



A Very Special Evening With David McCullough

Above, author David McCullough, with CCCHS

Executive Director Priscilla Couden, and Treasurer Steven James

The Contra Costa County Historical Society received a special honor this year, when it was chosen as the non-profit partner for the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation's *Newsmakers* Speaker series program. The speaker this year was renowned author and historian David McCullough. Mr. McCullough has

twice won the Pulitzer Prize and has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Whether or not you have read any of his best-selling books, you are no doubt familiar with his voice, as he narrated the PBS Civil War series, by Ken Burns.

As part of the special designation, the Society was awarded 20 tickets to the speaking event, which was held on the evening of November 2. As an added bonus, ticket-holders were invited to attend an exclusive private reception with the author, prior to the talk. Yours truly, along with eager spouse, happily paid the \$100 per ticket fee (proceeds, of course, go to support the work of the Society). At the reception, Mr. McCullough proved to be warm and affable, and eager to talk about his books, including his most recent work on the history of the Wright Brothers. He managed to shake hands with everyone in the room and seemed genuinely pleased with the response that his engagement had generated. He signed several books that members had brought with them.

for the future. While he had a lectern arranged for him, he ignored it, walking about the stage without any notes whatever, telling stories and engaging the audience with his humor, wit, and grandfatherly charm. While he is 82 years old, he never faltered for a moment, keeping the audience completely in his hands for over an hour. It was over too soon.

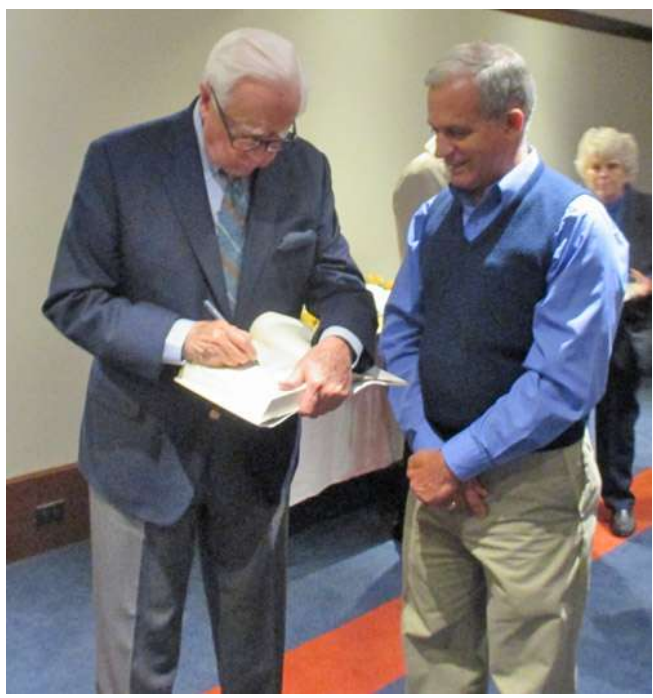
When asked what new work he is planning, Mr. McCullough stated that he had no idea. He never knows what he is going to write about next. But like all his other works, it will be something that no one else has done, about a story that has not yet been told. When he starts out, he never knows where the chase will lead, or how the story will turn out. "It's fun," he says.

Richmond Museum of History Secures Priceless Addition to its Collection *Editor*



Victor Arnautoff was a noted muralist, born in Russia, who completed notable works during the 1930s, many for the WPA (he often inserted his portrait in his works, as in this Coit Tower mural). He worked with Diego Rivera,

who greatly influenced his style. In 1934 he was appointed technical director of the Coit Tower Murals Project, and his works are still prominently displayed in that well-known San Francisco landmark. He was commissioned to create murals for five U.S. Post Office buildings. One of these was the newly constructed facility on Nevin Avenue, in Richmond, California. Titled "Richmond, An Industrial City," the piece was installed in March of 1941.



David McCullough signing a book brought by board member John Mercurio.

Following the reception, the group joined a larger, general audience in the theater, to hear Mr. McCullough talk about many things—his books, his recent best-seller on the Wright Brothers, his opinion of the general state of historical knowledge in this country (lamentable), his theory of the nature of history (nothing had to happen the way it did, and people are more important than dates), and his hope

Huge Mural Goes Up at Post Office

On exhibition at the Richmond post office today is a large mural depicting the life of Richmond as it is at the present.

The mural, which is on the wall above Postmaster L. J. Thomas' office, is 20 feet long and 10 feet high. Among the various scenes on the canvas are a graphic view of the Richmond waterfront, an industrial scene, a drawing of Tank Farm Hill showing some of the Standard Oil tanks, a picture of the high school, and a scene indicating the shopping district of the city.

The mural was painted by Victor M. Arnautoss, professor of art at Stanford University, and was put up in the post office yesterday.

While the local paper got the spelling of Victor's name wrong, and was a little off in the dimensions of the piece (actually 13' 4" x 6' 6") it was still a large mural. The mural remained in the Richmond Post Office for 35 years, until 1976, when

action. She contacted the former postmaster, Al Martinez, who put her in touch with a janitor, Earic Bohanon, who worked at the office. "Earic went poking around the basement and found a huge crate," says McCrary. "The crate was clearly marked as the mural packed by Nathan Zakheim in October 1976." Nathan, it turns out, was the son of Bernard Zakheim, who was also an artist and who had worked with Victor. The result was that Nathan took great care to carefully store the valuable art work, and even ensured that the crate's contents would not be damaged by water. The mural was thus preserved when water flooded the basement in the years that the crate sat, unmolested, in the dark.

This does not mean that the mural is undamaged or can be viewed in its present condition. It has many condition issues, but, overall, considering the years of neglect, it is in surprising good condition, and the colors are brilliant. Still, it must be carefully conserved. It is presently in the hands of a noted conservator, where it will remain, McCrary estimates, for about a year. The estimate for the complete restoration is around \$25,000, but it could go higher. The value of the mural is conservatively estimated to be around \$100,000, but is probably much more than that. But for the city of Richmond, and for its museum, the piece is priceless.

Hopefully, the Arnautoff mural will go on display later next year. A section of the museum has already been set aside for its unveiling. Director McCrary is justly proud of the museum's new acquisition, which is on loan from the postal service for a period of 25 years (with the expectation that this period will be extended indefinitely). She should be proud of herself. Without her persistence and perseverance, it is likely that the Arnautoff painting would still be sitting in the dark.

If you would like to more about the mural and the progress on its restoration, or would like to contribute to the restoration work, contact the Richmond Museum of History, at 510-235-7387. Or go to:

www.richmondmuseum.org

renovations made removal necessary.



Arnautoff Mural in Richmond PO, 1953

After the mural was removed, it simply disappeared. Until October 2014, it was assumed to be lost. However, in that month, the executive director of the Richmond Museum of History, Melinda McCrary, heard about the missing artifact and decided to take

Mary Patten: Heroine of the Pacific Coast

Editor



On November 15, 1856, the clipper ship *Neptune's Car*, 134 days out of New York, entered San Francisco Bay. At the helm was a 19 year-old girl, Mary Patten. Mary was the wife of the captain, Joshua Patten, who

had taught his wife, at her urging, the fine points of navigation. Mary put her training to good use, as her husband was suffering from tuberculosis, and while off Cape Horn, he became delirious and unable to command his vessel. What to do? Normally, in such situations, the first mate would have taken over, but he had proven to be unreliable and incompetent, and Joshua did not trust him. When the mate's behavior became mutinous, Mary took over the ship's command. In brutal, stormy conditions, Mary appealed to the crew to follow her lead, and allow her to captain the vessel to San Francisco. What she said is not known, but after her appeal, all the men, rough and

hardened sailors, agreed to follow the orders of this little girl.

Gold Rush San Francisco hailed



Mary as the "Heroine of Cape Horn." News of her accomplishment quickly traveled to the East, where the New York Daily Tribune described her as being "among the noble band of women who, by their heroic bearing, under great trial and suffering, have

won for themselves imperishable fame."

But Mary was only thinking of her husband and speedily returned with him to the east coast on the next available steamer. Sadly, in spite of her constant care, he expired within a matter of months, deaf, blind, and never aware that his wife had given birth to his son. Oh yes, did we mention that Mary was six months pregnant when she piloted the ship into San Francisco Bay?

There is no happy ending to this story. While Mary had enjoyed a brief period of fame, and the ship's insurance firm had awarded her \$1000, she studiously avoided the limelight and lived alone with her little son. To add to her burdens, Mary had contracted the tuberculosis that had killed her husband. She died in Boston at the age of 24.

Meet the New Board Member

Oliver Bray was raised in Martinez and has Contra Costa County history in his blood. He is the great-grandson of Sheriff R. R. Veale; grandson of A.F. Bray, Sr. (past-president and co-founder of CCCHS); and A.F. Bray, Jr., also a past-president.



Oliver is also a third-generation attorney in Contra Costa County following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He has practiced trusts and estates law in Martinez for over 30 years and has been involved with many historical estates including that of Ruth Galindo in Concord, the Thomas Ranch in Pittsburg, the Murphy Ranch in Clayton, and many estates involving Spanish ranchos in Martinez and West County. He is one of the owners of the Rodeo Marina and owns and operates a vineyard and winery in the historic gold country of Amador County.

Oliver Bray was appointed to fill an open position, created when a former member resigned.

Welcome aboard, Mr. Bray! – editor.

On Saturday, September 26, a group of CCCHS members were invited to visit the Rodgers Ranch Heritage Center in Pleasant Hill. Following the visit, the group's president, Denise Koroslev, was asked to submit the following article as part of our continuing series on the historical societies of Contra Costa County.

Rodgers Ranch Heritage Center



Where the past
sustains the future
Denise Koroslev

In 1868, Patrick and Mary Rodgers purchased 149 acres in an area now known as Pleasant Hill, hoping to succeed in California's other "gold rush," growing wheat. Patrick and Mary had moved from Tuolumne County with their three children, John, James and Rosemary purchasing a small farmhouse and granary built by Dr. Hiram Smith the previous year and joining 8 other local families.

A daughter, Sara Jane (Sadie) was born at the ranch in 1870 and the farmhouse was expanded to include a large living area and a kitchen. Wheat production dwindled about the same time that Patrick died in 1891. Various market conditions forced local farmers to change their crops to grapes, nuts and fruits. Mary moved in with her daughter, Sadie, in 1907 and the Rodgers property was divided between the four children, with James getting the portion with the farmhouse and wheat barn. James was a lawyer, working with Judge Bray in Martinez and did not wish to live in the family home, so it was sold.

The property changed hands several times until 1937 when author Alice Tisdale Hobart and her husband Earle purchased the property. Alice was known for her books about China, where she and Earle lived while he worked for Standard Oil. Her book, *Oil for the Lamps of China*, won awards and was made into a film in 1935. Alice and Earle built a larger home behind the Rodgers farmhouse which was featured in the 1939 *Sunset* magazine. During this time Alice wrote two books including *The Cup and The Sword*,

about a French family residing in Napa during the '20s. This book was also made into a movie in 1959 under the title "This Earth is Mine."

When WWII broke out, Earle went into the service and the property was sold to Dr. Kaho Daily, a prominent Richmond doctor, who used the ranch as a summer home. He eventually retired to the ranch and lived there until 1978 when the property (now around 18 acres) was sold to Robert McAdam. Robert McAdam, Jr. lived in the farmhouse as caretaker and the larger Hobart house was subdivided and sold.

When Davidon Homes applied for a development on the property, members of the Pleasant Hill Historical Society sought to save the farmhouse and wheat barn, noting the architectural and historical significance of the site. A little over 2 acres were dedicated to the Pleasant Hill Recreation and Park District, the current owner of the site; Friends of Rodgers Ranch, a non-profit organization, was formed in 1991 to raise restoration funds. The site was approved for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The farmhouse has been restored and is now home to many groups including the Northern California Unit of The Herb Society of America and the Pleasant Hill Historical Society. The wheat barn was dismantled in 2006 with the usable wood saved and stored on the property until funds are raised to rebuild it. In 2012 an Urban Farm was developed on the hill behind the house with Master Gardener Marian Woodard and her husband John Matthesen teaching students and community members sustainable gardening methods.

Friends of Rodgers Ranch, now known as Rodgers Ranch Heritage Center, provide the community a place to learn about the history of the area and information on sustainable living. Join us as we continue this preservation project located at 315 Cortsen Rd. in Pleasant Hill. Volunteers are always needed and welcome for our committees and as docents. Please check out our website to learn more.

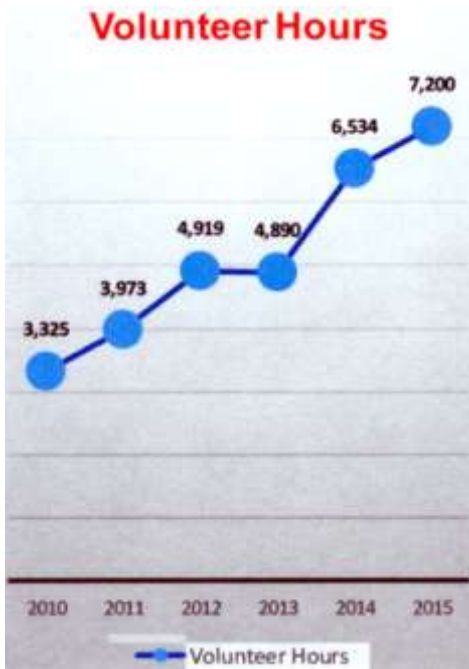
www.rodgersranch.org

General Membership Meeting Notes



The CCCHS held its annual general membership meeting on Saturday, December 5. As the previous meeting had turned out so well, it was decided to again hold the meeting in the old Town Hall, in Danville. The turnout was modest, but respectable. President Scott Saftler, shown above, detailed the year's progress, principally in terms of the number of documents that have been digitized and made more accessible to the public. Scott was followed in turn by our executive director, Priscilla Couden, and our treasurer,

Steve James. While Steve naturally pointed to our generally positive financial position, both Priscilla and Steve had high praise for the work and participation of our volunteers. In Steve's words, "Without our volunteers, we are just a climate-controlled storage facility."



Following a very tasty luncheon (thanks to our volunteer Tara Weber), our guest speaker (and fellow board member) Beverly Lane, gave a well-prepared



slide show on her new book, on the history of the town of San Ramon. Entitled "**San Ramon Chronicles: Stories of Bygone Days,**" the work takes a long view of the development of the town of San Ramon, following its historical trajectory from pre-historic times, with now extinct mammal life, touching on the Ohlone and Miwok peoples, through the agricultural period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and on to the development of a modern town of 80,000 people. Beverly's new book is available at the History Center in Martinez.

The day was capped by a raffle, with many prizes donated by local businesses. Here we see treasurer Steve James calling out the lucky numbers. A good time was had by all!



One item that was overlooked in all the bustle was the announcement of the voting results of the four board members whose terms had expired. We are pleased to say that all four, Webb Johnson, Lisa Gorrell, John Mercurio, and Tara Weber, were retained and will be rejoining us next year.



From The President:

Our annual report this year focused on our reach into the community. From my initial presentation to the county Board of Supervisors through our being named as non-profit partner for the David McCullough speech at the Leshner Foundation's "Newsmakers Speaker Series", it has been an eventful year. For those that haven't seen the annual report, you can find a PDF version of the report online by going to this address:

www.tinyurl.com/ccchs2015

I'd like to welcome Atty. Oliver Bray as the newest member of the board. Atty. Bray was selected to fill an open spot on our board. If the surname sounds familiar, it should. Oliver's grandfather, Justice A. F. Bray, was one of the founders of the Society and its first President, and his father, Judge A. F. Bray, Jr., also served as President of the Society. Oliver follows in their footsteps on our board, and I look forward to working with him on many issues facing CCCHS in the future.

I would also like to thank outgoing Board member Stan Davis for his gentle good humor and attention to the details of running our organization over the past few years. Stan has decided to step away from the board at the end of his term to "pursue other interests", mainly grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Enjoy your family, Stan, and thanks again for your service.

In closing, I'd like to wish each and every one of our Society members a great holiday season and a healthy, happy and prosperous 2016. *Scott*

From The Executive Director:

Happy Holidays to You!

As the days grow shorter and the year nears its close, I want to thank every one of you who have contributed to making this a truly wonderful year for the Society and to encourage those of you who have



not yet made a gift to do so as soon as possible. We are beginning a fund for the fire detection system and will keep you informed as to its progress. Our archives continue to grow with many new acquisitions. Our County Assessment Books and the Superior Court books are being thoroughly re-inventoried, and new indexes are appearing on our Public Access Computer Terminal (PACT) and on our website. I would like to continue our upward journey in 2016, but to do so, we need your continuing support. Please give generously before this year is up. Sincerely, Priscilla

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Please consider CCCHS in your estate planning. It is simple, and any gift is tax-deductible. Also, 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.

