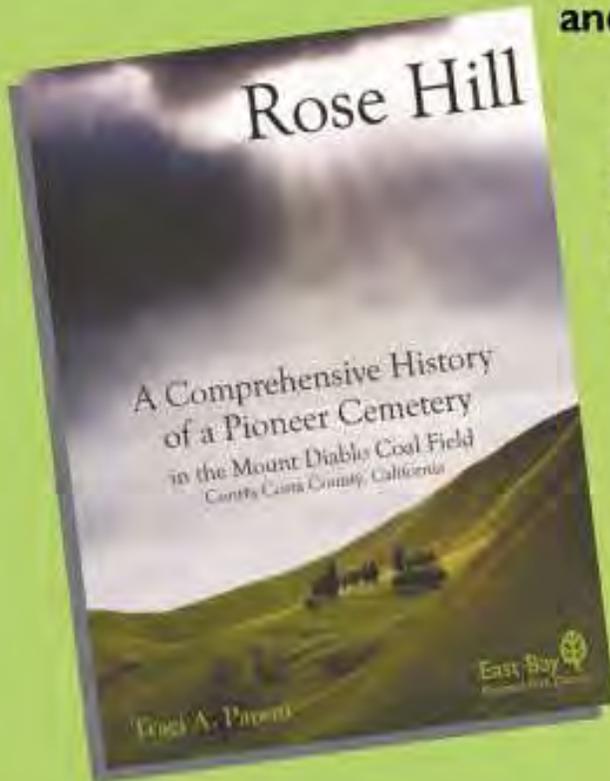




BULLETIN

AUTUMN 2011

The Contra Costa County Historical Society and the East Bay Regional Park District



Cordially invite you to the presentation, *Life and Death in the Mount Diablo Coal Field*, by Traci Parent, Supervising Naturalist of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve. Her talk is based on her recently published book, *Rose Hill – A Comprehensive History of a Pioneer Cemetery in the Mount Diablo Coal Field*.

1:30-3:30 pm, Saturday, September 10, 2011

The Community Presbyterian Church Social Hall
200 East Leland Road, Pittsburg, California

Please RSVP by September 7th to bdvisit@ebparks.org
510-544-2754 or 510-544-2755



East Bay
Regional Park District

One Stone at a Time

Park Rangers Preserve Pioneer Cemetery

Traci Parent

Nestled in the northern foothills of Mount Diablo lies the remains of a life long passed. The area, once known as the Mount Diablo Coal Field, is now home to Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, a nearly 7,000 acre East Bay Regional Park. From the 1860s to the turn of the 20th century, the Mount Diablo Coal Field was the largest coal producing area in California.

Twelve major mines existed in the thriving communities of Nortonville, Somersville, West Hartley, and Judsonville. During its heyday, the coal field was home to an estimated 3,000 inhabitants and, according to newspaper accounts, Nortonville was once the most populous town in Contra Costa County.

Little remains of the area today except the abandoned mines, waste rock piles created by the miners, intentionally introduced exotic trees, depressions marking building sites, and the most prominent historic feature, pioneer Rose Hill Cemetery.



Rose Hill Cemetery, c. 1939

Established *circa* 1865, Rose Hill Cemetery served as a Protestant burial ground and was the only cemetery located in the coal field. In 1973, this 2.7-acre pioneer cemetery became part of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, the District's first historic preserve.

Out of the nearly 250 burials, about 80 gravestones remain today. Not every individual buried in the cemetery had their own gravestone. Gravestones were expensive and individuals sometimes shared stones with other family members and friends. Some of those interred had no marker at all.

Photographic records document destruction of gravestones and other property in Rose Hill Cemetery as early as the 1920s. Newspaper accounts and statements by former residents indicate that some gravestones were broken by cattle using them as scratching posts. Vandalism, however, was most likely the main cause of the destruction. Vandals knocked gravestones from their bases, often breaking them in half or shattering them into many pieces. Some stones were rolled from one end of the cemetery to the other, making original locations impossible to determine. Other stones were removed from the cemetery and remain missing.

Some stones disappeared when erosion gullies formed during winter rains due to the lack of vegetation in

the cemetery. Numerous gravestones and bases became buried as the eroding soil washed downhill.

Prior to the area becoming a Regional Park, some stones were repaired by well-meaning individuals. Pieces of gravestones were put back together like a jigsaw puzzle, and then concreted flat on the ground in an effort to keep them in place.

Once the cemetery became part of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, Park Rangers instituted a program to stabilize the burial ground by restoring eroded ground and repairing broken gravestones and fences, and reinstalling them in the cemetery. This gravesite stabilization program is ongoing and utilizes conservation guidelines established by the Association for Gravestone Studies and the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

Gravestones to be restored are individually evaluated by the Ranger staff to determine the best repair method. Three basic methods are used to repair the gravestones in Rose Hill Cemetery: drill and pin, lamination, and encasement.

Drill and Pin:

The drill and pin method is used on gravestones that are 2 ½ to 3 inches thick. Holes are drilled into the broken pieces and brass or fiberglass rods, secured with epoxy, are used to pin the pieces back together.



Julia Etta Piery stone repaired by the drill and pin method

Lamination: This method is only used on gravestones with a single break. A slab of approximately 2 inch thick new marble is cut to the exact shape of the stone and epoxied to the back of the gravestone.

Encasement: This repair technique is used for gravestones with multiple breaks, severely damaged stones, or gravestones with missing pieces. A slab of new marble is cut 1 ½ inches larger around the outline of the gravestone.

The exact shape and size of the gravestone is then carved out of the slab to create a recess for the gravestone to fit into. The gravestone is epoxied into the recess and when complete has a 1 ½ inch border of new marble surrounding the original stone. The approximately 1/8 inch gap that is left between the side edges of the gravestone and the new marble is sealed with Jahn Mortar Mix.



The Joseph Banks stone repaired by the encasement method

Before any work begins, the gravestone to be repaired is carefully documented with both written and photographic records by the Ranger staff. New marble slabs for repairing gravestones, as well as new granite, sandstone, and marble used to reconstruct gravestone bases are often purchased. To date, the Black Diamond Park Rangers have repaired and stabilized nearly 40 gravesites in Rose Hill Cemetery.



Ranger Doug Fowler prepares a marble slab to encase the broken pieces of the Joseph Banks gravestone

Below: Ranger Monique Looney cleans the gravestone of Barbara Witherow



Anyone with information or photographs pertaining to the cemetery is encouraged to contact park staff.

Photographs, taken prior to Park District acquisition, are historically valuable and often assist staff with locating previously

unknown burial sites. The return of gravestones and iron fences is welcomed, no questions asked.

In 1934, the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West erected a ten-foot high concrete monument in Rose Hill Cemetery to commemorate the pioneers of Nortonville and Somersville. On October 7, 1934, Richard Rains Veale, sheriff of Contra Costa County, spoke at the dedication ceremony in Rose Hill. According to the *Antioch Ledger* newspaper, October 8, 1934, as Veale concluded his address, he

pointed to one of the marble monuments which had fallen to the ground and broken into several pieces. Then he pointed to another one, which though lying flat on the ground, had been pieced together. Here is something we should look after, he said. We should rehabilitate these monuments. We should find a way to raise the money, either take up a collection or get all interested in making this cemetery a beautiful place to contribute so the work can be done.

Undoubtedly Sheriff Veale would have been pleased to know that the Black Diamond Park Rangers are doing their best to “rehabilitate” the monuments and make the pioneer cemetery a “beautiful place” once again.

To learn more about historic Rose Hill Cemetery, attend the presentation *Life and Death in the Mount Diablo Coal Field*, on September 10, 1:30 to 3:30 pm at The Community Presbyterian Church Social Hall, 200 East Leland Road in Pittsburg. For additional information refer to the announcement on the front page of this *Bulletin*.

“Peace Quilt” Installed in Chambers of The County Board of Supervisors

Harriett Burt



Priscilla Couden, at right, Executive Director of the Contra Costa County History Center and Carol Bibeau, president of the Contra Costa County Quilters Guild, stand proudly beneath the

“Peace Quilt” created in 1985 by a group of Guild members representing all parts of the County. The quilt, part of the County Historical Society’s collection, is on display in the Chambers of the Board of Supervisors through December under arrangements made by Board President Gayle B. Uilkema (District 2).

Supervisor Uilkema introduced the quilt to the assembled audience at the Board’s July 12, 2011 meeting. She first saw it in a Contra Costa County display at a meeting of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and was so impressed with it that she visited the History Center and talked to Couden about displaying it in the Board chambers. Featuring hand sewn designs of the County seal and the names of the incorporated cities on the interior ring and the unincorporated towns on the outer edge, the quilt was given to the CCCHS in 2000 and has been on display at the History Center in the former Hilson’s building on Main Street in Martinez.

CCCHS board vice president Melissa Jacobson addressed the Board following Uilkema’s remarks thanking them for the opportunity to display the quilt and to explain to them and the audience the functions, responsibilities and operations of the County Historical Society.

A Hot Bed of History

Beverly Lane



The San Ramon Valley has several museums and groups which focus on the history of South County. A veritable hot bed of history.

The SRV Historical Society began in 1970 and hosts dinners every other month, has a newsletter (The Record) which always includes long articles on their speakers. It plans and installs historic plaques, offers periodic trips and has an August picnic.

In 1985 the Historical Society established the Museum of the SRV which was set up to focus on getting a museum in the valley. Today the Museum is



housed in the 1891 Danville SP Depot (opened 1999), provides changing exhibits, school programs (Tassajara School hosts all third grades for a one-

room school experience; fourth grade Indian Life program; complete local history curriculum provided), collections and a research library. In 2011 a quilt show opens August 26, followed by an Indian Life exhibit on Oct. 1 and then Christmas Memories. 150 volunteers make all this happen.

1997 saw the beginnings of a San Ramon City-supported Forest Home Farms Historic Park, begun with a donation of 16 acres by Ruth (Mrs. Travis) Boone. The site has a rich third grade program focusing on agriculture and a newly opened and restored Eliza and David Glass House (1877). Call 973-3284 for more information. The San Ramon Historic Foundation supports this park. Call the museum at 925-837-3750 or visit online at: **museumsrv.org**.

(This is the 2nd in a series of articles on Contra Costa County Historical Societies—Ed.)

Exhibit at the History Center *Beverly Lane*

The Ladies Have Something to Say -- Celebrate California's Equal Voting Rights Centennial! 1911 – 2011



September 1 -- November 23, 2011

**Opening Reception:
Sunday September 11,
2011, 1-4 pm**

On October 10, 1911, California's male voters awarded women the right to vote in the state by barely 2% -- 125,037 to

121,450. In Contra Costa County woman suffrage won by 21 votes, 1,569 to 1,548.

This special election included a long list of Progressive issues which were successful and which California voters have been proud to use for decades -- recall, referendum and the initiative. County Clerk Steve Weir has brought us a large page showing the County results for this important election in each community; it will be part of the exhibit.

The History Center exhibit will focus on the year 1911, the campaign, and the various activities of the Equal Suffrage Clubs in the County. Martinez was the first to organize their club with 25 members. Mrs. John Swett was Honorary President and Mrs. W. S. Tinning became President with Mrs. Fletcher Ames as Vice President.

The Concord Equal Suffrage Club was headed by Mrs. C. W. Thissell with Joseph Boyd as Vice President. In Danville businesswoman Lillian R. Close and rancher Libbie Wood led the Club. Walnut Creek's Club had Mrs. C. R. Leech as President and Mrs. A. S. Ormsby as First Vice President. Oakley was evidently a "suffrage stronghold" according to the Contra Costa Gazette with Mrs. W. E. Bacon and R. C. Marsh as top officers.

California women campaigned throughout the state with Votes-for-Women-Clubs, speeches out of cars, posters, parades and letters to the editors.

Activities in Contra Costa paralleled the statewide ones, often providing programs with speakers, songs, monologues and dances.

California was the largest state to give women the vote. It became the sixth western state to have women's franchise, following Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Idaho and Washington. Many of the campaign techniques used in California were copied in

other states. Indeed, on this issue, the west led the way.



1772 —Remembering the First Europeans Who Came to Bay Point *Dean McLeod*

The Bay Point Historical Society will be holding its 9th Annual Luncheon on September 17, 2011. This event will take you on a ride that will interest anyone with connections to Bay Point, West Pittsburg, Port Chicago, Nichols and Clyde. Touching briefly on an item or two from each community, we will quickly get to the FIRST European exploration of the land that became these communities. This exploration by the Spanish to the "contra costa" led by Father Juan Crespi and Captain Pedro Fages occurred four years before the more famous de Anza expedition.

Local historian and author Dean McLeod will tell the story from the actual words of these two men during the few days that they marched through what is now Contra Costa County. With maps, charts and illustrations on screen, we'll learn details of their encounters with the native Chupcans.

No monument to the historic Crespi/Fages visit to Contra Costa County exists. There will be some discussion of rectifying this significant oversight by the historical community.

Remembering Al Blachman

Webb Johnson

Last month I learned that Al Blachman, the loving husband of our President, Andrea, had died.

I met Al in March 1959 at the enlisted men's mess hall on Treasure Island. We had both been called to active duty as members of the Naval Reserve and were awaiting orders for deployment.

Al was easy to meet. All you had to do was get within talking distance, and make eye contact. I lived in Walnut Creek and had a college life going, so shipping out with the US Navy, even though it might be a great adventure to other people, was about the last thing on earth I'd have done, given a choice.

Al was married to Andrea at the time, and I think he was attending U.C. They planned on starting a family, so Al was even less enthusiastic about spending any time at all on some rust bucket in the South China Sea, than I was. We hit it off right away.

Al growing up in Berkeley and me in Walnut Creek gave us something else in common, and he loved cars and so did I, but the main thing I remember about Al Blachman from those three days on Treasure Island is that he could make me laugh – till I hurt, and there was nothing more I needed about then. Knowing him for just that short time made the dire prospect of being a sailor for the next two years seem at least bearable.

We got orders the same day, Al to the USS Yorktown and me to the USS Hornet. Yes. That "USS Hornet," the one now tied up in Alameda, as a living museum.

About a year went by and I had completed a seven month tour in the West Pacific - an old salt by then. I had almost forgotten about my three days on Treasure Island.

It was then I learned that my Division, COMCARDIV 19, was moving its flag to the USS Yorktown. When I reported aboard with my sea bag over my shoulder one of the first people I saw walking across the Hangar Deck in dungarees was Al. I still remember how glad I was to see that big smiling face, and how happy I was that he recognized and remembered me.

Al Blachman, on board the Yorktown



For the next year Al was my best friend. We were on liberty in Honolulu, Sasebo, Yokosuka, Hakodate, Kobe, Subic Bay, and Hong Kong. We spent time aboard ship when we had the chance, too. Al's about five games ahead in chess (I'll

admit it now) but that's in more than 1000 games (and a million laughs) at least.

Al Blachman was an intelligent, sensitive, considerate and humorous friend. It's impossible to recall my days in the Navy without remembering him, and what a great guy he was, and what difference he made in my disposition and outlook.

Attending Al's life celebration the other day with Andrea, the rest of his loving family and a multitude of good friends, I thought about the hopes and dreams that he had shared with me as a young man, thousands of miles and ages ago. I realized - they all came true.

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DONALD WILLIAMSON LEAVES \$10,000 TO CCCHS



Life member Donald Williamson passed away on November 25, 2010. His family is an old one in the County, settling in Antioch in 1867. Donald was a lifelong resident of Antioch. He attended local schools and graduated from UC Davis in 1949, with a major

in animal husbandry. After receiving an honorable discharge from the Navy, Donald returned home to the ranch to work the farm. He was a man of many interests, including wine-making; his wines won many awards. One of Donald's proudest achievements was

saving his ranch by having it placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.

Donald Williamson's generous bequest to the CCCHS is a testament to his interest in the history of Contra Costa County, and is deeply appreciated by the staff, volunteers, board members, and members of the Contra Costa County Historical Society.

In Memoriam:

Member Harmon Howard, Walnut Creek.

Member George Wiles, Concord.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

Date: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

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 Corporate \$500

Benefactor \$1000 Student \$15

Remember that your membership renewal date can be determined by checking the address label on this newsletter. If you receive your newsletter electronically, please call the History Center at: 925-229-1042.

From the Executive Director:



Dear Friends,

After my first year as Director, we are in the midst of another great year.

- We have received a challenge grant from the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation in the amount of \$5,000 toward our goal of upgrading our computer systems and digitizing our collections for their safety and for the use of our members and of the general public. Those computers are now in the process of being installed.
- We have received a grant of \$600 from the Martinez Community Foundation to help with our exhibits. A new DVD player and monitor are being used within the Veale exhibit to run a video about Sheriff Veale. I hope you have had a chance to view it.
- As the result of the federally funded Conservation Assessment Program grant, we will have a professional assessor come through the Archive at the end of August to give us guidance on the conservation and preservation of our invaluable documents.
- We have received the wonderful bequest from Mr. Williamson.
- Our 60th birthday appeal has met with a good deal of success.

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We need *you*, however, to keep the Society going. Your support is vital. Nearly 60% of our budget comes from membership dues and donations. If it is time, please renew your membership today. You may check to see if your membership is due by looking at the date that is just above your name on the address label of this *Bulletin*.

As always, you are more than welcome to visit the History Center. As of September 1, we will have a new exhibit, and a reception for members will be held on September 11. Please join us for that reception. I'll look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely, Priscilla

