



# BULLETIN

Winter 2021

***Last Chance!***      *A few "seats" still available!*

The Contra Costa County Historical Society  
Virtual Annual Membership Meeting

*featuring*

**Karen Buchanan**

***"The History of Point Richmond"***



*Donated in 1909, this Indian statue mysteriously disappeared in the 1930s. Replaced 1984.*

**Virtual Event**  
**Saturday, January 23, 2021**  
**11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
***(virtual doors open at 11:15 a.m.)***

Join your friends in history for a special presentation about ***The History and People of Point Richmond.*** Karen Buchanan, a Point Richmond resident and history consultant, will entertain us with the history and colorful characters of this quaint Richmond community.

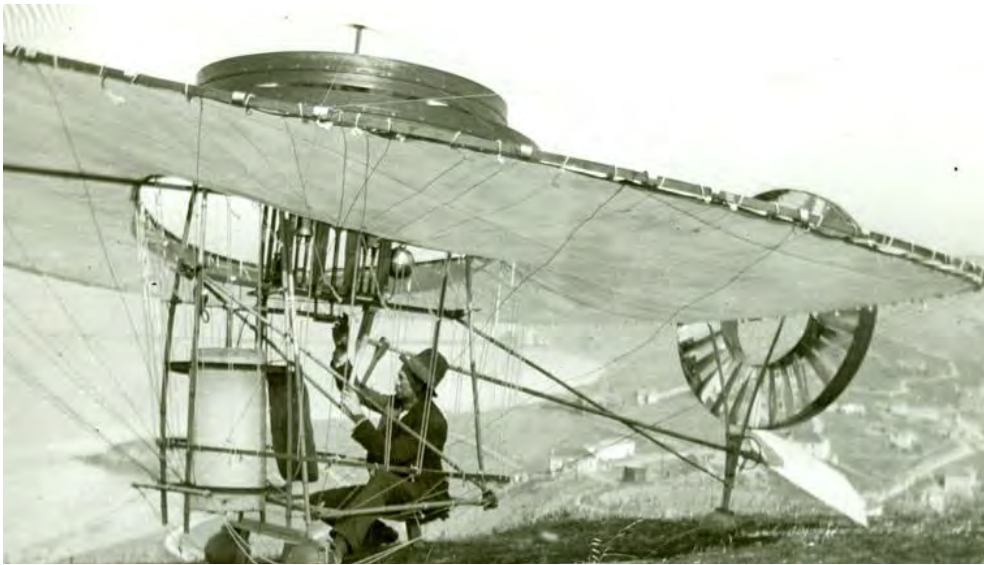
Also on the agenda is the CCCHS Annual Review as well as special thanks to retiring Executive Director Dr. Priscilla Couden and retiring Director and past-president Scott Saftler.

How much do you know about "The Point"? This little community is **full** of history and interesting characters. You'll learn about Professor Botts and his Flying Machine, C.L. Cofer and his Terrestrial Wave Detector, and how a failed duck-hunting trip turned into a business deal that put Point Richmond on the map!

Q&A to immediately follow.

*Program agenda:*  
*Opening remarks by Society President*  
*Special thanks to Priscilla Couden and Scott Saftler*  
*CCC Historical Society Annual Review*  
*The "History of Point Richmond" with speaker Karen Buchanan*  
*Q & A with Karen Buchanan*  
*Closing remarks*

**Admission to the event is free. Registration is required.**  
**Reserve your spot today! ~ [Click here](#) ~**



*Nicholl Knob, 1902. Professor Botts and his flying machine.*  
*Photo courtesy of the Richmond Museum of History*

*A suggested donation of \$20 is requested to cover the costs of this event and replace the raffle ticket sales that we would normally garner at an in-person event. You may donate on-line, at our website home page at [www.cocohistory.org](http://www.cocohistory.org); just click on the "Donate" button. Alternatively, a check can be mailed to our History Center address: 724 Escobar Street, Martinez, 94553.*

### **About the Speaker**

Karen Buchanan is an active volunteer in the Richmond Community. She is involved with local organizations, including the Point Richmond History Association, the Women's Westside Improvement Club, the Point Richmond Neighborhood Council, the Richmond Main Street Initiative, and First United Methodist Church. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Richmond Museum Association and previously served on the Board of Visit Richmond CA.

In addition to her community volunteer activities, Karen holds down a full time job as the Claims Administrator for the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway & Transportation District, where she is also on the Emergency Operations Team helping manage the District's response to the pandemic.



## Rancho El Sobrante: *Filling in the Details*

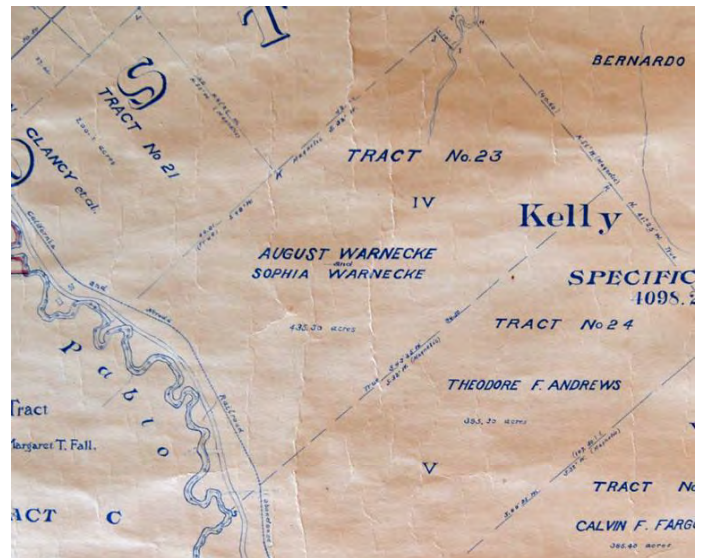
*Donald Bastin*

The Rancho El Sobrante was granted to the Castro brothers, Victor and Juan Jose, in 1841. The grant was created out of surplus or “sobrante” land that lay between five existing grants. As the boundaries of these existing grants were indefinite, disputes and lawsuits ensued. These difficulties were compounded when the United States and Mexico went to war in 1846. Shortly after the termination of the war, in 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill, and California, particularly central and northern California, were swamped with new immigrants, many of whom settled onto the Rancho El Sobrante land. Some of these settlers had legitimate claims to their holdings, and others simply squatted on land that appeared to be open and unclaimed. But the outcome of all this activity, by the late 1800s, was a vastly altered world from the simple one that had existed in the early 1840s.



A brief look at the several Rancho El Sobrante grant maps that were produced from the early 1880s to the last one, issued in 1909, shows that the original 18,000 acre (or so) holding was broken up into much smaller tracts, most no larger than 500 acres. One of the most important tracts, at least as far as the history of the El Sobrante community is concerned, is the Warnecke tract, situated along what is now the northeastern shoreline of the San Pablo Reservoir.

The earliest maps, issued in the 1880s, clearly show that the Warnecke Tract was owned by August and Sophia Warnecke. In the image above, we can see that the Warnecke tract was situated just to the east of



the Clancy tract. The Clancy tract is now the site of Kennedy Grove, part of the East Bay Regional Park system. At the bottom of the tract we can clearly see the sinuous path of San Pablo Creek, and just above it, the tracks of the, at this time, defunct California & Nevada Railroad.

We have a photograph of the extended Warnecke family, at their house on the tract, taken in 1890.



But other than the fact that the Warneckes were immigrants from Germany, we knew little about them and we did not know how the tract came into their possession. All that changed in late August of 2014, when we were contacted by John Hadel, a current resident of San Francisco who was doing genealogical research into his own family. In this endeavor, he had turned up a trove of letters, all written in German, dating from the early 1860s.

Hermann Hadel was John Hadel’s great great uncle. He and his brother Wilhelm (John Hadel’s

great Grandfather) immigrated to America, from the village of Osten in Hanover (Germany was not unified until 1871) in 1848. Their sister, Clementine, who was married to Augustus Heinsohn, followed in 1853. The family members settled in Dayton, Ohio. Wilhelm stayed on in Dayton, but sometime between 1848 and 1856, Hermann came to California to join in the Gold Rush. Whether he actually struck gold or not is unclear, but by 1857, Hermann was in San Francisco, amassing a series of eight properties that are described in the court proceedings following his death in 1879. Seven of the properties were located within the city limits of San Francisco, while the eighth was in Contra Costa County. This was the property that later came to be known as the Warnecke Tract.

Of historical interest is the description of the Contra Costa parcel, taken from the 1882 court decision, following Hermann's death.

*Beginning on the north bank of San Pablo Creek where Clancy's easterly line comes into said creek at a point marked "O" on a certain map used in a partition suit in the 19<sup>th</sup> District Court in and for the County of San Francisco. Thence North 32 degrees, East 86 10/100 chains to the center of Weybe's Canon Creek, marked on said partition map "I". Thence upstream through said creek to the northeast line of the Hadeler tract, marked "H" on the said map. Thence south 58 degrees. East 40 60/100 chains to a stake and stone marked on said map "R." Thence at right angles to the last mentioned line 94 80/100 chains to the center of the creek known as Frenchman's Creek marked "P" on said map. Thence along the center line of said creek down stream to the San Pablo Creek, marked "T" on said map. Thence along the center line of said creek downstream to the place of beginning. The same being designated as division No. IV on said map, containing 435 30/100 acres, and being part of the Sobrante, so called.*

It is interesting to note that many of these boundary lines are rather ephemeral, such as small creeks, stakes and rocks. Also, the language is antique. "Chains," for instance, is a unit of measure no longer in use, and is equivalent to 66 feet.

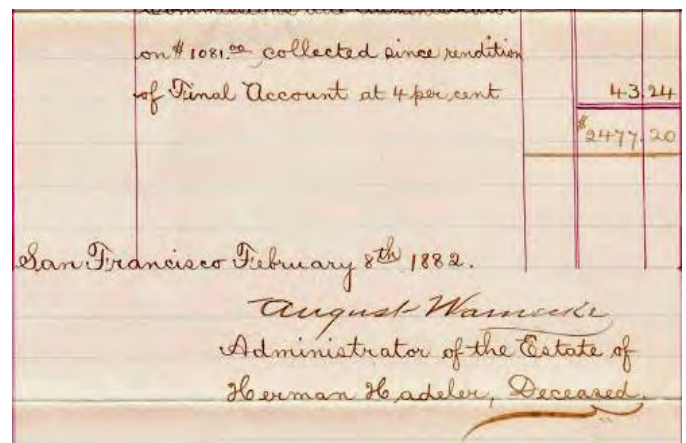
By 1865, Clementine's husband had died, and Clementine came out to California to join her older brother, bringing along her two young girls, Sophie and Dorothy. It seems that the Contra Costa property was already in Hermann's hands by this time, as we have a letter from Clementine, addressed to Wilhelm and her "aunt" in which she says that

*"Dorie (Dorothy) is still in the country. . . .  
Dorie is getting all round and chubby out there. She doesn't want to come back to town (San Francisco) yet. They are making hay and she will be helping. That's fine and I support it. Certainly it must be healthy. . . ."*

It may well be that the house that appears in the 1890 picture of the Warnecke family was already constructed at the time that little "Dorie" was making hay along San Pablo Creek.

So how did August Warnecke get into the picture?

When Hermann died in 1879, he left no will. So the matter of the distribution of his land holdings naturally went to court. It was not until February of 1882 that the matter was resolved: all eight parcels of land were allocated equally between sister Clementine and brother Wilhelm. Take a look at the name at the bottom of this document.



You will note that the administrator of Hermann's estate is none other than August Warnecke! Turns out he was Clementine's son-in-law, as he and Sophie (Sophia) had married in 1867. By the time of the legal proceedings following Hermann's death, Clementine and August had five children of their own.

The preceding information was taken from the *History of Contra Costa County* published in 1882. Here we also find that August was not only German, like the

Hadelers, but also hailed from the kingdom of Hanover. The *History* relates that August purchased the Contra Costa property in 1881, but this seems unlikely, as the court awarded the tract to both Clementine and Wilhelm early in 1882. And it is clear from the letters between Clementine and Wilhelm (who remained in Dayton, Ohio) that some time elapsed before an agreement was made as to the price that Wilhelm would accept for his share of the property. So while August and Sophie may have spent time on the property along San Pablo Creek, and even built a home there, actual legal possession of the land could not have taken place until 1882.

It seems that sometime after 1890, the Warneckes moved away from their home along San Pablo Creek, and the family ceased to be a part of the evolving history of El Sobrante. However, they did retain ownership of the land, leasing it to a Danish immigrant by the name of Soren Skow. It is the Skow family that has become woven into the fabric of the history of El Sobrante. Soren started a dairy operation on the Warnecke property, which was apparently successful as the business was going strong



as late as 1921, when the completion of the San Pablo reservoir necessitated a move to a new location. The Skow Family Dairy, also known as the Richmond Farm Creamery, set up shop along Clark Road, where the operation continued until sold in 1955.

The Warnecke property came under the control of the East Bay Municipal Utility District in 1923. As far as is known, nothing remains of the Hadelers-Warnecke home or the buildings associated with the Skow dairy operation.

Filling in the details is what historical research is all about. Through the efforts of people like John

Hadeler, often simply tracing their own family background, we uncover information that illuminates the world around us, and come to a better understanding of how and why things happened the way they did. Bottom line, without people like John, doing the grunt work of historical research, our knowledge of history, particularly local history, would be barren indeed. Thanks John!

**Clayton Bailey 1939-2020**

*Steve James*

On June 6, 2020, Contra Costa County lost an artist like no other, Clayton Bailey. Clayton and his wife Betty found their way to Berkeley in 1968, after receiving a BS and MS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1961-62. You can imagine the scene in Berkeley in 1968 and Clayton fit right in.



In the early 1970s he was a leading figure of the “Nut Art” movement. To get an idea of what “Nut Art” is, visit his website at [www.claytonbailey.com](http://www.claytonbailey.com). Clayton became a tenured professor of ceramics at Cal State Hayward (now East Bay) and retired at age 57.

In 1970 Clayton and Betty settled in Port Costa and stayed. The community and surroundings fit his lifestyle. The mid 1970s is when I first became aware of Clayton’s art, although I had no idea it was Clayton behind the white lab coat and strange sculptures. Port Costa has been and still is a site for young folks to take a weekend ride for a beer. The Warehouse Café was the bar of choice, where you could find ceramic and metal sculptures by Dr. George Gladstone, aka, Clayton. There were Big Foot remains among other strange displays. I would wonder who does this stuff? They must be one weird person.

Fast forward to 2014. This is when I first got to meet Clayton. He attended a Contra Costa Co. Historical Society event. He fascinated me. I only met him a few more times while visiting his Museum in Crockett.

Each time I would remind him where we first met, then it was on with the stories. How he and Betty came to the Bay Area. Why he settled in Port Costa (one reason was the clay deposits in the area are excellent for ceramics), and a few hints on what inspired him to make a sculpture. He would never admit an item of Dr. Gladstone's discovery was not real. The Big Foot droppings are real. Each item on display held a story.

Clayton's art is on display at major museums around the Nation and Europe. One of his life size metal



robots can be seen at the Oakland museum.



The images above were supplied by board member John Burgh. They were given to John by Clayton, with whom he shared a love of vintage Studebakers.

On my last visit to Clayton's museum there were three life size scrap metal robots lined up at the door. I thought, "That is a strange display", so I asked, "What's up with these three?" He said, "Those are shipping out tomorrow to New York City Museums".

I thought "WOW an artist from Port Costa has items on display at New York City Museums!". Truly, a leader in his chosen field. The "Nut Art" leader from Port Costa, Contra Costa County. Truly a unique individual and a piece of Contra Costa history. He will be missed.

## CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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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.org](mailto:info@cocohistory.org) to renew.

**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.**



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## From the Executive Director:



As we start this new year, I have task of starting a new job as the newest (and only third) Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. In the two months that I have been on board I have been struck by the

level of commitment and professionalism exhibited by all of the wonderful volunteers, the Board of Directors, and most of all, by my predecessor, Priscilla Couden. The “bar” has been set high and I look forward to meeting the challenges that await me.

A little background: I was born and raised in Sacramento and attended Sacramento State, receiving a BA in Communications Studies. On graduating, I entered the Navy via the Aviation Officer Candidate program. Receiving my commission, I attended flight school; after receiving my “Wings of Gold” I was assigned to a P-3C “Orion” squadron at NAS Moffett Field. From Moffett, I made deployments to Okinawa; Diego Garcia, BIOT; and Misawa, Japan. After four years at Moffett, I was transferred to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY, serving as an Asst. Professor of Naval Science.

After my tour ended at Kings Point, I transferred to the Naval Reserve and returned to California where I began a career at San Francisco International Airport. During my 22 years at SFO I worked as an Emergency Planner, Operations Supervisor, Duty Manager, Supt. of Operations for the International Terminal, Assistant Deputy Director for Noise Abatement, and Director of Community Affairs.

Retiring from SFO, I worked as a consultant for a local city, a major utility, and an airline. I also worked for the USS Hornet Museum in Alameda, as its Marketing and Communications Manager, and as the Executive Director.

I retired from the Naval Reserve in 2008 at the rank of Captain and with more than 3,000 hours of flight time in the P-3C Orion.

I plan to take advantage of our downtime and begin developing a three-year strategic plan. As a Naval Flight Officer, navigation is part of my DNA. By developing this three-year plan, it is my goal to build upon the past successes of my predecessors and continue to grow and develop the CCCHS.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible, and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Board and all the volunteers. I am excited to share my ideas and see where we can go as an organization. All my best as we embark on what all of us hope will be a less stressful and more successful New Year!

*Michael McCarron*

## From the President:

As I complete my two years’ tenure as board president, I am reminded that the greatest difficulties and the toughest challenges can lead to new opportunities and a brighter future. Our Society seems to be experiencing that phenomenon as we begin the new year.



Here’s one example. With our History Center still closed to visitors, we will take advantage of this “quiet time” to develop a three-year strategic plan suggested by our new executive director Mike McCarron. Without visitors coming in or the phones ringing, we have time to develop a plan for taking us from where we are to where we need to be. Board members, staff, and volunteers all will have input. This type of multi-year strategic planning is a luxury, since small non-profits like us rarely have the chance to do it.

Another example has to do with our collections policy. Having taken the Contra Costa County Library’s Local History Collection – a very large collection for us – we are out of storage space. Given the shutdown, and the fact that no one is offering us any collections at the moment, we will have a chance to review how and when we will accept such collections from here on. We continue to look for additional off-site storage for our archives that don’t need humidity- and temperature-controlled rooms.

A final example has to do with processing the collections we already have, some of which are stored in boxes in our kitchen/break room and many in the hallways. Without visitors coming in, once we can resume having a few volunteers in the building we will be able to make more progress in going through those collections, properly storing them or moving them to other institutions if we find we don’t need them.

All of this bodes well for the future. This newsletter, and our website, will keep you informed of our progress. In the meantime, stay healthy and safe.

*John Grotzger*



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**Note:** The History Center remains closed until further notice. In the meantime, we are available online to answer your queries and to offer books for purchase. Please check our website, [www.cocohistory.org](http://www.cocohistory.org), for updates.

**Mark Your Calendar**

**Saturday, January 23, 2021: CCCHS Annual Membership Meeting.. This will be a virtual meeting.** Featured Event: **The History and People of Point Richmond.** Guest speaker: **Karen Buchanan.** Special recognition of retiring ED Priscilla Couden and past president, director, and volunteer Scott Saftler.

**Mission Statement**

*Our Mission is to Preserve, Protect and Provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County, California.*

**Contra Costa County Historical Society  
Officers and Directors:**

President..... John Greitzer  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice President..... Tara Weber  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President..... John Burgh  
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Scott Saftler     Betty Maffei – Member Emeritus

**Executive Director:** Priscilla A. Couden, Ph.D.

**Newsletter Editor:** Donald Bastin

The History Center

724 Escobar Street, Martinez, CA 94553

Phone: 925-229-1042 Fax: 925-229-1772

**Open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 9 am-4 pm**

**Open 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday, 10 am-2 pm;**

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