Riders were to ride from 15 – 100 miles per day. They were to ride day and night, all months of the year. Each rider was given a Bible and required to take an oath prohibiting fighting, drinking and profanity. The rider to become most famous in his later years was Wild Bill Cody. [The horses had to weigh less than 900 lbs. and be slight. No ponies were used, but the small horses are responsible for the name.]

To keep weight down, the mail and special edition newspapers were printed on special light paper and wrapped in oil skin for waterproofing.

The saddles were of a special abbreviated design ...The mail was placed in a mochila, a special rectangular piece of leather which was the saddle bag...The mochila had a hole for the saddle horn and was thrown over the saddle at each relay station. The weight of the rider kept it in place.



On March 31, 1860, a special train carried 49 letters, 5 telegrams, and special edition newspapers from Washington and New York to St. Joseph Missouri...the mail was put into a mochila [on April 3] and the rider left St. Joseph for points west. The whole town had gathered for the event. In San Francisco on this same April 3 at 4:00 p.m., James Randall left with 85 letters ...to the wharf and traveled to Sacramento. There the mail was transferred to another rider and the eastbound overland service began.

[Now for how Lafayette in involved.]

Although it was easy for the eastbound riders to make the boat connection in San Francisco, it was not for the westbound riders arriving in Sacramento... Riders often missed the boat... Unexpectedly, they had to ride overland from Sacramento to Oakland where they took a ferry from Jack London Square to San Francisco. The route went through Davis, Fairfield, Cordelia, Benicia, by ferry to Martinez, Pacheco, Walnut Creek, *Lafayette*, and Oakland.

Lafayette House was the hotel and way station on the southwest corner of modern-day Mt. Diablo Blvd. 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 the 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.

The completion of the nationwide telegraph network in October, 1861, doomed the Pony Express.

The Pony Express contributed to the western frontier in many ways. The central route became the basis for telegraph service and the transcontinental railroad which was completed in 1869. Faster mail from east to west was now a reality.

The Pony Express captured the hearts of the populace. Although it only covered half the country and only ran for 19 months, schoolchildren and adults alike think of it in a reverent, yet full of life, sort of way. Its memory far outlives the short time it was in service.



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