



# BULLETIN

Winter 2017



## **Annual Membership Meeting The Most Successful in Our History**

The CCCHS annual membership meeting was held this year at the Diablo Country Club, in Diablo, California. This beautiful and historic venue was made possible through the efforts of David Mackesey, Club director for the past 6 years and president from 2012 to 2014. David spent a great deal of time in our History Center, doing research for

his book, *From Country Estate To Country Club, The History of Diablo Country Club*. The relationship between David and our Center proved to be mutually beneficial, and led to a member tour of the club last June. The tour was a revelation to our members and volunteers, and led to the site's selection for our annual membership meeting on December 3.

In fact, it was a conversation with David about speaking at one of our “Author in the Archives” events that led to David’s suggestion that the talk be held at the Country Club. David was instrumental in securing the space and the substantial discounts which enabled CCCHS to hold the annual event at DCC.

Seats were quickly sold out, and we had a total turnout of 100. We had two wonderful speakers. The first, naturally enough, was David Mackesey, who talked about his book, the evolution of the Diablo Country Club, and the Club’s relationship to Mt. Diablo and its preservation. Following David, Seth Adams, the Land Conservation Director for the group **Save Mt. Diablo**, spoke at length about the decades-long effort to save Mt. Diablo from development. Employed by the group since 1988, Mr. Adams has authored a history of Mt. Diablo, which can be found at the group’s website, at: <http://www.savemountdiablo.org/>. A brief history of the country club may be found at: <https://www.diablocc.org/history>. David Mackesey’s book is available for purchase on-line, through Amazon.com.



*Seth Adams, left, and David Mackesey, answering questions regarding the histories of Mt. Diablo and the Diablo Country Club.*

A highlight of the membership event was our first-ever silent auction. Over 25 items were offered for bid. Among the offerings was an estate planning package, valued at \$2000. This was our most substantial donation, and was made possible through the generosity of our board member Oliver Bray, a

local attorney. Other offerings included a genealogical research package, valued at \$200, which made available the expert assistance of our very own Lisa Gorrell (another board member). In addition, the auction featured various hotel and tour packages, some with wine tasting, some original art, and even a custom cake.



*Checking out the auction table*

A summary of the year’s accomplishments were presented by our Director, Priscilla Couden, our outgoing President, Scott Saftler, and our Treasurer, Steve James. All agreed that it had been a significant and busy year, in which we held many public events, unveiled a new exhibit, made significant progress on making more of our extensive archive available to the public, grew our volunteer staff, and managed to keep our financial head above water.

Total revenue for the day, including seats sold and income from the auction, was just under \$7,000. Naturally, our net was somewhat less than this, but nonetheless, the event was far more successful than any previous general membership meeting that we have held. And everything went smoothly, thanks largely to the professionalism of our event planner (and board member), Tara Weber. And much thanks to all the members and volunteers who put together our auction list and helped to set up for the event.

A very special thank-you to our speakers David Mackesey and Seth Adams, and to the Diablo Country Club.

## Solving A Culinary History Mystery

The full version of the following article was printed in the Fall 2007 edition of **Repast** ([www.culinaryhistoriansannarbor.org](http://www.culinaryhistoriansannarbor.org)) authored by Robert W. Brower, an attorney and culinary historian living in El Sobrante. The article has been edited to fit into the space that we have available. The summarized



portion is in italics; Mr. Brower's own words are in regular script.

The article is of interest on several levels: First of all, it centers on a

cookbook, printed in 1881 in San Francisco, and self-published by a Black woman, Mrs. Abby Fisher. Mrs. Fisher was unable to read or write, but her cooking was apparently popular enough that her book was printed by the Women's Co-operative Printing Office. Indeed, San Francisco city directories from 1880 – 1882 establish that Mrs. Fisher was running her own business manufacturing pickles and preserves. The book is believed to be one of only four culinary works published in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by an African American. Only a few copies of the work are known to exist, and little was known, until recently, about the author. One of the mysteries of her culinary background concerned her origins, as it had been assumed, because she had indicated in her cookbook that she was "late of Alabama," that she grew up in that state. Very scant census data suggested that she may have been born a slave in South Carolina, and that her father, most likely, was a white plantation owner and her mother a Black slave. Starting with this data as a base, Robert Brower determined to indentify Mrs. Fisher's roots, based partly on public records in San Francisco and South Carolina Census data but primarily using the information found in the recipes in her cookbook.

Based on the available public records, one important fact was revealed: Abby Fisher's father's name was James Andrews. The Federal Census records of South Carolina, from 1830 thru 1860, revealed only one James Andrews who might qualify as Abby's father: James J. Andrews, a farmer with 2,000 acres of land near Orangeburg, S.C. Using this important piece of information as a pointer, Mr. Brower was then able to concentrate his research on the recipes in Mrs. Fisher's cookbook, comparing what was available at or around

the plantation in Orangeburg. In addition, he was able to compare Mrs. Fisher's recipes with another cookbook using recipes from the same general area and very close to the same time period.

Confirmation that Abby Fisher's roots lie in Orangeburg, SC can be found in the ingredients used in Abby Fisher's recipes, in the crops and animals raised on James Andrews's farm in Orangeburg, and by a comparison of Abby Fisher's recipes with those found in a contemporaneous cookbook from a nearby plantation. Although this determination will necessarily be based on circumstantial evidence, the essential background information is simple and straightforward.

Historically, South Carolina had been divided into seven well-defined regions. . . . For ease of analysis of its culinary landscape these regions can be reduced to three distinct zones: the low country, the middle country, and the up country. . . . The low country was generally a low, flat, and level coastal plain with malaria-infested cypress swamps and a large slave-driven rice plantation economy. . . . The middle country . . . is at a higher elevation, with flowing rivers and streams, and pine forests. With its more temperate climate, it supports a very diverse array of crops. The up country . . . at a still higher elevation with different soils, a sub-temperate climate and a longer growing season, its agricultural production is (therefore) less diverse.

With this background information in mind, does Abby Fisher's cookbook reflect a foundation grounded in the culinary landscape of South Carolina's . . . middle country? To answer this question, three factors must be considered. First, were the ingredients used in Abby Fisher's recipes those associated with Orangeburg and the middle country? Second, were the specific crops raised on James Andrews's farm in Orangeburg reflected in the recipes in the cookbook? Third, how does Abby Fisher's cookbook compare to any other nearby and contemporaneous cookbook?

The recipes in Abby Fisher's cookbook called for

a wide variety of ingredients. Reading a list of numerous ingredients will be a tedious assignment, for which I apologize, but the goal is to decide if the ingredients *as a group* are typical of a certain location, i.e., the low, middle, or up country of South Carolina.

Abby Fisher's meat, poultry, and seafood dishes utilized veal, beef, lamb, pork, venison, chicken, turkey, quail, duck (wild and domestic), turtle, fish, crab, shrimp, oysters, and clams. There were more than 40 fruits and vegetables, including: corn, rice, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, turnips, cauliflower, "mangoes" (bell peppers), chili peppers, "ochra" (okra), tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, ginger root, celery, eggplant, lemons, oranges, cling peaches, pears, plums, apples, apricots, quinces, cherries, prunes, currants (fresh), watermelon, cranberries, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, blackberries, rhubarb, raisins, citron, pineapple, and "cocoanut."

Common dairy products—butter, cream, milk, and cheese—were mentioned in the recipes. For leavening, Abby Fisher called for soda, yeast, and yeast powder. There was no shortage of sweeteners and spices. These were sugar, dark molasses, sage, mint, thyme, mustard seed, mustard (dry), celery seed, parsley, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, cloves, allspice, cayenne pepper, and turmeric. The almond was the only nut mentioned in the cookbook, and the only macaroni was vermicelli.

Finally, in terms of frequency, there are a significant number of peach recipes: Peach Pie, Sweet Pickle Peach, Brandy Peaches No. 1, Brandy Peaches No. 2, Marmalade Peach, Preserved Peaches, and Peach Cobbler.

The ingredients list alone and the large number of peach recipes support a strong inference that Abby Fisher's cookbook is not a low country cookbook.

In 1850, James Andrews reported that there were . . . 15 milk cows . . . 75 sheep, and 75 swine on the farm. . . from the milk cows, there were 156 pounds of butter. The farm's other agricultural production

included 2,000 bushels of Indian corn, 400 bushels of oats, 3,200 pounds of rice, 1,000 pounds of sweet potatoes, and 300 pounds of peas and beans.

Because there are no substantial inconsistencies, the specific crops raised on James Andrews's farm in Orangeburg support the inference that Abby Fisher's recipes are grounded in the culinary landscape of South Carolina's Upper Pine Belt (middle country).

The Emily Wharton Sinkler Manuscript Cookbook:

In 1996 the manuscript cookbook of Emily Wharton Sinkler was published (an expanded version was published in 2006). Sinkler, the primary author, lived at several plantations roughly 30 miles east of Orangeburg, from 1842 to 1875. When the Sinkler Family manuscript cookbook is compared side-by-side with Abby Fisher's cookbook, there are many similarities. Chicken croquettes, fricassee chicken, roast turkey, pickled mangoes, Sally Lunn, Charlotte Russe, plum pudding, rice pudding, meringue-topped puddings, quince preserves, and brandy peaches, to name just a few. Differences in the recipes themselves are understandable. Emily Wharton Sinkler copied her recipes from those she received from family, friends, and neighbors, or found in newspapers and printed cookbooks. Abby Fisher dictated her recipes from memory.

Conclusion: Standing alone, the ingredients mentioned in Abby Fisher's cookbook do not conclusively prove that she was a cook on a middle country farm or plantation. This can also be said for the agricultural production from the Andrews farm and the similarities we find in the Sinkler family manuscript cookbook. But, when taken as a whole, these three pieces of circumstantial evidence sufficiently support the conclusion that Abby Fisher's culinary roots are in South Carolina's middle country.

***Want to know more?*** Mr. Brower will be speaking about *Abby Fisher at the SF Public Library, Feb. 2. Details at: <http://sfpl.org/index.php?page=1026191101>. Mrs. Fisher's recipes may be found on the internet. Abby Fisher is buried in an unmarked grave in Cypress Lawn Cemetery, Colma, CA.*

## What Does a Genealogist Do? *Lisa Gorrell*

*The following article was inspired by our auction. As luck would have it, the winning bid was made by the previous author, Robert Brower, who used his time to further research the origins of Abby Fisher. Robert had nothing but praise for Lisa's knowledge and professionalism.*

I have been a genealogist for over twenty years. People often ask what I do. For many years, I have researched my family lines and those lines of my husband. In recent years, I have been conducting research for others and giving lectures on genealogical research strategies.

So how can a genealogist help you? There is a whole range of services a genealogist can do for you. Here is a sampling:

- Researching one or more of your family lines
- Helping you break through one of your “brick walls”
- Retrieving resources from a distant library or archive when you cannot travel there
- Mentoring you with your own research and helping with research strategies

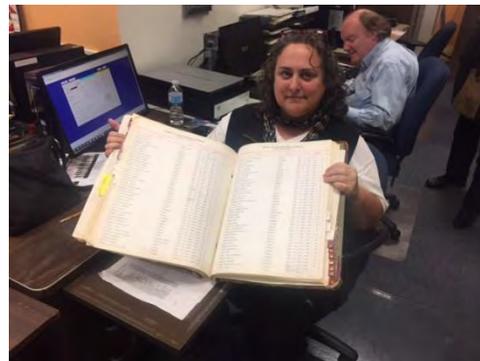
When you first meet with a genealogist, it's a good idea to have a solid idea of what you are requesting. Are you looking for the parents of your ancestor, the maiden name of your ancestor's wife, the military history of a Civil War ancestor, or maybe whether your ancestor served in the Revolutionary War so you can join Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) or Sons of the American Revolution (SAR)?

The genealogist will want to see the documentation of what you already have. This is important so you don't spend money on re-researching something you have already done. He or she will then create a Research Plan explaining how they will go about conducting the research. They will also create a contract for you to sign that will explain the financial part of the project. Some genealogists expect a deposit paid up front. When they have completed the number of hours, they will have a research report for you or if

they need more research time will ask for another deposit. It all depends on the breadth of the project.

To test out whether the genealogist is a good fit for you, hire one to do a short project. If you like their work, you can then hire them to work on something longer. You can find genealogists for hire at the Association of Professional Genealogists website (<https://www.apgen.org/>). You can check with local archives in the area where your ancestors lived for local researchers. Or you can ask your friends for recommendations. This FamilySearch Wiki article has great instructions on hiring a genealogist: [https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Hiring\\_a\\_Professional\\_Researcher](https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Hiring_a_Professional_Researcher)

## Melissa Cardinet--Just One of our Dedicated Volunteers *Steve James*



Today our volunteer Melissa Cardinet completed a task that has taken her two years. Melissa started

volunteering at CCCHS two years ago. She comes in every Thursday for about 4 hours. On her first day she was given the task to assure our digital Nationalization records matched the original documents. The Index to Naturalized Citizens in CCC covers years 1850 - 1988. There are over 10,000 individuals in these records. When finding a missing record she would update our digital files. Hard to say how many records were missing, but easily in the 2% range.

This shows how dedicated our volunteers are and to what length CCCHS takes to make sure our research archives are accurate.



## Contra Costa County Historical Society receives NEH Grant (excerpt: Martinez News-Gazette)

The Holidays arrived early a few weeks ago for the Contra Costa County Historical Society when they received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). In part, the grant will fund monitoring equipment that will allow the Society to track environmental conditions in the various rooms of the Society's History Center in Martinez. It will also provide funds to protect the rooms from too much light with special tint on the windows. "When the email announcing the funding came in," says Executive Director Priscilla Couden, "I asked all of the volunteers in the room to cross their fingers, and then I opened the e-mail to find that we had indeed received the grant. We are thrilled that the NEH chose our project to fund."

The Historical Society looks forward to the improved conditions for its many historical documents, maps, and photographs that this \$6000 grant will provide.

## From the Executive Director:

2016 was a great year for us, and 2017 promises to be even better. Receiving the NEH grant at the very end of the year was exciting as were the new computers we installed and the new large screens for our now two Public Access computers. I want to thank everyone—Board, members, community partners, and volunteers—who contributed to our success. Special thanks go to Scott, our outgoing President, and Tara, our Marketing volunteer, who stepped up to create our Scan-a-thons, our Annual Meeting and many other events. In the coming year, we hope to make our archives much more known and available to the public, and, of course, that means our members, too. As always, I welcome your comments on our progress. Soon, we will be launching a survey that I hope you will watch for and respond to. Please do not hesitate to call me or come in to the Center.

*Priscilla*



## From the President:

It's 2017, so Happy New Year! Scott Saftler is now our past president, having "termed out" of the office. He's still on the board and, I presume, still our "IT guy". Which reminds me of the work day that he organized in December during the time when our history center in Martinez was closed. Scott planned two days of rewiring, cleaning, and installation of new equipment including a new computer work station. With that new work station, we can now accommodate one more volunteer! I encourage anyone who would like to learn more about our collection as well as the history of our county, to come on down to 724 Escobar Street in Martinez. Also, we are planning some special events this year so anyone with an interest and talent that could help us with these events which are fun but also help us to raise funds, give us a call or a visit.



As the society's new president, I have been thinking of a special emphasis to pursue this year. And despite all our volunteers and their many years of work, we still have several large collections of photographs and negatives that have yet to be catalogued in any detail. So I am personally devoting my energies toward identifying and scanning these images so that they can be made accessible to anyone wanting to take a glimpse into the past. If you would like to help us with this, we would love to have you join the volunteer crew. Volunteers get an inside look at our archives and also get to participate in several volunteer-only events per year. It's our way of saying thank you. For without our dedicated volunteers, the history center could not operate and we could not prepare our many archive items for access by the public. Our Executive Director, Priscilla Couden does a wonderful job for us, but she can't do it alone!

*John Mercurio*

