



BULLETIN

SUMMER 2013

Grand Opening!



On April 20th, the Contra Costa County Historical Society officially celebrated its grand opening at its new location at 724 Escobar St., in Martinez. Shown here at the top of the stairs, cutting the ribbon, is our County Supervisor, Federal Glover. Martinez Mayor Rob Shroder is to his right, while to his left is fellow Supervisor Karen Mitchoff. At the bottom of the stairs, from left, are: Beverly Lane, CCCHS Board member, Executive Director Priscilla Couden, and Board President, John Burgh. An estimated 120 people attended this gala event. For more information on this event, please visit our Facebook page.

MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Margaret DePriester

The Moraga Historical Society was founded October, 1965, for the purpose of researching, collecting, preserving and disseminating information about the Rancho Moraga and the Town of Moraga. The attic space of St. Mary's College Library was the group's first home. The Moraga History Center, now located



in the Moraga Library building on St. Mary's Road, contains files, historical documents and photographs pertaining to the Moraga Valley's history. Founding members of the Society were: Eleanor Dickenson, Nancy and Richard Erwin, Brother Dennis Goodman, Marilyn Harbord, Sonia and Lloyd Levitin, William Macoskill, Jean and Donald Manuel, Brother Wilfrid Mathew, Dorothy Mutnick, and Gladys and John Shally.

The original Moraga land grant, 13,316 acres, known as Rancho de Los Palos Colorados, included parts of Orinda, Moraga, Lafayette and the communities of Canyon and Redwood. This was deeded to Joaquin Moraga and his cousin, Juan Bernal, by the Mexican government in lieu of a pension for service in the military. However, the Moragas were virtually illiterate and by 1886, the family had lost their entire holdings.

An adobe house, built by Jose Joaquin Moraga about 1841, was the Moraga family's home until around 1886. The house and 2 acres are on the top of a hillside off Moraga Way, in Orinda. In 1954, the Contra Costa Historical Society placed a bronze plaque at the house, designating it as California Historical Landmark #509. The buildings are in ruins, but a recent agreement between the landowners and

the "Save The Adobe" group provides for restoring the site.

The Moraga Historical Society has 4 membership meetings a year. Several day trips and tours are arranged each year. A book, entitled "Moraga's Pride" was published by the Society and is available at the History Center.

The Society has designated 5 sites in the Town as important to the Moraga Valley's history and has marked them with historical markers – Willow Spring School, the Hacienda de las Flores, the Moraga Barn, the site of a former lake on the fields at Campolindo School, and the first townsite, on School Street. Each spring, all third grade students in the three local elementary schools tour the Town's historical sites and finish with a guided tour of our History Center. This trip follows a study of Moraga history by the classes and includes a tour of the local historical sites.



The "Wednesday" group of volunteers at the Moraga Historical Society. In front is Mary Ostrander (98 years old); Behind Mary, from left are: Margaret DePriester, Elsie Mastick, Doris DeAndre, and Pat Williams.

The Moraga Historical Society is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 1-3 pm, and by appointment. Phone: 925-377-8734. E-mail: Infoa@moragahistory.org

This is the latest in our series on the historical societies of Contra Costa County. We invite each of the historical societies in our county to advise us of upcoming events that would benefit from publication in this newsletter. Please send any such message directly to the Bulletin editor, Donald Bastin, at donaldbastin@comcast.net.

Congratulations, Kid!

You Deserve the Harriette Merrifield Forbes Award

By Mary-Ellen Jones

A brief entry for March 19th in my 1979 appointment book reads: *Traci Gibbons, 9:00, appt re Rose Hill Cemetery.* This was not an unusual entry. I had been interested in tombstones since my early teens so all researchers coming to The Bancroft Library seeking information about cemeteries were routinely referred to me.



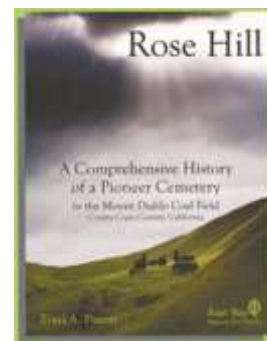
Traci Gibbons came to The Bancroft Library that morning to consult with me about an assignment she had been given as part of her new job with the East Bay Regional Park District. Her task was to create a photographic record and documentation of the seriously-vandalized and nearly-destroyed Rose Hill Cemetery in the Mount Diablo Coal Fields located within their recently-acquired land.

Traci had no clue that morning that her work assignment would turn into a never-ending search for information about the men and women who are buried in Rose Hill. It would also make her an expert on gravestones and cemeteries. I sure never suspected that this meeting would prove to be far more than a routine one. It was, in fact, the first of hundreds of uncommon conversations between us concerning cemeteries and tombstones and stone carvers and history. They continue to this day.

Her long involvement in virtually every aspect of gravestone preservation and education is well known. Traci is the go-to person with questions concerning everything from lost or found gravestones, how to restore broken stones using the most advanced professional methods and who's buried in Grant's tomb.

All of this expertise plus an extraordinary knowledge of California history were prologue to Traci's

publication of *Rose Hill: A Comprehensive History of a Pioneer Cemetery*. It is a volume only Traci could author.



I want to share a little of what I have come to know and respect about that kid who showed up in Bancroft Library's Reading Room 34 years ago.

Traci is one of the most thorough researchers I have ever known. Her tireless search for and careful interpretation of primary source materials make her work invaluable. As a result, she has virtually recreated the burial records of Rose Hill Cemetery. Additionally, she has compiled biographical information about most people buried there and has identified and researched numerous stone carvers who produced many of the stones.

Traci (Gibbons) Parent has made a lasting contribution to the history of Contra Costa County and to the State of California. The importance of her contribution to the field of gravestone studies can only grow with time. Her book on Rose Hill Cemetery is the standard by which future writings on cemeteries in California and beyond will be judged.

The Association for Gravestone Studies (AGS) will present the Forbes Award to Traci Parent at their annual awards banquet, in Salem Oregon, June 18. The letter informing Traci of her award reads in part:

The Forbes Award is presented annually by the AGS Board of Trustees to honor an individual, institution, or organization in recognition of exceptional service to the field of gravestone studies....(Traci) has made a significant contribution to the scholarship of multiple fields: gravestone studies, genealogy, cultural anthropology, and history of art, industry, environment, and medicine...Your 30-plus years of research which culminated in publication of *Rose Hill: A Comprehensive History of a Pioneer Cemetery in the Mount Diablo Coal Field, Contra Costa County, California*, is an encyclopedic work documenting people connected to the coal mine, gravestone carvers and suppliers, and the five communities surrounding Mount Diablo. Ed.

*Note: **Rose Hill** copies available at the History Center.*

Mary-Ellen Jones

The Expert at “Un-Dulling” History

Traci Parent



Mary-Ellen Jones, speaking at the retirement dinner for Traci Parent, who recently retired from her career with the East Bay Regional Park system. Photo by James Wilson

It is somewhat intimidating to write an article about someone whom I have looked up to and who has been a mentor to me for well over 30 years. Mary-Ellen Jones has been my inspiration. I first met Mary-Ellen in March 1979 while she was employed as an archivist at The Bancroft Library. I was working with the East Bay Regional Park District and was seeking information about the pioneer Rose Hill Cemetery in Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve. While talking to a park visitor in the cemetery one day, I was told that I should really speak to Mary-Ellen Jones. I did, and we then became longtime friends.

I have had the pleasure of serving with Mary-Ellen on the Contra Costa County Historical Society Board of Directors for many years. She has done much for the Historical Society. In addition to serving as a board director from 1983 to 2012, she was president of the society from 1997 to 1999. For eleven years Mary-

Ellen was the editor of the *Bulletin*, the publication of the historical society. Mary-Ellen wrote fascinating, educational, and humorous articles for the enjoyment and enlightenment of members. Her special writing style always made me laugh. As Mary-Ellen recently said to me, “There is no reason that history has to be dull.” She has taken on many responsibilities with the historical society over the years. As Director of Archives (1984-1999) Mary-Ellen supervised the archiving of materials in the History Center. As chairperson of the program committee for nearly 12 years, she meticulously planned the quarterly meetings arranging for speakers, meeting locations, and often times even organizing lunch. She was also very creative in preparing flyers for each of the events.

Mary-Ellen is a charter member of the Conference of California Historical Societies. As Regional Vice President for Region 11 of the organization, Mary-Ellen serves as an exceptional representative for the historical societies in Contra Costa County. Since 2008 she has served as the Committee Chairperson for Publications. From 2008 to 2012 she was Editor of *California Historian*, a periodical of the society and is currently the Executive Editor for that publication.

As an accomplished author, photographer, and a gravestone enthusiast, Mary-Ellen’s articles about gravestone carvers, gravestone photography, and California history have appeared in many professional publications including: the *American Association for State and Local History*; *Journal of the Butte County (California) Historical Society*; *Bancroftiana*, a publication of the Friends of The Bancroft Library; *California Historian*; and *Y Drych*, the newspaper of the Welsh people in America. Additionally Mary-Ellen has presented numerous lectures on the same subjects.

Her photographs of California tombstones have appeared in exhibits at the Sutro Library in San Francisco; Folsom (California) History Museum; University of California Extension Center Gallery in San Francisco; Mendocino County Art Association Library in Gualala, California; the University of California at Berkeley Main Library; and during the

Black Diamond Days events at Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve.

Mary-Ellen has been a recipient of several awards. In 2001, she received the Harriette Merrifield Forbes Award from the Association for Gravestone Studies for her outstanding contribution to the field of gravestone studies. Additionally she received the Regional Vice President of the Year award for outstanding achievements during 2003-2004, and the President's Award for 2010 from the Conference of California Historical Societies.

Mary-Ellen assisted me in recent years with the proofing and editing of two publications that I had written: *Images of America – Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve* (co-authored with Karen Terhune and published by Arcadia Publishing in 2009) and *Rose Hill – A Comprehensive History of a Pioneer Cemetery in Contra Costa County* (published by the East Bay Regional Park District in 2011). Mary-Ellen's assistance with these books was invaluable and I will be forever grateful for her help with these projects. She was an enormous help which was no easy feat as there are nearly 1,200 pages in the Rose Hill book alone. I was also fortunate that she gave me permission to use one of her gravestone photographs in the book.

It would take volumes to document all that Mary-Ellen has contributed to the history of Contra Costa County and California. As a CCCHS board director she kept us on track at our monthly meetings and wasn't afraid to speak what was on her mind. Without a doubt we are all fortunate to witness her contributions and dedication to the Contra Costa County Historical Society and the History Center. We honor and appreciate Mary-Ellen for the 29 years she has served on the Board of Directors. Thank you Mary-Ellen for "un-dulling" history for so many of us!

Mary-Ellen Jones recently retired from the CCCHS Board of Directors. We all join with Traci in wishing her the very best in her future activities. She will be missed. Ed.

MARIO MENESINI

Educator, Musician, Preservationist, Historian

**February 24 1922-
April 28, 2013**



Mario, a native of Martinez, held a master's degree in Marine Biology and a doctorate in science education. He taught at San Francisco State, UC Berkeley, UC Davis and Las Lomas High School-Walnut Creek. He was assistant superintendent of the Pittsburg School district when he retired from the Contra Costa County School system.

He played lead trumpet for the Alhambra Marching Band and remembered marching across the Golden Gate Bridge with his band when the bridge opened. A talented, lead musician, he played in several bands during the 1940s.

He was co-founder and executive director of the Environmental Alliance. A Central Contra Cost Sanitary District board member, he was honored in 2007 for his work with the district's youth programs.

In 2005 he joined the board of directors of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. He served on the Landmarks Committee and was proud of his work, nominating the town of Diablo and the resort of Byron Hot Springs as Historic Districts.

Mario was always available for historic interviews, helping students from third grade to college age. A member of a pioneer family--the Bonzagnis from Nortonville and Menesinis from Martinez, he could tell students about his father's business, his growing up in Martinez with such energy, his students could see the business and the streets.

The staff and members of the Historical Society are fortunate to have experienced his talents and skills.

Betty Maffei

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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___ 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

Your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter via e-mail please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042

Consider including the CCCHS in your estate planning. Bequests from a will or trust are simple to arrange, completely revocable, and tax deductible.

Walk With Us

Our Fall Membership meeting will not be our usual sit-down affair. Igor Skaredoff, Board President of Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and member of Friends of Alhambra Creek will guide members of the Contra Costa County Historical Society on an evening watershed walk.

September 7, 2013 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

3 miles max/400 ft elevation gain.

Meet: 5 p.m. 5026 Alhambra Valley Road

Begin walk at Strentzel Meadows, along canyons, fire roads and Mt. Wanda. Wear sturdy shoes; carry water.

Finish at twilight--flashlights might come in handy.

Donations accepted

R.S.V.P. (925) 229-1042 Questions: 925-788-6825

An Invitation from the Contra Costa County Library:



Join us for our 100th Birthday Celebration on July 21, 2013 from 12:00 - 5:00 p.m. Pleasant Hill Park, 147 Gregory Lane in Pleasant Hill

Performances by
Comedic Juggler
Thomas John
Maori

Mo Ake Tonu
Dance Troupe

Diablo Valley College's Rock Rhythm & Blues
Antioch Music Academy
Concord Kung Fu Academy

Activities for Everyone!

Contra Costa County Animal Services Dog Adoptions

Contra Costa County Sheriff's SWAT Team

East Bay Parks Mobile Visitor Center

Lawrence Hall of Science

U.S. Postal Service

Diablo Valley Stamp Club

Dr. Jim Hale Wildlife Biologist

Spare the Air

Contra Costa Chess Club

And of course, representatives of the Contra Costa County Historical Society will be there

For more info, visit: guides.ccclib.org/July21st



Dear Friends,

Have you ever experienced the thrill that comes when you find something important to you that you had no idea was there? Just today, a researcher looking into the history of one of her ancestors serendipitously found in the

same box a folder pertaining to her grandmother ... from an entirely different branch of the family, not immediately sought after but exciting to unearth! Such events occur almost daily at the History Center.

During these last few months, our Board of Directors has begun an initiative to support our many County historical societies... with our next collaboration a book signing by Professor Ken Tye, who has published an historical novel based on his growing up in Port Chicago and on his research at the History Center. We are asking each local historical society to send information about themselves that we can post and distribute. We will participate in the 100th Anniversary celebration of the Contra Costa County Libraries that takes place on July 21. Plans are afoot for a hike of the Martinez watershed in September as well as for a new type of gathering in the fall.

In the archives, the big news is our new large-scale scanner, purchased with funds from the Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation, to be used to preserve our oldest newspapers. Soon to be added to our location also is a stand-alone computer funded by the Martinez Community Foundation that will enable the public to access our database directly. And volunteers entering information into the Veale collection database feel that they may finish their mammoth task of twelve years' duration by the end of the year!

As always, I am working to fund the budget needs of the Society, and I want to express my profound thanks to those of you who have donated funds to help us meet those needs.

Please come by soon to see our archive in action!

Priscilla



“Summertime, and the Livin’ is Easy...” So goes the 1935 George Gershwin song. Once again we are in the season of baseball, BBQs and a life suddenly filled with kids that have been cooped up in school all year.

Maybe there is a message that summer is defined by holidays rich in meaning in the history of where we live.

As predicted when we relocated to our new building in January, every aspect of the Society’s service to county-wide residents has grown. All the members, the battalion of our (sainted!) volunteers, your Executive Director and Board of Directors have risen to the challenge of making the most of these new opportunities: the expanded History Center services and results are already evident. Hopefully, in your action-packed life you are finding at least a hint of the joy of summer “easy livin’ ” ...but around the History Center excitement is the order of the day!

A new display near the entry illustrates the location, hours and contact information for each of the 22 other Historical Societies in the County. Soon to be added are QR codes (little black squares that many cellphones can scan and read) for each one. That will enable visitors to instantly pick up and store information on the location and offerings of their local society. I hope this small gesture will foster increased use of all 23 Societies, and help the many wonderful partner organizations that do so much so well on the front line of preserving our heritage.

Organizations that prove to be sustainable benefit from a Strategic Plan, a document that defines broad objectives for the future. The Board envisions a process that will take a year or two, to examine potential long term goals and the means to sustain ourselves. Developing a flexible Plan to guide us into the future will add a new dimension to the challenge, satisfaction and fun that has made the History Center such a vibrant repository not of just the past, but of all which is yet to come.

John

