



Lafayette Historical Society

# NEWS

Enlightening Our Community

Lafayette, California

January 2020

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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*

"How Eminent Domain Changed Lamorinda"

**Speaker.....** Stuart Swiedler

**Date.....** Sunday, January 26, 2020

**Time.....** 2:00-3:00 p.m.

**Place.....** Lafayette Library & Learning Center -  
Don Tatzin Community Hall

**Donation Requested** - \$10.00 LHS members; \$15.00  
non-members; Kids under 14 free with paying adult

*For questions or reservations please call (925)283-1848 or  
email [Lafayette.History@comcast.net](mailto:Lafayette.History@comcast.net)*



## EMINENT DOMAIN PROGRAM **RESCHEDULED**

Imagine being told that the land your home sits on will become part of a reservoir that will not even benefit local residents. Or that your back yard was needed for a freeway. Eminent domain refers to the power of the government or its agent to take private property for public use if fair compensation is provided to the owners. This presentation will utilize aerial photographs, images of properties, and documents to examine how eminent domain impacted the course of Lamorinda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in efforts to prevent a freeway's construction. Please join us for Stu's rescheduled program on Sunday, January 26 from 2-3 in the Don Tatzin Community Hall.

## **MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2019**

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

Richard Horonjeff  
The Allen Family  
The Denham Family  
The Mullan Family  
The Tsiouris Family  
The Johnson Family

Mary Ann York  
The Hedlund Family  
The Cano Family  
The Loo Family  
The McKeon Family  
The Duindam Family

The Badger Family  
The Burgher Family  
The Campbell Family  
The Brindley Family  
The Hornburger Family

**Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.**

### **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral Histories which date from the 1970's have been stored on tapes and discs in the History Room. Many of these tapes have recently been digitized and are available for viewing on the Historical Society Website – [lafayettehistory.org](http://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 tell about early life in Lafayette. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

**Linda Peterson:** Linda Peterson was interviewed by Mary McCosker on May 12th, 2009. In the 1980s Linda co-founded a communications firm which specialized in helping non-profit organizations “tell their story”. She had been a supporter of the library for years, and had been president of the Friends of the Lafayette Library, when she became leader of the communications efforts related to the new library project. Following college, Linda spent 2 years as a graduate student in English. One of the ways she described the new library was as, “the university, as well as the community center, for the rest of your life.”

**Roger Falcone:** Roger Falcone was interviewed by Brenda Hepler on July 12th, 2008. Roger was head of the Lafayette School District board. He was also head of the physics department at UC Berkeley and was actively involved with the Lawrence Hall of Science. Among the things Dr. Falcone brought to the group of talented and dedicated volunteers that were organizing to develop a new library was his knowledge about education and about the teaching of science in particular. His proposal to make the library an additional place in the community where students could learn science in a hands-on way was an important part of the Learning Consortium concept, which in turn was a principle reason for the transformational winning of a major grant from the California Library Bond Committee in Sacramento. Roger helped generate excitement in the community for a new library that would “be central place for people from all our neighborhoods to congregate and to generate and exchange ideas.”

**Jerry Overaa:** Jerry Overaa was interviewed on July 23rd, 2009, by Brenda Hepler. Jerry was CEO of C. Overaa & Co., the construction company that built the new library. At the time of this interview, he had also been a Lafayette resident for over 40 years. Jerry's company had built libraries in Orinda, Danville, and other cities prior to being selected for this project. The plans called for state-of-the-art materials and unique structural elements, which required a contractor with the kind of extensive professional experience that Jerry had. He knew well that a small group of individuals could combine their efforts to create a transformative community institution, which is what he now saw happening

in his home town. Jerry says “the dedication and determination of all the people involved” was unlike anything he had seen before. He says that the community-wide effort to build the new library—even before the first services and programs were launched—was already bringing Lafayette’s citizens together.

## **EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT**



Oliver Lane, Acalanes High School Junior, completed his Boy Scout Eagle project by installing new black and white modular flooring in the cage that houses Old Betsy, the Lafayette Model T fire engine. Oliver had to come up with an idea for a project, fundraise to be able to pay for it, and recruit fellow scouts to help him complete the project after having it approved by the Aesthetics Committee at the Library as well as the Historical Society...a lot of hurdles to overcome but he did it!! The new flooring will make it easier to keep the cage clean and certainly makes the red fire engine pop!! Thank you, Oliver!!

## **THANK YOU**

Old Betsy made a special appearance at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Library on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Thank you to some special people who have worked hard to keep her up and running: George Wasson, John Kallio, Mike Raffo, George Smith, and Larry Blodgett made sure she was able to be on display in the amphitheater. Ed Anderson fixed her flat tire with assistance from Big O Tires. Thanks to the volunteers who staffed our booth: Sharon Fraetis, John Kennett, George Wasson, Nancy Flood, Laura Torkelson, Larry Blodgett, and Sande Hubbs. Sometimes it takes a village....thank you to all.



## **BREAKFAST WITH SANTA**

The Second Annual “Breakfast With Santa” was held on Sunday, December 15, and was attended by many excited children and their families. Santa was driven to Sideboard Restaurant in Old Betsy and a tasty pancake breakfast was served. The Silent Auction raised money for LHS and we are grateful to those merchants who donated merchandises and gift cards: Town Hall Theater, Anthony’s Custom Picture Framers, Misto Lino, Tutu’s Café, El Charro, Whole Foods, Great Wall Restaurant, Lafayette Car Wash, Clocks, Etc., The Coop, Diablo Foods, Friends Corner Book Shop, Lafayette Beauty, Sharp Bicycle, Papillon Quality Coffee, Mechanics Bank, Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, Karen & Larry Blodgett, Lafayette Ace Hardware, Bank of the West, and especially Sideboard Restaurant. Thanks too to all who attended to support LHS and to Lauren Herpich for organizing the event. See you all next year!!

## **A LAFAYETTE HOLIDAY TRADITION: THE TREE AT DIABLO FOODS**

Every year, the redwood tree in Diablo Foods parking lot is lit up and gives its brightness to the community. There is a plaque below the tree that tells of its being planted by Jennie Bickerstaff. Many may wonder who this beloved lady was. Some know from third grade lessons about Lafayette History, but many came later, or have forgotten. Here's the story:

In 1877, James and Delilah Bickerstaff moved their family from Pennsylvania to Lafayette. Charlie was a baby, and sadly died when he was a year old. Jennie was 7, and thrived in Lafayette. James built them a little white house on Mt. Diablo Blvd. that then was a dirt path leading from Oakland to Walnut Creek. Jennie lived in that house for 85 years, surrounded by gas stations, businesses, and fronted by a four-lane highway by the end. She left an indelible mark on our town.



She attended the second school house, a small wood building where the Methodist Church on Moraga Rd. is now. No, not the one with the bell tower that we still see, that was the third school house. The second school was moved to make room for the third one, long after Jennie graduated in 1888 at the age of 16. She knew that she wanted to be a teacher, and for that, she needed to go to college. What is now San Jose State was the closest teacher training college. Her parents moved to San Jose to give her a place to live. No dorms for young ladies in those days! After four years, she graduated in 1892 and the family moved back to Lafayette.



On September 1, 1892 at the age of 20, Jennie began teaching. She taught at Moraga School in Orinda where Glorietta Blvd. meets Moraga Rd. (near what is now a stop-light and a creek). She taught 34 students from 13 families in grades 1 through 9. Every month she rode her horse Topsy to Martinez (along the path of Pleasant Hill Rd. / Alhambra) to collect her monthly salary of \$60 in gold. In 1899, she left there to teach at Lafayette School. In



In 1903 she began teaching in Pacheco (a much bigger town then) and later in Walnut Creek and Saranap. She retired in 1936. The superintendent of schools remarked that she had always brought music instruction to her students, and that whenever he visited her classroom, the students seemed happy which greatly enhanced the learning of all subjects. Contra Costa County was filled with former students who continued to sing her praises as they aged.

She married late to an older man with grown children. Perhaps you have seen the name Dewing around? Later, when she was 70, she married a younger man named William Rosenberg. At some point, she planted a redwood tree in her backyard. There are conflicting stories, but the most likely is that she was middle-aged and hired a high school boy to do the digging for her.

Jennie died in 1966 leaving the little house her father built a few months previously for an assisted living situation. When I was in high school in 1965, my church group went to her house to sing carols. She came out to thank us. I was struck by the reverence and excitement everyone had about going to her house. I did not understand why, but the specialness of this woman was clearly conveyed. She was 93 when she died and she is buried in the Lafayette Cemetery. The house was razed in 1966 to make way for the building of Diablo Foods in 1968. They saved the tree from Jennie's yard and have been conscientious and loving caretakers of it ever since.

1976 was a perilous year for Jennie's tree. Diablo Foods had a terrible fire. It was touch and go whether the tree would survive, but Ed Stokes, the founder of Diablo Foods, brought in experts and spared no effort to save it. Later he said, "The branches were still there, but the limbs were scorched and burned. After a year of waiting, the foliage finally came back."

Diablo Foods continues its careful tending of the tree. William Rosenberg used to visit the tree after Jennie's death and called it "Jennie's heart". Think of Jennie, and old Lafayette, when your heart fills with pleasure as you see the lit tree through the dark and rain each winter.

(For pictures and artifacts, and lots more detail about Jennie, come into the History Room at the back of the library on Golden Gate Way.)

~~ Laura Torkelson

*The Lafayette Historical Society thanks Diablo Foods for becoming a Pioneer Sponsor of the Lafayette Historical Society. An article follows about this longtime Lafayette community-minded business. Thank you to the Stokes and Collier Families for their support.*

## **DIABLO FOODS**

Back in 1968, when Ed Stokes started Diablo Foods in Lafayette, he knew how much effort would be involved to establish a successful grocery store. He had already been in the grocery business for nearly two decades. Born in South Carolina and raised in North Carolina, Ed worked as a clerk during his high school years. After he fought for the Marine Corps in World War II, he attended Cal while he worked at a local grocery store to support his young family.

Ed put quality in place from day one when he insisted that USDA Choice and Prime grades of meats would be featured, local produce and fresh fish would be delivered daily, and deli offerings would be made on site. He assembled an excellent team of friendly and knowledgeable employees, set fair prices, required ultimate cleanliness and never lowered his standards. Shoppers would check the windows for hand painted signs that announced the arrival of Brentwood just-picked cherries, corn or fresh local lamb.

Today, ever more local and specialty produce fill the baskets in front of the store. Expert butchers hand cut the meats, poultry and fish to customer specification. The artisan and specialty cheese selection is unmatched locally and continues to expand alongside a delicious deli bursting with fabulous salads, cured meats, roast poultry, and prepared meals.

The cheerful employees and exceptionally familiar with all the products and services. More than 40% of the current employees have been with Diablo Foods for more than ten years. They help shoppers find products, take special orders, offer gift suggestions and load purchases into cars. Customers love to "hunt and gather" at Diablo Foods, where people meet, mingle, and shop in the friendly environment cultivated by the entire Diablo Foods team.

Diablo Foods was voted the #1 specialty food store in Contra Costa County by Diablo Magazine in 2011. Ed Stokes and Diablo Foods were recognized as the "Best Independent Grocer" by the California Independent Grocery Association in 2011 as well. They are passionate about food and its prominence in our daily lives and special occasions.





Lafayette Historical Society  
PO Box 133, Lafayette Ca 94549  
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[www.lafayettehistory.org](http://www.lafayettehistory.org)

**LHS**

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**Return Service Requested**

*Thank you Diablo Foods for your Sponsorship of LHS!!*

