



Lafayette, California

October 2021

Vol. 48, No. 4

Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

JOIN US FOR A VIRTUAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Sunday, November 7 from 2:00-3:30

**The Evolution of Interurban and Commuter Rail Travel in the Bay Area
With Speaker Extraordinaire Stuart Swiedler**



Stuart Swiedler will present a talk entitled “The Evolution of Interurban and Commuter Rail Travel in the Bay Area.” Dr. Swiedler, a physician-scientist by training, created the East Bay Hills Project in 2009, providing presentations and an online resource, Eastbayhillsproject.org, that uses aerial photographs and images taken by railroad fans to document the history of the East Bay and its connections to the Central Valley in the 20th century. The presentation will follow the competition in the private sector to expand rail transportation

opportunities using electric trains in the Bay Area in the early 20th century, the decline in rail service starting in the mid-20th century, to the eventual takeover by governmental agencies to provide what exists today. (Ralph Demoro Photo, Courtesy John Harder)

Register for this program at <https://tinyurl.com/swiedler-nov7>

If you have difficulty registering, please send an email to lafayette.history@comcast.net

Presented to you by the Lafayette Historical Society and hosted by the Friends of the Lafayette Library.

Confirming emails will come from the Friends of the Lafayette Library (Friends Programs), not the Lafayette Historical Society (but the subject line will indicate LHS).

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2021

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their membership or have made a donation:

Emily & Ken Haas
Sue Cross
Daniel O'Leary
Catherine McLin
Thomas Kieny
Caren Armstrong
Barbara Sinclair
Christine Raymond
James Cervantes
Janet Nadol
Mark Harrigan

Carol Ward
Stan Pedder
Helena McGinley
Cooper Ogden
Don Jenkins
Marianne Monagle
Aggie Malanca
Molly Gleason
Matt Rees
Andrew Parrott
Rebecca Mallon

Jennifer Russell
Patricia Moore
Joan Grimes
David Ogden
Laura Torkelson
Susan Mott
Diane Barbera
Margaret Franz
Sheila Rogstad
Andree Duggan
Mary McCosker

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your membership is exceedingly important as it makes it possible for our organization to pay annual rent to the City of Lafayette for our space and be able to pay for our phone, insurance, and other needed supplies. If you have a **red dot** on your address label for this issue, your membership is up for renewal in the next month or two. If you have a **red L** on your address label you are a Life Member and do not pay dues so if you'd like to make a donation it would be appreciated. We have made a small increase in membership fees effective July 2021.

Student Membership is \$15

Individual Membership is \$30

Family Membership is \$60

Additional Donations are always appreciated

Please send to LHS

PO Box 133, Lafayette CA 94549

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral Histories which date from the 1970s 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. 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 the area of Reliez Creek. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

Donn Black: After growing up and attending college in Oregon, Donn and Arlene Black moved to California, where Donn started his law career. In 1967 they moved from Oakland to Lafayette. He became Lafayette's first mayor when the city incorporated the following year. In this interview Donn describes how he and a small group of other civic-minded individuals evaluated the pros and cons of incorporation, made the decision to go for it, and guided the new city through its challenge-filled first years.

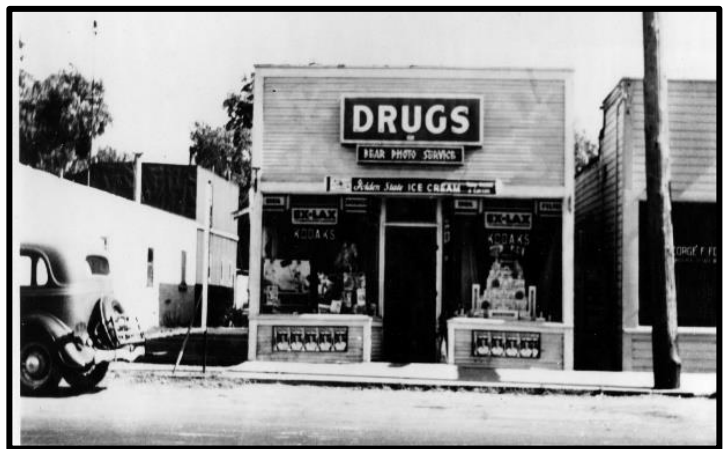
James S. Rossi: James is the grandson of Serafino Rossi Sr., who emigrated from Italy at age 16 in 1906 and eventually farmed pears, peaches, plums, apricots, figs, and grapes on his 158-acre farm in Reliez Valley. James tells how his father, Angelo, who was a member of the first class that graduated from Acalanes High School in 1941, was awarded two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star for his valorous service as an infantryman in World War II. After the war he returned to Lafayette and joined his brothers Frank and Serafino Jr. in operating the Rossi Brothers Furniture Shop near the present-day Lafayette Park Hotel. Rossi Street and Angelo Street, as well as Hillside Terrace, are all located on land that was part of the original Rossi farm.

Louis Persico: Louis was interviewed in June 2005. He was born in Oakland in 1918, but a year later his family moved to Lafayette, where they first operated a farm on the present day site of Acalanes High School. After serving as a mess sergeant in World War II, including the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle at Remagen, Louis returned to Lafayette and worked in the baking business and then at Russell Bruzzone's liquor store. He shares memories of the Lafayette businesses he remembers from his 50 years working in the community.

M.H. STANLEY

Most all Lafayette residents know the name M.H. Stanley, either because they are alumni, have had kids there, or just drive by the middle school. Who was Mr. Stanley and why did a school get named after him?

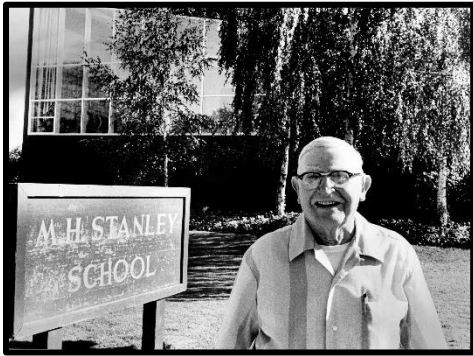
Initially, all people said was that he owned a drugstore on Mt. Diablo Blvd. That's not a reason to name a school! The History room had a file of articles and news clips that explained what a remarkable and influential man he had been.



Stanley's Pharmacy on Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Matthew Howard Stanley was born in San Diego in 1888, the son of a blacksmith and carriage builder. When he was 8, his family moved to Oakland. When he was beginning high school, he had to go to work to help his family. He worked in the lumber business

by day and went to high school at night eventually earning his diploma. After serving in World War I, he continued working in the lumber business. He married Grace Eagles in 1921, and in 1925 they moved to Lafayette. Mr. Stanley and his wife were committed to improving the local schools. He was elected to the Lafayette Elementary School Board in the late 1920's. Over the next 25 years he helped oversee the school system's growth from a single three-room schoolhouse with 150 pupils to three schools with 1,800 students. In



the 1930's, Lafayette residents began forming a high school district to include Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga and Walnut Creek. At the time, Lafayette's high school students took the Sacramento Northern train (the Lafayette/Moraga trail is where the tracks were) to Concord's Mt. Diablo High School. It was a 2 ½ hour ride round trip. Train fares cost Lafayette tax payers about \$20,000 per year! Mr. Stanley was voted to the Board of Trustees for the new Acalanes High School District in 1938. In 1940, Acalanes High School opened with 300 day

students and 49 adults in the evening. By 1956, when Mr. Stanley left the school board, Las Lomas and Miramonte were also up and running.

In addition to the huge contributions to developing Lafayette's schools, he also was on the board of the Fire District from 1925 to the 1950's. "Old Betsy", the Model-T now next to the Library garage, was the only fire engine! During his tenure, Moraga Road, Burton Valley, and Happy Valley Fire Stations were built.

More? Yes. Mr. Stanley was also part of the formation of the Contra Costa Sanitary District. Solutions were needed for the bad sanitation problems of a growing area (sewage was going into Lafayette Creek from pipes out of houses along it).



M.H. Stanley and Family

He was on the planning committee for the Caldecott Tunnel. He brought labor to work on schools from the Works Project Administration (WPA) during the Depression. He was a member of the committee to establish the Lafayette Library. The Lions Club, the Boy Scouts, the American Legion were all beneficiaries of his energy and commitment to serving Lafayette's growth and well-being.

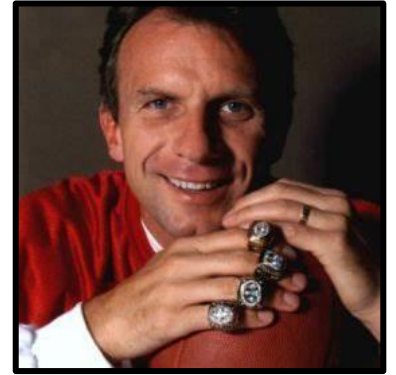
During all this community service, he also owned a lumber yard and a pharmacy. People remember the delicious tuna sandwiches served at the counter. He was also a father to five children. Clearly, M.H. Stanley, a Springhill neighborhood resident, is very worthy of the honor of the middle school being named for him.



SPRINGHILL STARS: Notable people who have lived near Reliez Creek

The number one box office draw from 1935 to 1938 lived at the end of Black Hawk Drive off Springhill Road.....Shirley Temple! She and her child-sized Oscar moved into Springhill in 1950. She had just married Charles Black, a businessman whose parents lived on Black Hawk Drive. The couple lived there with them for a few years. Later the home belonged to Gundie Younger, an Olympic Dressage rider (it may still).

Joe Montana, famous quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, lived in the Springhill Road area for several years. He started and won four Super Bowls and was the first player ever to have been named Super Bowl MVP three times. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2000.



Donn Black, first mayor of Lafayette (1968) moved to the Springhill area in 1967. Under his leadership, the City Council cleaned up Mt. Diablo Blvd. with a sign ordinance and added median dividers to the street. He served on the Lafayette City Council for six years. His oral history is available on our website: www.lafayettehistory.org

MOONSHINERS NABBED IN RELIEZ VALLEY

The 1929 headline in the *Contra Costa Gazette* screamed “SIX JAILED IN RAID ON GIANT STILL IN RELIEZ VALLEY.” Clyde Laird, the head of the “dry squad” was tasked with enforcing prohibition. With stills operating all over the county from El Cerrito to Brentwood, he had a big job. Most of the stills found yielded 25 to 60 gallons of liquor. In the Reliez Valley (the Peterson Ranch) raid, 12,000 gallons of mash were seized. A test of the liquor showed it to be 100 proof. A stake-out nabbed a supplier of yeast who came with 5-gallon empty tins that he would fill every night and haul to Oakland. A supplier of sugar was also caught. Five of the men were sentenced, but the sixth jumped bail and disappeared. None of the hirelings turned on the “King Pin”, so he was never identified.



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LHS

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Return Service Requested

Thank you to Christine Raymond for sponsoring this LHS Newsletter issue:

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is a proud sponsor of the Lafayette Historical Society

*"The more you know about the past,
the better prepared you are for the future."*

~ Theodore Roosevelt

Please join us in supporting our local historical society and
contributing to a stronger and better informed future.