



BULLETIN

Winter 2014-2015

Annual Membership Meeting A Great Success *Editor's Report*

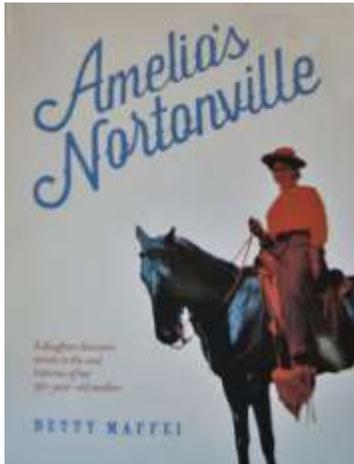


The CCCHS annual membership meeting took place this year on Saturday, December 6, at the Town Meeting Hall in Danville. A lot of activity was crammed into the (nominally) 3-hour event, which included lunch, four speakers (covering two new books), ratification of board elections and minor by-law changes, a raffle, speeches, a tour of historic Danville, and a visit to the nearby Museum of the San Ramon Valley. And, oh yes, we threw in a board meeting for extra measure.

The meeting was kicked off with short welcoming speeches from President John Burgh and Executive

Director Priscilla Couden. A brief overview of our financial situation was presented by Treasurer Steve James, who pointed out that our year has been a good one and that we are in relatively good financial shape. But no good numbers-guy leaves it at that, and we were reminded that the past two years have been exceptional in that our landlord has only charged us for 10 months of rent. As of 2015 we will be responsible for the full 12 months, which will place an additional burden on our fund-raising capacity. This was not a surprise, of course, but our ability to generate more than modest sums has yet to be tested.

After a simple but tasty lunch of lasagna and salad, we were treated to two very excellent presentations. First off, Betty Maffei introduced her new book, *Amelia's Nortonville*, which is an extended interview of her



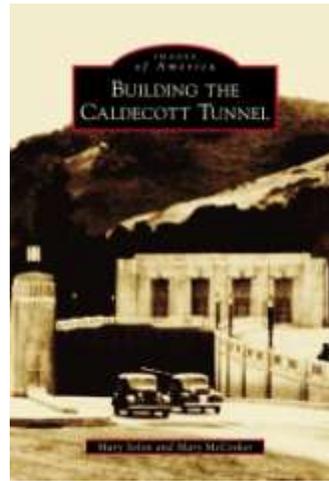
mother, Amelia Ginochio. Amelia's family immigrated from Italy in the latter part of the 19th century, and settled into the little community of Nortonville. Through her stories and memories, Amelia recreates a world long

gone, full of self-sufficient men and women, living in a rapidly changing environment. Betty's daughter, Janiele, quickly took over the presentation and displayed a keen knowledge of her own family history and the history of the town of Nortonville, now a ghost town.



Following Betty's and Janiele's slide show, and without skipping a beat, the two Marys, Mary McCosker (left) and Mary

Solon, of the Lafayette Historical Society, presented slides from their recently published book (Arcadia Press) titled *Building The Caldecott Tunnel*. The book, in fact, is about the building of five tunnels, from the original Kennedy Tunnel, which opened in 1903, to the fourth bore, which just opened a little over a year ago. In between, we learned about bores 1 and 2,



which opened in 1937, and bore 3, which opened in 1961.

Mary McCosker took us through the principal parts of their book, with lots of information concerning the engineering, geological, and economic problems encountered in the

building of the tunnels. Mary Solon followed with some tidbits that were not included in the book, and some images that also did not make it. It was a very detailed presentation, and if there were a fault, it was that we learned so much that it was hardly necessary to buy a book!

The formal meeting was wrapped up with a drawing for the books on display, as well as one of the society's flash drives, which comes with the society's logo (they make great stocking stuffers).



Following the meeting, members were encouraged to take a self-guided walking tour of several historic Danville structures, and to visit the nearby Museum of the San Ramon Valley, currently featuring its



"Christmas Memories" exhibit, which includes a great model train display, a sure-fire hit

with the kids. <http://www.museumsvr.org/>

With over 65 members in attendance, this event was generally conceded to be one of the best that we have put together. Many thanks to all who helped make the event so successful. A special thanks goes out to Tara Weber, who went above and beyond to make sure that everything was arranged perfectly.

To purchase a copy of *Amelia's Nortonville*, visit the History Center in Martinez, or visit: <http://www.cocohistory.org>. *Building The Caldecott Tunnel* is available through many sources, but to help support the Lafayette Historical Society, it is suggested that the book be purchased through them. Visit them at: <http://www.lafayettehistory.org>.

2014 Accomplishments

A year of reaching out to the Community

... Priscilla Conden, Executive Director

- Arranged Contra Costa County Historical Society Authors evening at Swan's Fine Books, Walnut Creek
- Placed historical photographs on Facebook every Tuesday
- Published articles in the *Contra Costa Lawyer*, magazine of the Contra Costa Bar Association
- Painted and renewed our Bookstore and created a new sign for it
- Created an on-line Bookstore using e-crater
- Completed large format searchable scans from our Bookeye 4 Scanner for the years 1864-1890 of the *Contra Costa Gazette* and placed them on our Public Access Computer Terminal
- Partnered with Walnut Creek 100, Walnut Creek Historical Society, and Gilbert Herrera on a large photo exhibit at the Walnut Creek Art & Wine Festival
- Presented a display at the US Bank in Martinez
- Installed a permanent exhibit regarding the Archives
- Received matching gifts from Chevron retirees and Bank of America employee
- Partnered with Contra Costa County Libraries on *Remember and Go*, an on-line resource designed to provide access to CC County Historical Materials: <http://rememberandgo.ccclib.org/>

- Held board meetings at the East County Historical Society and at Rosie the Riveter
- Welcomed a veterans group, professional genealogists, and county employees with tours of the Center
- Sent a speaker to the Superior Court Docent Lunch regarding the history of the Contra Costa County Courts
- Provided tables at Heritage Day at the John Marsh Park and the Ygnacio Valley Library's Information Fair
- Launched Betty Maffei's *Amelia's Nortonville*
- Completed distribution of Dr. Epstein's *In Sickness and Health*

In Addition, we...

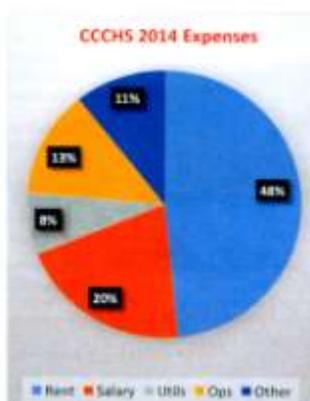
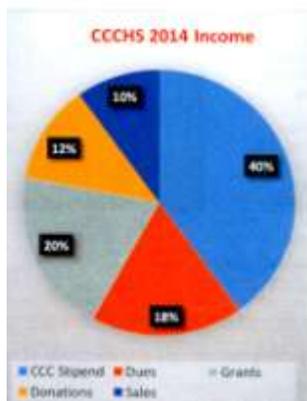
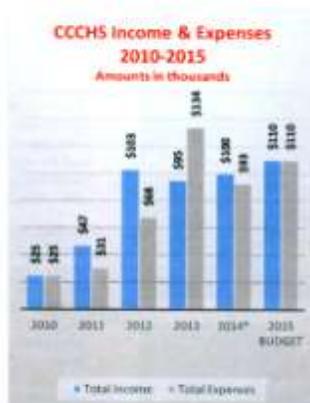
- Raised more than \$5,000 in our Summer Appeal
- Increased volunteer hours by 18% over last year
- Received grants from the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation, the Thomas J. Long Foundation, Shell, and the Martinez Community Foundation, as well as sponsorships from the Chevron Federal Credit Union and the US Bank
- Evaluated our organization in a Self-Study that was preliminary to the Museum Assessment Program's assessor, who came to the History Center August 27 and 28. The report that the assessor, Katarina Spears, presents will provide the Society with a blueprint for action during the next few years. The visit was completely funded by a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services and administered by the American Alliance of Museums.

An Eventful Year of serving 19 Cities and Contra Costa County

..... John Burgh, President

Thanks to all of you, the Society had a banner year in 2014. We set new records in community engagement, as illustrated by the hours contributed by our wonderful volunteer docents, researchers, and the myriad skilled hands needed to maintain a large collection such as ours. Graphic data follows. A Complete report is available at the History Center.

CCCHS Financial Summary



<http://mam-massouthernfamily.blogspot.com/>
and "My Trails into the Past"
<http://mytrailsintothepast.blogspot.com/>.

Editor's Note: There are still vacancies on the CCCHS Board. If you are a member of the society, in good standing, you are eligible to apply to be a board member. Please contact us at: director@cocohistory.org.

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

Date: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Apt. # _____

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 Sustaining \$?

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, or e-mail info@cocohistory.com.

Please consider CCCHS in your estate planning. It is simple, and any gift is tax deductible. We have a Schwab account that makes it easier for members and others to donate shares of stock to the Society, a good way to make a year-end or other contribution.

100 Year Anniversary, Pan Pacific International Exposition in 2015!
More to come in Spring issue of the Bulletin

Meet New Board Member, Lisa Gorrell

Lisa Gorrell has been volunteering at the History



Center as one of the regular Tuesday crew since she retired in 2011. She created a finding aid for the newspapers at the archives and currently fills genealogy requests. She is also working on additional finding aids.

Lisa has been seriously researching her family for nearly twenty years. It was the birth of her daughters that began the journey connecting the past and the future generations. One trip to Sutro Library to use microfilm of the 1920 census and finding her grandfather's family got her hooked. She is currently the Recording Secretary for the California Genealogical Society and recent past-president of the Contra Costa County Genealogical Society. She enjoys giving genealogy presentations and writing about her family on two blogs: "Mam-ma's Southern Family"



Twilight of an Old Boat: The Ferry *Garden City*

Donald Bastin

Recently, while sorting through some of my old black and white photographs, taken in the 1960s and 1970s, I came across a series of images of an old ferry hulk, the *Garden City*, lying in the mud in the Carquinez Strait. I had completely forgotten about the pictures, and became curious about the history of the *Garden City* and its subsequent fate.

Living as we do, around one of the largest and most

magnificent bays in the world, it is not surprising that ships and boats form a large and romantic part of our local history. And it is the ferry boat that touches our lives most directly; all of us have some experience of taking a ride on a ferry. Passenger ferries still ply the bay, but car ferries are a thing of the past. Many of our older residents remember commuting to San Francisco or Marin, often in cars, before the bridges were built. The *Garden City*, I learned, was on the Bay long before the first car chugged up the hills of San Francisco.

The *Garden City* entered service in June of 1879, operated and owned by the South Pacific Coast Railroad. The SPCR was a narrow gauge line running between Santa Cruz and Alameda, with a connection in Alameda to San Francisco. The ferry was originally fitted with narrow gauge rails to allow trains and cars to be carried on board. In 1887 the SPCR was bought by Southern Pacific. Along with the *Garden City*, SP also acquired two other ferries: the *Newark* and the *Bay City*. All three boats were side-wheelers and all three were put into service at about the same time. The *Garden City*, with a length of 208 feet, and a tonnage of 1080, was the smallest of the trio. Her “walking beam” steam engine produced 625 horsepower, as opposed to 800 hp for the *Bay City* and 1200 for the *Newark*.

Although designed to carry rail cars, the *Garden City* could and did carry passengers, and was used as a relief boat when the other two vessels were out of service due to repair needs. She was also used as a relief boat for the auto ferry runs to San Francisco on the old “Creek Route.” The Creek Route referred to the run between the Oakland

Estuary (with a landing at what is now Jack London Square) and San Francisco.

On Christmas morning, 1921, the *Garden City* was heavily damaged while crossing the bay in a full gale. She was subsequently retired from active service, but repeatedly recalled for temporary work, due to the very heavy traffic during the 1920s. Her last run was made in 1929; she was then moored at a pier in Eckley, in the Carquinez Straits, and served as a fishing “resort” for many years. Probably it was used as a platform to fish for sturgeon and striped bass. The little town of Eckley, which no longer exists, was located just a little east of Crockett, and its main business was associated with the ferries that crossed the straits prior to the construction of the auto bridge in 1927. No longer needed as a ferry crossing site, the townspeople drifted away, many relocating to Crockett.

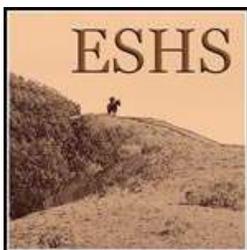


At the time that I happened upon the hulk of the *Garden City*, probably around 1970, the boat had long been abandoned and was in an advanced state of deterioration. But she still bore the clean and functional lines of a classic, side-wheel ferry, and the fact that she was nearly 100 years old was a testament to her stout and honest construction. She may well have remained in that state for many more years, but in 1983 the old girl was burned to the water line, a likely victim of arson. Her bones are still visible, though, at low tide.

On November 8th of this year, the East Bay Regional Parks District officially re-opened the Carquinez Shoreline Drive, which is part of the Carquinez Shoreline Regional Park. Many trails are open to the public, allowing unparalleled views of the strait, Benicia, the Sacramento River, and, of course, the old Eckley town site, with its new fishing pier (no license required). So if you are out that way, stop for a refreshing walk and pay your respects to the remains of one of San Francisco Bay’s old-time ferries, the *Garden City*.



El Sobrante Historical Society



Donald Bastin

The first meeting of the El Sobrante Historical Society took place in my living room on the evening of Wednesday, February 23, 2011. There were three of us: myself, Maurice Abraham, and Steve James. In a month we would be joined by a fourth member, Lyle Miller. We all shared a long history in El Sobrante. My family had moved into a brand new housing development in the area in 1955, and I had entered the brand new De Anza High School in the same

year, as a 7th grader (the school accommodated 6 grades for several years). All of us except Lyle, grew up in El Sobrante and graduated from De Anza in the 1960s. What brought us together was a common love of history and a desire to capture the history of our town. About a year after our first meeting, we published the history of El Sobrante as part of the Images of America series, through Arcadia Press. This generated a lot of interest in our group.

El Sobrante is not an incorporated city. Situated between Pinole, Richmond, and Orinda, it is technically defined as a census-designated place (CDP). Many of its residents are in fact within the

boundaries of the city of Richmond, but stubbornly remain attached to their El Sobrante identity. With these reluctant Richmondites, the total population of the El Sobrante community is around 25,000.

We are a young group, but have collected much information, many images, and many artifacts that help tell the story of our community. Like the Pinole HS, we are a “museum without walls,” having no fixed place to show our stuff. So we make do by putting up displays, both permanent and temporary, in the local library and in local businesses, like the Mechanics Bank. We are also happy to give slideshow presentations whenever requested.

The name El Sobrante comes from the old Rancho El Sobrante, granted to the Castro brothers, Victor and Juan Jose, in 1841. The phrase is commonly translated as “the leftovers,” but is more accurately translated as “surplus” or “unclaimed.” The word “sobrante” is common on old Mexican land grants, and such surplus land was a device to defuse ownership disputes, serving as a “buffer” between uncertain boundaries. Unfortunately, the El Sobrante grant was situated squarely between existing grants and therefore dispute was unavoidable. The resulting legal haggles went on for decades and by the late 1800s, the Castros had perhaps 500-600 acres remaining, out of an original 18,000 acre parcel.

But the real history of El Sobrante begins with the onset of World War II, as workers from around the country swarmed into the bay area to work in the shipyards. What was a thinly populated area of perhaps 100 people in 1939, was a bustling town of 7000 in 1950. The open, hilly area naturally attracted people from a rural background, who were stubbornly independent and self-reliant. People are still coming to El Sobrante for the same reasons.

Part of our continuing series on the historical societies of Contra Costa County

For more information, visit our website at:

<https://sites.google.com/site/elsobrantehistoricalsociety/>

Final Message from our Outgoing President

One of the highlights this year has been the completion of the first formal Museum Assessment in our 63-year history. This was a guided self-evaluation conducted through the prestigious American Alliance of Museums. That exercise pointed out just how many different elements must operate well to maintain vibrant education in historical preservation, and an accessible and perpetual archive. To no surprise, with input from a full range of volunteers, staff, and Board, it was clear that our wonderful success to date will fuel even better service and results as we go forward. While only a few of these many activities can be captured by numbers, all are rich in bettering the future by learning from the past, having clear beneficial impact on future generations, and generating excitement for those researching the history of their families or the County community.



We all define success in different ways. In some fields, it is easily measured with numbers: the athlete has wins and losses, salesmen track customers and volume, people who seek followings for any purpose tabulate those that come in the door. In contrast, it is not easy to find a metric that captures your achievements as Society members and volunteers that operate the History Center. In fact, the aspects of operations that cannot be reduced to numbers are to my mind the most exciting parts of what we do. (Better stated, of ***what you all make possible!***)

One sure definition of success is hanging around with amazing people.....and anyone who serves as President of this Society is immersed in that wondrous world every day. Thanks for extending me the honor of serving as your President. I look forward to continuing the exhilarating ride of participating in the Society!

Thank you, John, for your leadership! While our by-laws limit a president's term to two years, John remains on the board.

