



BULLETIN

SUMMER 2011

Sheriff Richard R. Veale, a Contra Costa County Sheriff Like No Other 1895-1935

Beverly Lane



For forty years Contra Costa County was protected by an extraordinary public servant, Sheriff R. R. Veale. Elected as a young man who had a large family farm in East Contra Costa County, he became a renowned law enforcement presence, an extraordinary civic booster and a member of fifteen fraternal orders.

He had one deputy when he began, traveled by horseback and horse and buggy, and used telephone farmer lines to reach people in the County. During his years he helped initiate the state bureau of identification, organized the California Sheriff's Association, began the use of fingerprints and solved many crimes. The Selby smelter bullion robbery -- which involved the theft of \$280,000 worth of gold bullion -- was one he often talked about. He helped capture the vicious Fleagle gang and solved several murders and train

holdups. Upon retirement, he said **"I am proud of the fact that I have never shot a man in all of the forty years I have been a sheriff."**



Exhibit Opening, May 22. From left, Mary-Ellen Jones, President Andrea Blachman, VP Beverly Lane



Veale descendents Oliver and Margo Bray

As a civic booster he helped get the river dredged, instituted the highway from Martinez to Crockett, organized a huge parade from Martinez to Diablo to recognize the new State Park and, practically single-handed, promoted and raised funds for the Soldiers Monument dedicated in December of 1927. He was secretary of the County Chamber of Commerce for 20 years.

You are invited to view the new exhibit on Sheriff Veale at the CCCHS History Center, which will be on display until August 20. It features many items from the Society's enormous Veale archive, including fraternal regalia, photographs, correspondence and campaign materials. A special thank you to the Martinez Historical Society for lending the Sheriff's cup to the Center.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S JUNE LUNCHEON/MEMBERSHIP MEETING WILL BE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

On Saturday, June 25, we will dine with members of the Conference of California Historical Societies who are in Berkeley for their 2011 Annual Meeting. This is a marvelous opportunity to meet visiting historians from throughout California and talk about mutual interests. They are a friendly and enthusiastic bunch so introduce yourselves and make them feel at home.

This luncheon is a highlight of CCHS's Annual Meeting. It is the time when yearly awards of merit are presented to those who have been nominated by their peers and selected by the awards committee as having made outstanding contributions to the preservation of history. Numerous Contra Costans are previous awardees including Traci Parent, Nilda Rego, Marlene Thompson, Brother Dennis, Elsie Mastick, Phyllis Wainwright and Betty Maffei. Several additional Contra Costans will be honored this year.

Other highlights of the Conference's 2011 Annual Meeting are a day at The Bancroft Library with 3 workshops by experts and a tour of a few of its divisions including Rare Books Collection, Tebtunis Papyri, Mark Twain Papers, Regional Oral History, Pictorial Collection and Western Americana. A special happening will be the printing of a commemorative keepsake on an Albion hand press which was brought to California around the Horn in the 1850s. Also, there will be a tour of Berkeley buildings designed by Julia Morgan and Bernard Maybeck, a tour of a sake factory and 2 super dinner speakers. Our grand finale on Saturday night will be a wine and hotdog dinner with free access to pinball machines at Playland-Not-At-The-Beach. For additional information about the CCHS Annual Meeting only and registration go to:

www.californiahistorian.com or call 925.254.2295 or 925.372.7146.

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REGISTRATION FOR OUR CCCHS LUNCHEON

WHERE: Spenger's Fresh Fish Grotto
1919 Fourth Street
Berkeley 94710

WHEN: Saturday
June 25, 2011
11:00 Happy Hour
11:30 Luncheon
12:30 Awards

COST: \$40.00

MENU: Pan seared salmon
Grilled London Broil

<p>NAMES: _____ _____ _____</p> <p>MAIL CHECK (PAYABLE TO CCCHS) TO: CCCHS/610 MAIN STREET MARTINEZ, CA 94523</p>

**DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION (CCCHS LUNCHEON ONLY) IS
MONDAY, JUNE 20, 2011**

Editor's Note: The Bulletin will feature an article about Contra Costa County's historical societies in each of its upcoming issues. We are starting at the end of the alphabet and working backwards. So our first submission is from the Walnut Creek Historical Society.

SHADELANDS RANCH



THEY LEFT A LEGACY... Sylvia Ortlieb

Right in our own backyard, located on Ygnacio Valley Road between Wiget Lane and Via Monte, is a piece of early Walnut Creek history. Shadelands Ranch Museum, a century old home, is filled with the original furnishings, pictures and folklore of the Hiram Penniman family.

The Colonial revival house features the heavy oak newel post staircase, leaded glass windows, and rounded bay windows typical of this architectural style. Surviving two major historical events, the house stands in the original form except for the rebuilt chimney, which fell during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, and the replaced second story landing windows, blown out during the WWII Port Chicago ship explosion.

Hiram Penniman came to California in 1850 and by 1856 had acquired 500 acres in Ygnacio Valley. He established Shadelands Ranch planting walnut and fruit trees. The present ranch house was built in 1903 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Shadelands Ranch is open Sunday and Wednesday, 1-4 p.m. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$1 for children. For additional information, contact Walnut Creek Historical Society at 925-935-7871;

wshadelands@sbcglobal.net or visit our website at walnutcreekhistory.info

Remember the Ladies -- the Centennial of California's Woman Suffrage



Since 2011 is the centennial of women winning the vote in California, several exhibits and events are planned in Contra Costa County. Visitors may view an exhibit at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley called "Remember the Ladies, The Centennial of California Woman Suffrage, 1911-2011" at 205 Railroad Avenue,

Danville. It is open 1-4 Tues.-Fri. and 10-1 Sat. See the web site for Saturday programs, museumsrv.org.

The CCCHS History Center will present "Remember the Ladies" beginning August 25, 2011. This exhibit will feature Martinez and Contra Costa County activities which culminated in success for women suffrage at the October 10, 1911 election.

From the first issue of the Bulletin, 1951:

Greetings

Greetings to all members of the Contra Costa County Historical Society:

Your Board of Directors has decided to issue, from time to time, a Bulletin to keep you acquainted with the affairs of the Society and to contain matters of historic interest. You will be of great assistance if you will send to the editor any information or material which you think ought to be published. ·

We hope, in the near future, to be able to reproduce and make available to the members a book of illustrations of early-day buildings, homes and places in our county.

The Board of Directors and I are grateful for your interest in the Society and in providing an organization that in time will be able to preserve for future generations the intensely interesting history of our County, and the many articles of Contra Costiana

which otherwise would be lost. Will you kindly interest others in joining the Society so that our work may go forward more rapidly?

A. F. Bray, President

(Judge Absalom Francis Bray was a founding member of the Society and its first President. His wife was Leila Veale, eldest daughter of Sheriff Richard Veale. The connection between the CCCHS and the Bray/Veale family is long and deep)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

Date: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

E-Mail _____

Please check here if you would prefer to receive your newsletter by e-mail—saves money and trees

DUES:

Individual \$30 Couple \$50 Sponsor

Patron \$150 Corporate \$500

Benefactor \$1000 Student \$15

Remember that your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter electronically, please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042

In Memoriam:

Member Max Horn, Martinez
Life Member Donald Williamson, Antioch

The CCC in El Sobrante, Part 2

Donald Bastin

In the last issue of the *Bulletin* we followed a trail that led to the discovery of a series of stone “check dams” located near the San Pablo Reservoir, and built by the CCC during the 1930s. That discovery was prompted by an initial search for a stone wall, allegedly built along the old Dam Road overlooking the reservoir. According to Professor Gray Brechin, creator of the “New Deal Project” (devoted to the discovery of New Deal projects throughout the country), he had seen photos of the wall’s construction, but the location of the old wall, if it still existed, had yet to be determined.

Fortunately, Professor Brechin was able to direct us to a cache of photographs in the possession of local historian Richard Langs. The photos, it seems, had originally been part of the collection of the East Bay Regional Parks District, but had been forwarded to Mr. Langs for appropriate disposition, as the Parks



African American CCC group 1934

District had deemed the photos to be outside of their area of interest.

The images covered about three years, from



1934 thru 1936, and showed young men engaged in all kinds of activity, including road construction, tree planting, tree clearing, and inter-camp sports competition. All of the images, over 100 in all, were

snapshots, un-posed, showing men and boys engaged in some kind of activity. With Mr. Langs approval, I was able to scan about 80 of the better images. This is an amazing collection, and sheds light on a part of West County history that had been very little known, even, apparently, among the staff of EBMUD, operators of the San Pablo Reservoir.

But was there anything showing the construction of a rock wall? Sure enough, after going through almost the entire collection, we came upon five images that seemed to be oriented to the



construction of a rock wall. In several of the shots it could clearly be seen that the site of the wall was right



alongside the old Dam Road and very near the water. It was also evidently near an

outfall tower. As the reservoir has only one such tower along its length, it would be an easy matter to locate the current site of the wall, assuming that it had not disintegrated over time or been removed. On several of the photos, dated January, 1935, someone had written the term “Observation Point.”

Apparently, the purpose of the wall was to provide motorists with a place to stop and view the lake. And as can be seen from the picture of the finished wall, this was not just an exercise in engineering but was something that was meant to be an attractive piece of architecture. But was it still there?

In September of last year, I, along with my wife and girls, visited the San Pablo Reservoir. After parking, we hiked along the service road (the old Dam Road), all the while looking for the old outfall tower. After about three-quarters of a mile, we found ourselves

opposite the tower. The site had changed considerably in the intervening 75 years, and was now covered with trees and brush. Also obscuring the site was a visitor toilet facility. But neither time nor toilet could hide the stone wall that immediately commanded our attention. There it was—about half covered by dirt and obscured by a thick cover of



poison oak, but without a doubt the very wall that we had been seeking. At the right end and in the middle were

the decorative little pillars that we had seen in the photograph. The middle pillars, flanking a gap in the center of the wall, held a surprise. On the other side was a broad stone stairway, leading down almost to the water's edge. Now the meaning of that little gap in the wall made sense. But still it was a surprise, as it was not until 1973 that the reservoir was opened to the public. Yet, here was an overlook and a stairway, built in 1935, that invited the visitor to enjoy the lakeside without hindrance. Curious.



Over the years, the left end of the wall has fallen away, victim of a small earth slide. But most of it, including the stairway, remains intact. It would take little effort to clear away the obscuring brush and earth and bring back this artifact to something like its original condition, providing a unique and historic amenity to the San Pablo Reservoir experience. It is a site worthy of a modest interpretive exhibit.

The next time you visit the San Pablo Reservoir, take a side trip to this long-hidden piece of Depression-era history. And tell a friend.

The Pleasant Hill Historical Society

Dana Matthews

The city of Pleasant Hill is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. But, the history of the Pleasant Hill area goes back many more than 50 years to the days when Native Americans lived in the Diablo Valley. In the mid-1860's the name "Pleasant Hill" was first applied to the Pleasant Hill School District, which consisted of one small schoolhouse located on what was then the property of David McClellan. By this time, the Pleasant Hill area was identified as a small agricultural community where farmers grew wheat, fruit, nuts, and vegetables. From these early years until now, Pleasant Hill has had a long and interesting history.

In 1973, a group of citizens met and decided to start the Pleasant Hill Historical Society to discover and preserve the history of Pleasant Hill for future generations. In 1982, the Pleasant Hill Historical Society (PHHS) opened a small museum and archive at the 1920's "Old Schoolhouse" at Oak Park Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road as part of the "Pleasant Hill Cultural & Historical Center". This museum/archive was opened weekly to the public and the PHHS group met, quarterly. It established a collection of Pleasant Hill artifacts and documents, worked to preserve Pleasant Hill landmarks, sponsored tours and speakers of historical interest, published a regular newsletter, and served as a resource of history for our community.

In 1986, a committee was formed within the PHHS to address the need to save the 1860's ranch house and wheat barn that had once belonged to the pioneer family of Patrick and Mary Ann Rodgers (this also, later, became the home of novelist, Alice Tisdale Hobart). In 1991, an independent group, Friends of Rodgers Ranch (FORR), was established to restore and maintain Rodgers Ranch on Cortsen Road, as part of the Pleasant Hill Recreation and Parks District. Since then, FORR has restored much of the farm house and property and has held regular Open Houses to educate the public about local history. It also holds annual summer day camps and field trips

to educate our area's youth about local history.

By 1994, the PHHS, after being an extremely active group for 21 years, began to lose its membership. It finally discontinued its regular meetings and closed its museum and archives to the public. But, in the fall of 2006, a small group of citizens began efforts to re-establish the Pleasant Hill Historical Society. For 2 years, memberships were re-started, regular meetings were held, a newsletter was mailed out, and tours and speakers of historical interest were once again offered to the community. The museum and archives at the Old Schoolhouse were being reorganized and maintained for public usage.

Then, just as the PHHS was, once again, becoming an active group in our city, the Old Schoolhouse was closed in October 2008 because of structural damage that caused safety concerns. So, at that time, the PHHS had to vacate this facility and move the museum's artifacts and archives into a storage facility, where monthly fees are charged. The PHHS continued to meet on a regular basis until the spring of 2009, when its President became ill and had to move back east. Once again, the group disbanded.

Now that our city is celebrating its 50th anniversary, many citizens have become interested in learning more about our city's past. And, despite the fact that the PHHS' artifacts and archives remain in storage for lack of a museum site, there is a small group of citizens in Pleasant Hill who are still interested in discovering, exploring and preserving our city's history.

We are now meeting again on a regular basis and hope to re-establish a vital and active Historical Society in our city. If anyone is interested in joining this group, please contact Pleasant Hill Historical Society at pleasanthillhistoricalsociety@yahoo.com Our next meeting is Thursday, May 26, 2pm at Rodgers Ranch, 315 Cortsen Rd. 925-937-3677

(Editor's Note: This article is reprinted in keeping with our role as supporter of all historical societies in Contra Costa County.)

From The Executive Director:



Dear Friends,

On April 29th, we marked the 60th anniversary of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. As the Society begins its 61st year, I am happy to have shared the events of the past year and a half with you and am looking forward to the challenges of the year to come.

In keeping with our board approved project entitled *History Center 2015*, we will be working toward the goal of having the entire archive indexed and available to the public on line by the end of 2015.

To help with this project, we have received a challenge grant from the Dean & Margaret Leshar Foundation in the amount of \$5,000 toward our goal of upgrading our computer systems and digitizing our collections both for the safety of the collections and for their use by our members and the general public.

In donating the challenge grant, the Dean & Margaret Leshar Foundation wishes to encourage others to join them in supporting our ambitious plans for the next few years. We'd like to show them how well we can put their money to work. I invite each of you to call in or visit our website and join the Leshar Foundation in supporting our amazing Archive.

We have also received a \$650 grant from the Martinez Community Foundation for the purpose of supporting our new exhibit about Sheriff Veale. The exhibit will run through August 20, 2011. I encourage everyone to come by and see it.

And, we have just received notice of a Conservation Assessment Program grant from the federal Institute for Museum and Library Services. This grant will help us prioritize conservation needs for the Archive. More details to come in the next *Bulletin* and in the e-mails I have been sending out to those of you whose e-mail I have. I hope you have enjoyed receiving these e-mails. I know I enjoy receiving your responses!

As we get more and more inquiries and our dedicated volunteer force rises to about 20 "regulars" who spend anywhere from 3 to 8 hours per week, we need still more volunteers who can help answer inquiries. We also need help at the reception desk, making visitors feel welcome when they come in and introducing them to the Society and the History Center. Please call or e-mail me with your offers of help.

Lastly, I hope you will take a moment at this time to think of all of the marvelous volunteers who have gone before us and made the Society's extensive Archive a source of great pride for all of us.

My best to you,

Priscilla

From The President:

The receipt of the Leshar Foundation grant is wonderful news! Our aging computer system simply is no longer up to the task of the increasing demands that are placed upon it. To meet the challenge of digitizing our collections, we will be looking for volunteers who are creative and like a challenge. If you fit this profile, please give us a call. In anticipation of the challenge, our Policies and Procedures subcommittee is currently working on a standardized protocol to be used in the digitization process.



The additional challenge of securing a long-term home for the History Center has also been occupying much of our time. As you know, the County is in severe financial straits, and funding for our rent has been in doubt. Our Site Subcommittee recently met with Supervisor Gayle Uilkema to discuss this issue, but nothing could be promised. However, just a few days ago the Supervisor called subcommittee chair Beverly Lane and informed her that funding appeared to be assured for the next two years. This is welcome confirmation of the value that the county places on our service. And a great relief!

Andrea

