



BULLETIN

SPRING 2011

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

&

PITTSBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY



proudly invite you to spend an afternoon with Mark Twain, author of the classic short story, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* and other masterpieces including *The Innocents Abroad*, *Life on the Mississippi* and perhaps his finest work, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

How in the heck can we spend an afternoon with Twain? Get real. He's dead, isn't he? Technically yes but purely dead, never! He lives in every one of us who has ever spent time with Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn. Our speaker, **Robert Hirst, Curator of the Mark Twain Papers at The Bancroft Library**, is the one person who can bring this literary genius to life. He has been reading and writing about him since hiring on as a proofreader with the Papers in 1967.

The title of Hirst's talk is: **Finding the Autobiography of Mark Twain**. Please join us for an extraordinary glimpse into the life of an American literary icon.

Coffee and light refreshments will be served following Bob's talk. Guests will have ample time to enjoy the numerous fine exhibits in the impressive Pittsburg Historical Museum.

WHEN: Saturday
March 12, 2011, 2:30 PM
3:00 PM Program Begins

WHERE: Pittsburg Historical Museum
515 Railroad Avenue
Pittsburg, CA 94565

COST: \$15.00

Route to Pittsburg Museum:
Route 4 east
Take exit 23, Railroad Avenue
Turn left on Railroad Avenue
Drive about one mile

Museum is on the right
Parking lot at the side of Museum

*RESERVATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 2011
SEATING IS LIMITED TO 60 RESERVE EARLY GUESTS ARE WELCOME*

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: CCCHS NAME(S): _____
MAIL TO: Contra Costa County Historical Society _____
610 Main Street, Martinez, CA 94553 Questions? 925.254.2295 or 925.372.7146

Natural Talent Photography Exhibit Opens to Overflow Crowd!



The History Center was wall-to-wall people on Sunday, January 16. The enthusiastic crowd was there to view the opening of the East Bay Regional Park District Finalists Photography Contest Show and Reception. Photographers had been invited to submit scenic, wildlife, or recreational views of Regional Parks sites. 80 photographers sent in 425 images. 50 finalists are represented in the show, with judging performed by personnel from Sarber's Camera, and Diablo and Oakland Magazines.



First-place winner Marc Crumpler and third-place winner Susan Gerber were present at the exhibit. Second-place winner, Fred Rowe, was unable to attend due to illness.



The exhibit will remain on view through March 20. For more information and to view the images

on-line, visit the E.B.R.P.D. website, at ebparks.org.

Contra Costa County Display at the ABAG 50th Anniversary January 21, 2011



Contra Costa was one of nine Bay Area Counties asked to provide a display at the recent Association of Bay Area Government's Golden Anniversary celebration at the Claremont Hotel.

Volunteers from the Contra Costa County Historical Society answered a call from the County and set up the County's display. The Peace Quilt from 1985 (which hangs in the History Center) was the backdrop for the display which featured information about the County and its history.

Meet the New Guys



Please welcome our newest board members, John Mercurio (left) and John Burgh. John Mercurio was appointed to complete the remaining two-year term of retiring member John Robinson, while John Burgh was appointed to complete the term of long-serving member Mario Menesini, who has been unable to attend meetings due to illness. Mr. Burgh's term will be up at the end of this year. Both new members are residents of Concord.

John Mercurio is originally from New York, but loves California and is a fan of local history. He wrote a number of historical articles on the Central Sanitary District; in fact, it was while doing research on these articles that he became acquainted with the History Center.

John Burgh is a retired engineer and is on the board of the Contra Costa Water District. He is currently president of the Antique Studebaker Club. He regularly drives his 1946 Studebaker coupe, and spends much of his spare time restoring his 1923 Studebaker touring car.

Both Johns have already shown themselves to be helpful in many ways, and to volunteer for events and activities without too much arm-twisting. We look forward to working with them in the coming year.

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The CCC in El Sobrante

Donald Bastin

On June 19 of last year, at the San Ramon campus of DVC, members of our historical society were treated to a very special lecture by Professor Gray Brechin, who has taken on the task of identifying



and cataloguing sites around the country that were part of President Roosevelt's various work programs (CCC, WPA, PWA, etc.). A great many of those sites happen to be located in California, and many are in Contra Costa County. In fact, the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) was active near the area where I live, in El Sobrante. Specifically, the CCC did a lot of work around the San Pablo Dam over the course of several years during the 1930s. Professor Brechin showed several slides of the boys working around the Dam (including one group of African Americans) and indicated that he had looked for, but had been unable to find, a particular rock wall that appeared in several of the photos that he had uncovered. All of this was of particular interest to me, as I have been in the process of putting together a history of El Sobrante (Arcadia Press), and was unaware that the CCC was active in our area. Living within walking distance of the Dam, however, it would not be that difficult to nose around and try to find evidence of the work that was done over 70 years ago.

A few days after Dr. Brechin's lecture, my wife, Clementina, and I walked along the old Dam Road (which has served as a service road for the reservoir since the new road was built in the 1950s)

looking for any signs of the kind of cemented rock work that was typical of the time, and which can be



seen at Alvarado Park, at the entrance to the Wildcat Creek trail. We quickly came upon some intriguing blocks of what may have once been

a rock wall, but had appeared to have been moved from somewhere else. We then spoke with an amiable ranger by the name of Tom Brackett, who was not aware of any rock walls, but who did mention that it was common knowledge among EBMUD staff that the CCC had done work at the dam in the '30s, including planting trees, cutting roads, and constructing a series of "check dams" along some of the ephemeral creeks that drain into the reservoir or into San Pablo Creek, above the dam. These areas, unfortunately, were not open to the public, but he graciously offered to escort us to one of the better sites when he had some free time.

A few weeks later, we met ranger Brackett at the staff center just off the Dam Road. A short drive along Bear Creek Road took us to the mouth of Mistletoe Creek, which drains into San Pablo Creek just above the road. Neither Clem nor I were expecting a great deal. Perhaps we would find some jumbled rocks or a piece of a cracked wall to indicate where a dam had been, that is all. We were not prepared to come upon no less than twelve intact rock dams, still doing their job of



checking water flow and trapping silt, extending perhaps a half-mile or so up the hillside.

Ranger Brackett, standing on one of the check dams

The dams were clearly well-built and well-engineered, typical of the high-quality work that was done by the CCC and other workers in Roosevelt's programs. Some of the lower dams showed some cracking, evidence of earth movement. But the upper works were pristine, and could have been built last week.



After almost two hours of clambering over rock walls, and snapping almost 100 photographs, we were obliged to leave little Mistletoe Creek and its unexpected treasures. Our guide assured us that other dams had been built along other streams, but that he did not have the time to take us to any other sites. We were more than happy with what we had seen, and expressed our appreciation for his generosity.

These rock structures, built to serve a utilitarian purpose, and to keep young men busy and active, may not seem to be particularly impressive, but their very existence, along an inconsequential creek, is amazing and quite unexpected. They should be treasured. They serve to remind us of a low time in our county's history, when young men learned the value of hard work, and doing a job well, no matter how pedestrian.

But what of the rock wall that sparked this quest? That story, and more, in a subsequent issue.

From the Photo Department



Lee Taylor

The photo department recently received and accessioned an architect's portfolio for the Pleasant Hill Town Center, prepared in 1989. Among the architectural renditions was a curious document, in somewhat fractured English, part of which follows:

*With great pleasure and honor,
The City of Verona, Italy – Bortolaso S.p.A.
Hereby dedicates to the city of Pleasant Hill for the
Ellinwood Square project a bronze
Sculpture of Shakespeare Juliet*

Since we had no photos of the sculpture, the writer and his wife contacted a niece who lives in Ellinwood. She located the 6-foot sculpture and provided this photo.

Avice Taylor researched the CCCHS clipping files and located an article in the Oakland Tribune, dated 8-16-87, confirming the statue's placement in Ellinwood Square (actually, five days



later, on August 21). The Bortolaso company, which constructed the Pleasant Hill Town Center, donated the piece, which was a copy of an original created in 1961, which stands below the Capulet House in Verona, Italy. You can see it near Outback restaurant and across from the fish & chips place.

All of the above proves that you can have fun involving yourself and others in research at the History Center. We have a large backlog, so if you have some computer skills, and would like to join in the fun, please let us know!

Volunteers

For those who are familiar with Bill and Tillie Larkins, long-term volunteers at the History Center, it's nice to know that they were honored at the Rodgers Ranch on January 16 in an afternoon



during which they shared memories of Pleasant Hill, their long-time home.

Our volunteers continue doing a great job of entering materials into the database and researching the interesting queries we receive.

Last month, in addition to genealogical inquiries, we received inquiries regarding Charlie Chaplin, pathways in Kensington, a map of Bethel Island, Winifred Ruth Judd, and Phar Lap, a famous thoroughbred who came to Heather Farms from Australia in early 1932. In most cases, we were able to provide the information requested. New volunteers are Larry Kolano and Bill Johnson.

A volunteer opening exists for a greeter/administrative helper who could work 3-4 hours a week or longer on a regular basis. Please contact Priscilla at 925-229-1042 if you can help.

Richmond Historic Preservation Award Nominations Sought

The Historic Preservation Commission of the city of Richmond is seeking nominations for its annual awards ceremony in May. If you are aware of a worthy project in Richmond and would like a nomination form, please e-mail the *Bulletin* editor at: donaldbastin@comcast.net. Due by March 31.

In Memoriam

June Kallosser Whitesides

May 25, 1921-October 21, 2010

Betty Maffei



I first met June in 1984. She had seen the write up in the newspaper covering the opening of the History Center in Pleasant Hill and she came in to look. She was a member

of the Contra Costa County Historical Society.

The Louis Stein photographs, negatives, and slides had just been transferred to the History Center and we needed someone to organize the collection. June had worked for the California Historical Society and agreed to volunteer on Tuesdays. She called her friends at the California Historical Society for advice on prices for re-sale of photographs. She called her friends at Bancroft Library for advice regarding preservation of photos and negatives. We began by separating the negatives from the pictures. She gave classes on the preservation of photos.

June and I had so much in common. We both were born in the Bay Area -Oakland. We both met our husbands at Cal. Tom Whitesides was born in Richmond. She and Tom attended every home game. Their seats were opposite ours. Tom died in 1989. June continued to volunteer at the History Center. When the History Center moved to Martinez in 2000, she helped set up the photo department and continued to volunteer until 2003.

As a member of the California Alumni organization, Bear Backers, and the Motor Board Society, it is not surprising that June asked that in lieu of a memorial, we all remember her favorite saying—“GO BEARS.”

Maybe next year, June!

The Society also acknowledges the passing of the following members within the last several years, notice only recently being received:

Joan Shaw – April 10, 2008

Wayne Merryman – November 3, 2005

Harmon Howard – April 14, 2010

Eileen McCauley – March 18, 2005

Ruth Kirby

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:

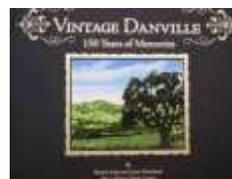
Individual \$30 Couple \$50 Sponsor \$75

Patron \$150 Corporate \$500

Benefactor \$1000 Student \$15

(Remember to look for your membership renewal date on your address label. Use your credit card-renew by phone!)

If you are a current member of the Contra Costa County Historical Society, or are thinking about becoming a member, please visit our History Center at 610 Main Street, in Martinez. We are open 3 days/week, Tuesday-Thursday, and the third Saturday of each month. We have a great



bookstore and gift shop, and are currently featuring a brand-new book, **Vintage**

Danville: 150 Years of

Memories by Beverly Lane and

Laura Grinstead. \$50.00 + tax.

From the Executive Director:



Greetings!

As Contra Costa County's tulle fog turns to the warm days of early Spring, I enjoy the scent of yellow primroses and the beauty of

fruit trees in bloom that make California Spring my favorite season. Not to mention Super Bowl Sunday—a long-held tradition in my family. It's hard to believe I've been involved with the Historical Society for one year already.

At the History Center, the number of volunteers has swelled to 17. However, more volunteers can always be "employed." Currently, we could use a volunteer occasionally to pick up or deliver materials for the History Center as well as a person who could keep up contacts with local bookstores that carry titles they buy from us.

After being exhibited at the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)'s 50th anniversary dinner, our peace quilt, created in 1985 by women from all over the county, will be exhibited in the Contra Costa County Supervisors' Chambers.

We are closer to providing our *Bulletin* by e-mail to those who requested it. I will make a first pass with the *Bulletin* you are now receiving.

Thanks to so many of you, our year-end appeal was a resounding success, bringing approximately \$5,000 to the Society.

Most of all, it is time to celebrate our 60th year as an organization. The Society was organized on April 30, 1951. A list of our Charter Members can be found on our website www.cocohistory.com.

As always, I look forward to seeing each of you at a membership meeting or in the History Center.

Yours truly, Priscilla

From the President:



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish our membership and the many friends of the Contra Costa County Historical Society a year

full of good health, happiness and wonderful opportunities. We anticipate a good year for the Historical Society. However, several challenges face the board in 2011, which we prefer to think of as opportunities.

We are pleased to welcome two new board members: John Mercurio and John Burgh. John Burgh was recently appointed to fill the remaining term of longtime Director Mario Menesini. We thank Mario for his many years of faithful and dedicated service to the historical society. Mario assures us he will continue to be available to the board when needed.

The year-end appeal was fabulously successful. We send heartfelt thanks to everyone who responded. Your generosity will assist the board, Executive Director Priscilla Couden, and her dedicated volunteers in their efforts to provide the excellent services that our members have come to expect. Your donations will help ensure that the collection is properly archived and accessible to researchers.

The board is committed to presenting interesting exhibits and providing stimulating programs. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to visit the History Center to see the East Bay Regional Park District's fabulous photographic display. On March 12, 2011 we will meet at the Pittsburg Museum for a talk by Robert Hirst, Curator of the Mark Twain Papers at The Bancroft Library. Hope to see you there!

Cheers, Andrea Blachman

