



BULLETIN

Spring 2017

Historical Fact vs. Historical Truth

Donald Bastin

On the 4th of July, 1924, a group of around 750 knights of the Ku Klux Klan marched up Macdonald Avenue in Richmond, part of that year's Independence Day parade. That is an indisputable fact. A photo showing the marchers appears in the Arcadia history book I put together on the history of Richmond. No single image, out of the over 200 that appear in the book, aroused such intense interest, speculation, and controversy. Some people saw it as confirmation that Richmond was a hotbed of racial and anti-immigrant sentiment well before its wrenching expansion during the Second World War. Others were perplexed: Richmond's pre-war years had always been portrayed as quiet and uncontroversial. And others just dismissed the image as an oddity.

At the time, I knew little about the meaning of the photo. Was Richmond a Klan town? Did its citizens buy into the Klan's hateful attitudes toward people of color, immigrants, Catholics, and just about anyone who did not remind them of themselves? A little digging would prove enlightening.

Two questions immediately presented themselves. First of all, according to an account of the parade in the July 5 edition of the *Richmond Independent*, the Klan marchers were described as "... robed and hooded in white regalia, but without masks . . ." It was also noted that the Klan marched at the "... rear of the parade." Both of these observations may have meant little, but they were apparently important enough for the reporter to mention them. Additionally, telling information was disclosed in the following sentence: "Banners indicated that they were from Oakland, San Francisco, Vallejo, Santa Rosa, and San Jose." Curious. No Richmond banner. So why were these 750 Klansmen, "several floats," and a "Klan band," swinging along in a July 4th parade in Richmond?

Turns out, the Klan never intended to march in Richmond. As the Klan had a large presence in Oakland, that city was the intended location of the marchers. The Klan, in the summer of 1924, had planned for a statewide convention, and was successful in securing a permit to march in Oakland's July 4th parade. At the last minute, however, Oakland Commissioner Frank Colbourn revoked the permit, and "stood firm against the Klan, even when hundreds of Klan members protested at a City Council meeting." (https://localwiki.org/oakland/Ku_Klux_Klan)

Following the parade in Richmond, the Klan held a rally near Grand Canyon Park (now Alvarado Park) and threatened "political action" against the city of Oakland "over its refusal to permit the klansmen to parade there." But aside from action at the "ballot box", the nature of this action was not made clear.

The city of Oakland can probably also be credited with the Klan's decision to march without masks. In 1922, in action aimed directly at the Klan, the city commissioners unanimously passed the following resolution: "It is unlawful for any person in the city to appear in public in any mask, cap, cowl, hood." According to the Oakland

Wiki site copied above, this ordinance is still part of Oakland's city code. No doubt, by the time that the permit was revoked, the plans for the Klan march had already advanced too far to change and so the Klansmen in the

Y. M. I. DECLINES PARADE INVITE

Burke Council of Young Men's Institute has refused to accept the invitation of the war veterans Fourth of July committee to parade on the Fourth of July because of the invitation extended to the Ku Klux Klan. The lodge has issued the following statement: "The Young Men's Institute is dedicated to serving "Our God and Our Country" and as patriotic Americans we cannot consistently parade with such an un-American organization as the Ku Klux Klan."

Richmond parade were unmasked. Also, according to the *Independent*, the Klan had several floats in the parade; the "principal one depicted Uncle Sam clad in Klan robes with the caption: "The Klansman Unmasked." This was no doubt an attempt to satisfy Oakland's requirement, but the reference was probably lost on Richmond's spectators.

The decision to allow the Klan to march in Richmond was not without controversy and at least one group declined an invitation to participate due to the Klan's presence (see left).

How many of Richmond's residents agreed with the sentiment that the Klan was "un-American" is not clear, but what is clear is that the image of the Klan marching on Richmond's main street means little by itself. It is just a fact, whose meaning, like most facts, is colored by a host of other facts which are often unknown. What is known is that, after 1924 the Klan went into a precipitous decline and never again achieved the influence that it wielded during the early 1920s.



Klan marchers on Macdonald Avenue, at about 9th street, July 4, 1924.

Photo courtesy of the Richmond Museum of History



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- Once you have chosen your charity, a confirmation page will be shown. Towards the bottom of this page, there are a couple simple suggestions to help you set up the AmazonSmile link on your browser.

The following questions and answers come from the amazon.com website, which explain how to set up and use the service, as well as costs and tax implications:

How do I shop at AmazonSmile?

Simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device.

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Donations are made by the AmazonSmile Foundation and are not tax deductible by you.

THE PACT

Priscilla Couden

With precision and well-deserved pride, long-term volunteer Bill Mero recently demonstrated the latest additions he’s made to the **Contra Costa County History Center’s Public Access Computer Terminals (PACT)**. The occasion was a quarterly workshop held for the benefit of the some 30 volunteers of the Center.

The workshop’s purpose was to train the volunteers to help the increasing number of visitors who come in to use the PACT and to celebrate the arrival of a second computer and terminal, due to the generosity of the Martinez Community Foundation. With new, larger screens and increased search capability, the History Center’s digitized photographs, newspapers and maps, are made available. The PACT also makes it possible to access such things as several book-length Histories of Contra Costa County, Nilda Rego’s columns, and many other documents in the archive. The PACT is truly a marvel made possible in great part by Bill Mero’s own scanning and digital photography, along with the help of many other volunteers in the scanning process.

Bill has almost single-handedly created the interfaces for searching the database, making it possible for visitors to get started on their genealogical or other journeys.

The History Center is grateful to the **Martinez Community Foundation’s** (MCF) funding both for the new computer and monitors for the PACT, but also for the original computer and monitor setup. A media center including microfiche records is another project the MCF has funded over the years. The PACT is really a great resource that we would like to be known as widely as possible. We are so fortunate that the MCF has been interested in this project from the beginning.

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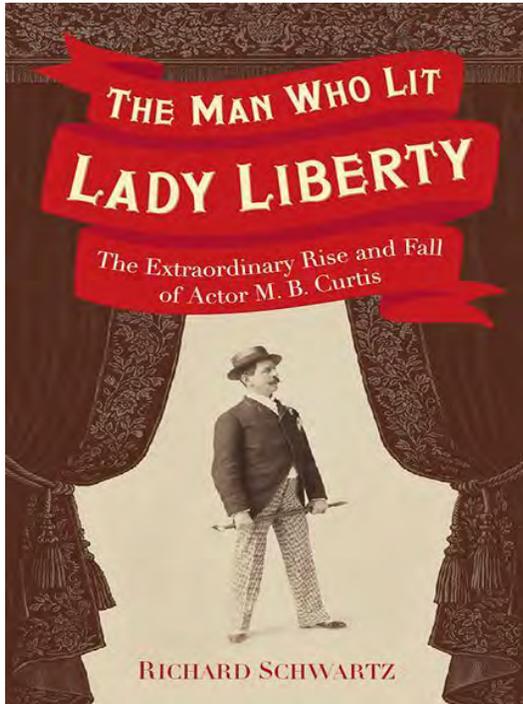
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You Are Invited

To a history talk and book signing with
Richard Schwartz, author of
The Man Who Lit Lady Liberty

Join the Martinez Historical Society & the Contra
Costa County Historical Society for this special event.



Saturday, May 6, 2017
1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Shell Clubhouse in Martinez

Historian Richard Schwartz presents an illustrated talk about his new book, *The Man Who Lit Lady Liberty: The Extraordinary Rise and Fall of Actor M.B. Curtis*. His presentation will reveal the life of this incredibly influential immigrant actor of the late nineteenth century. As the first Jewish male actor allowed to portray a Jewish male on stage in America, Curtis' story is one of immigration, assimilation, theatre history and how the invisible wings of comedy can affect the nation's direction.

Richard's talk begins at 1:00 p.m.
A wine and cheese reception with the Author will follow at 2:30 p.m.

Signed books will be available for purchase during the reception.

March 18 Scan-a-thon our best yet!

Tara Weber

Thank you to the many County residents that brought in their items for scanning and gifting. The County archives accessed over 75 items including family photos and documents, newspapers, publications and a collection of photos from the Danville Diablo Jr. Horseman's Association.

Thank you again. The County archives are a little more robust because of your gifts!

News from Our Sister Societies:

Celebrate San Ramon Rancho-Village-City: an exhibit coming to the Museum of the San Ramon Valley celebrating the history of San Ramon's past and present

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of San Ramon, the Museum of the San Ramon Valley is presenting an exhibit which celebrates San Ramon's evolution from Rancho San Ramon to the vibrant city of today. "Celebrate San Ramon, Rancho-Village-City" features stories about San Ramon's naming, its founders and first village, a century of agriculture, the San Ramon Fire Department, Bishop Ranch history, and the new city which incorporated in 1983. The exhibit is sponsored by the SR150 Committee and Linda Gossett.

The museum exhibit will also provide hands-on opportunities for young and older visitors alike including a history hunt, a saddle for children to try out, and an intriguing question and answer feature. Every Saturday from 10 to 11 am, beginning on April 22, a speaker will tell stories about the city's transformation from a rural community to modern San Ramon. Beginning a "First Friday" tradition, the museum will be open 6:00- 8:00 pm on Friday May 5 and June 2 for free tours and refreshments.

SATURDAY SPEAKERS AND TOPICS:

APRIL

22 Remembering San Ramon Grammar School **Ginny Fereira**

29 Jose Amador's Fabulous Rancho San Ramon Beverly Lane

MAY

6 Two Railroads and the San Ramon Village Bill Clarkson

13 The Historic Harlan House: Has It Fallen Down Yet? Bill Harlan

20 Ranching Life In San Ramon Roxanne Lindsay

27 San Ramon Fire Department –The Story Bill Ferreira & Rick Probert

JUNE

3 The Glass family, Early San Ramon Founders Claudia Nemir

10 Forest Home Farms Historic Park – Back to the Past Pat Boom

LOCATION: Museum of the San Ramon Valley located at 205 Railroad Ave Danville CA April 15 thru June 11. Open hours Tu-Fri 1-4, Sat 10-1, Sun 12-3. 935-837-3750 <http://museumsrv.org/>

Richmond Museum of History:

How World War 1 Changed Richmond:

Commemorating the Centennial of the U.S. entering the war in April 1917. Open now through June 30. Tours and speaking events on April 22, May 6, and June 3.

The Museum-owned ship, the *SS Red Oak Victory* invites you to experience live dance music of the '40s and '50s on Saturday, May 13, and enjoy a pancake breakfast on Sunday, May 14. Details at: <http://richmondmuseum.org/>

Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park:

Too many events to list. Open 7 days/week. Wonderful location. Visit them at: <https://www.nps.gov/rori/>

East Contra Costa Historical Society

Kathy Leighton Resource Center Now Open!



On Saturday, April 1, Executive Director Priscilla Couden attended the 2017 opening day of the East Contra Costa Historical Society (ECCHS) in Brentwood. Attended by some 500 people, the main attraction was the dedication of the long-awaited new Resource Center. The Resource Center had been built almost entirely by volunteers, many of whom were in attendance. A band played, hot dogs and lemonade were served, boy scouts raised the flag, and the Center was named in honor of our own board member, Kathy Leighton, in appreciation for her long-term service to the ECCHS. Contra Costa County Supervisor Diane Burgis, mayors of Brentwood and Oakley, and representatives of East Contra Costa congress people attended, as well as our own Executive Director, and many presented certificates of appreciation to Kathy. Kathy was totally surprised-- "shocked" was the word she used when quizzed--because there is a tradition at ECCHS of *not* naming buildings, etc., in honor of individuals, and members and volunteers had been able to keep the dedication secret. The surprise brought tears to Kathy's eyes. It was a very special recognition of behalf of Kathy's long service over many years to the ECCHS. It was a beautiful day and a beautiful ceremony for a beautiful person. Congratulations to Kathy and to the ECCHS on a great new research venue. <http://www.eastcontracostahistory.org/>



From the Executive Director

Dear Members,

These past three months have been amazing! First we learned that we were to be the recipients of an NEH grant for upgrading our environmental monitoring in the various rooms of the archives. This will ensure that temperature, humidity and light will be monitored in each of our rooms and that our windows will receive some light screening.

Recently, we upgraded our PACT computers so that now we have two computers and two large screens for your use. In March, we upgraded our telephone system so that now the uploading and downloading speeds are better than they ever were.

In early March, we sent out our member satisfaction survey and received more than 100 responses. Most said they liked what we have been doing. All comments were appreciated and will be used going forward. A report on the survey will be included in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

In April, we held a Volunteer Appreciation lunch. I'm sure you will join the board and me in thanking all of our volunteers that make the History Center such a vital and vibrant place.

In the Archives, we are on the move as well. A new push to get the names of those in our obituary clippings files is underway, with about five volunteers, headed by Scott and Rich, working hard to get the names up on the website by the end of the year. A 4th grade project is underway, being headed by volunteer Kaori Evans. She is developing a walking tour of our County Seat that will first be used with school groups and then with others who are interested.

Many other projects and events are happening. As always, I invite you to come in and become part of our volunteer force.

Sincerely,

Priscilla

From the President

Of all the issues that deserve our attention at the Contra Costa County Historical Society perhaps the most critical is fundraising.

We have many needs for adequate funding. We need to pay rent and utilities, update software, keep our computer hardware up to date,

make improvements to protect our archives, and purchase all the materials it takes to keep an office running. But the board and the Executive Director constantly assess where we can look to keep our budget healthy and provide a reserve.

Funding for the society comes from a number of sources, some of which are:

- A yearly stipend from Contra Costa County in recognition of the county document preservation service we provide
- Dues from members like you
- Grants from various partners we have developed over the years. Our E.D. Priscilla Couden plays a key role in this effort.
- Two annual appeals to our members
- Occasional fundraising events

Some of our board members bring knowledge and experience that is vital to the development of new funding sources. Others read up on the latest ideas for non-profits in the funding arena. And many others attend various seminars that provide us with new ideas and educate us on what has worked the best for other organizations similar to ours. We also network with various organizations which may lead to funding opportunities.

We take great care to see that these funds are used wisely. We thank you for your support and we continue to work to improve the financial stability of Contra Costa County Historical Society.

Finally, if you have fundraising ideas, please let us know!

John Mercurio



