



Lafayette Historical Society

NEWS

Enlightening Our Community

Lafayette, California

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**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*



Saclan Indian Woman

"The Bay Miwok Saklan in Lafayette"

Speaker.....James M. "Doc" Hale will share his knowledge of the indigenous Native American people of Lafayette and the surrounding area.

Dates.....Sunday, October 14, 2018

Time.....2:00-3:00 p.m. – Registration begins at 1:30 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

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

Please join us for another most interesting program!

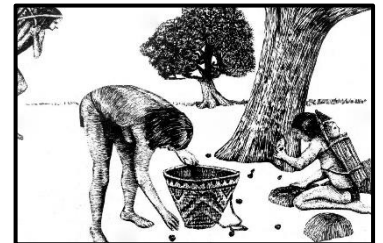
Learn how the Bay Miwok Saklan Native Americans made use of edible, medicinal, ceremonial, and plentiful plants and wildlife in their Lafayette and Walnut Creek villages. James will bring his mini museum of artifacts to his presentation

LAFAYETTE'S FIRST INHABITANTS

For centuries the Saclan, a Miwok tribelet, lived in the area of present-day Lafayette and Walnut Creek. They lived simply on the land, gathering acorns and hunting for their food. The area abounded with freshwater creeks and streams and many varieties of plants and animals, which were used for housing, clothing, and medicine, as well as food. These people lived in peaceful harmony with the land.

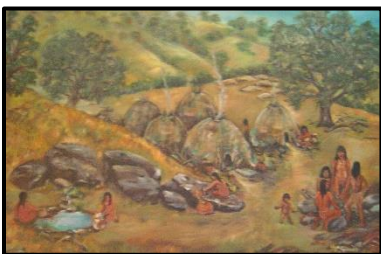
The Saclan people had short bodies, broad shoulders, and long, coarse, black hair. They painted their faces during celebrations, and women often tattooed their chins with lines to indicate the number of children they had. The women wore willow-bark skirts during the warmer months of the year. Men and children usually wore no clothing at all, but in the winter months, both men and women often coated their bodies with mud to insulate themselves from the cold.

The Saclan lived in tule grass houses that were constructed from willow branches stuck into the ground, lashed together with willow bark at the top, and covered in tule grasses and leaves. The size of the hut depended on the number of people in the family. Saclan villages consisted of family units of 65 to 75 people, all that an area could easily support in food and clothing.



Acorns were used as a staple food and many months were spent every fall gathering and storing these nuts for the winter ahead. A large oak tree could yield 300 pounds of acorns each year. Acorns were served as soup, mush, in biscuits and bread, and were gathered and stored in granaries and woven baskets. To eat the acorns it was necessary to leach out the tannic acid. The acorns were shelled and the meat pounded in the mortar bowls that had been worn in the bedrock. The pounded acorns were put in baskets and then rinsed as many as 20 times in water, a process that might take several days.

Most of the Saclan life was spent out of doors. Within each village was a central place where meals were prepared and men sharpened weapons and planned the hunt. The Saclan were not farmers. All food was foraged or killed. Nuts, grasses, and other plants were gathered or dug from the ground to eat. They drank water from nearby creeks and streams. When the Saclan men hunted deer and other indigenous animals, they would mask their human scent by rubbing their bodies with bay laurel leaves. Insects, especially grubs and larvae, were collected as well as snails and grasshoppers, which were roasted on hot rocks before being eaten.



With the arrival of the Spanish explorers in the mid 1770s, the Saclan people's lives changed drastically. By the early 18th century, most of the Saclan were gone from the area, having died from the diseases brought by the Spanish, having become missionized by the Catholic Church, or having left the area to escape the rule of the white man. The land lay uninhabited for many years until the lure of inexpensive, fertile land brought Yankee settlers from the East.

THE EARLY SETTLEMENT

In 1853, the first business in Lafayette was established by Elam Brown. A local grist mill was necessary for the farmers to have their grain ground into flour. Until the opening of Brown's grist mill, local farmers had to travel to San Jose. The round trip took several days to complete. Brown's grist mill was located on the creek in the center of the new settlement. Other businesses would soon follow as the little community became established.

Another important member of the community at that time was the blacksmith who made plows and farming tools for farmers and shoes for their horses, as well as tools for the local lumbermen. John Elston established the first blacksmith shop in Lafayette shortly after the arrival of Brown's grist mill.

Peter Thomson, a Canadian who had purchased an acre of land from Elam Brown, worked for Elston in the blacksmith shop. In 1863, he bought the business from Elston and served as the town's blacksmith for the next 50 years. He located his blacksmith shop and his home on the northeast corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Moraga Road.

Peter Thomson's anvil played an active role in many of the town's celebrations. A hole in the end of the anvil was filled with gunpowder and lit with a 30-foot rod that Peter heated in the forge; the result was a loud and visible explosion. Such a celebration took place in 1865, in recognition of the end of the Civil War. As a result of a particularly large blast during the celebration, the anvil cracked in half. It had to be repaired with a metal patch. That anvil, with its patch, can be seen on display in the History Room at the Lafayette Library.



Benjamin Shreve found his way to California from Kentucky hoping to strike it rich in the Gold Rush. He traveled through our young town in 1852; during a later visit, Elam Brown convinced him he should stay. Shreve established the community's first school house. He taught in the settlement for a year, then gave up teaching to open Lafayette's first general store, located near Lafayette Plaza. The store served not only the settlers of the community but the lumbermen who worked in the nearby redwoods.



On March 2, 1857, Shreve petitioned for a post office, planning to name the community Centerville. When he discovered that the name was already in use in California, he chose the name La Fayette, because Shreve's wife had come from La Fayette County, Illinois, a community named after the Marquis de La Fayette, the French statesmen and officer who assisted George Washington and the Colonial army during the fight for independence in the Revolutionary War. The original spelling was later changed to Lafayette. Shreve served as general store owner and postmaster for 33 years. In addition, he farmed 250 acres that he had purchased from Elam Brown.

Another pioneer who traveled to California in search of new opportunity was Milo Hough. Hough settled in Lafayette in 1853 and built the first hotel and tavern. This was a very popular stopping place for the men who drove the wagons and hauled lumber from the towns of Canyon and Moraga. The hotel later burned to the ground, and Milo Hough relocated to Walnut Creek. A new hotel, the Wayside Inn, was later built nearby.

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.

Fred Ravazza: Fred's father came to San Francisco from Liguria, Italy around the time of the "Great Earthquake." He eventually settled in Lafayette where he and his wife raised two sons. Lafayette had the perfect soil and climate for the same kind of farming the family had been doing for 250 years in Italy – dry farming which required no irrigation and no fertilizer. Fred describes Lafayette in this era as a small town in which most of the other families, along with his, were also involved in farming - including the Cossos, Rossis, Ghiglioni, and Magginis. Fred was in one of the first classes at Acalanes High School, where the students observed a strict uniform code. Fred's own sons and grandchildren also attended Acalanes. After high school Fred worked for Shell, served in the Army in Europe, and then worked for Oakland Scavenger Company for 35 years.

LAFAYETTE STREET NAMES

Following up on the article about Lafayette Street names in the July issue, here are some additional street names and their origins. If you have information on the origins of the name of the street you live on, please let us know...we'd love to have it for our archives.

Acalanes Road and Acalanes Avenue: a Spanish corruption of the name of the first people of the area, the Saclans. Rancho Acalanes, the Mexican land grant, took its name from the native people.

Andreason Drive: named for the family who owned Walnut Glen in the late 1800s.

Angelo Street: named for Angelo Rossi, son of Serafino Rossi who was an early settler in Reliez Valley.

Augustine Lane: named for Augustine Lobo, a Portuguese immigrant who owned the land in the early 1920s.

Bickerstaff Road: named for James Bickerstaff, father of Jennie Bickerstaff, longtime local teacher.



Briones Park Road: named for Maria Manuela Valencia de Briones (1796-1884), grantee of Rancho la Boca de la Canada de Pinole.

Brown Avenue: named for Elam Brown, founder of Lafayette.

Burton Drive and Court: named for Arthur Burton, caretaker for the land in Burton Valley and Moraga.

Camino Colorados: named for the Mexican land grant that included all of Moraga and Burton Valley.

Dewing Avenue: named for Stephen Dewing, first husband of Jennie Bickerstaff.



Franke Lane: named for Rudolph and Grace Franke who owned the property in the 1920s.

Hamlin Road: named for Oliver Hamlin, rancher and farmer, who lived on the land in the late 1800s. The Hamlin family still owns some of the land.

Hough Avenue: named for Milo Hough who owned a hotel in downtown Lafayette in the 1850s.

Hunsaker Canyon: named for the family who originally lived on the land. Nicholas Hunsaker and James Hunsaker were County Sheriffs in the 1850s and 1860s.

Las Trampas: means “the traps” in Spanish as elk were trapped in this area.

Leslyn Lane: named for Lester and Marilyn Hink, owners of Hink’s Department Store on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley.

Los Arabis Drive: named by Dr. Musser who owned an Arabian Horse Farm in this area. Other streets (Natasha Drive, Rahara Drive, and Timothy Lane) are named after his horses.

Los Palos Drive: name is taken from the Camino Colorados land grant (Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados).

Martino Road: named for Nat Martino, owner of the property.

Oliveira Lane: named for the family who were tenant farmers in Burton Valley.

Peardale Drive: named by the Malley family who owned the pear orchards that grew on this land in the early 1900s.

Reliez Station Road and Reliez Valley Road: “Reliz” was an old Mexican/Spanish word meaning “landslide”. The Sacramento Northern Railroad had a stop at Olympic Boulevard called Reliez Station. Reliez Valley Road runs north off of Pleasant Hill Road.

Rossi Street: see Angelo above.

Rowland Drive: named after the first settlers in Reliez Valley.

Soares Lane: named after the Portuguese family who were farmers in this area.

Stanley Boulevard: named after M.H. Stanley, drug store owner and civic leader. Stanley School is also named after him.

Thompson Road: named for the blacksmith, Peter Thomson, who served the Lafayette community for 60 years. The name is misspelled as his name had no “p” in it.

Topper Lane: named after his dog by the young son of the family who lived on the street.



Wilkinson Lane: named after Sybil Brown Wilkinson, Elam Brown’s granddaughter.



Return Service Requested

