



BULLETIN

Fall 2016

Mark Your Calendar for our Annual Meeting & Holiday Luncheon Plus a Silent Auction Fundraiser!

Saturday, December 3, 2016 11:00am – 2:00pm Diablo Country Club *Tara Weber*

The Contra Costa County Historical Society is excited to be holding its Annual Meeting & Holiday Luncheon at the Diablo Country Club. This year, we are adding a fundraising component to the agenda with a silent auction. This will be the perfect opportunity to bid on and take home several fun and unique holiday gifts.

Each year the Society sets out to raise enough funds to purchase several critical items as outlined on our Wish List. These items allow the Society to continue the preservation work, and public access of, the County archives.

To date, we have crossed off several items from the Wish List but still have a few higher-priced items we must work toward. Replacing out-of-date computers and software as well as adding a security camera system and fire detection system are these big dollar items.

Our goal this December is to raise at least \$10,000 that we can put toward these bigger items and we will need your help to achieve this. Here are the ways you can support our year-end fundraising efforts.

- **RSVP to the December event!** Invitations will be mailed and emailed in mid-October. Reservations can also be made on our website at www.cocohistory.com
- **Pass along the invitation** to family and friends. Non-members are invited to attend the Annual Membership meeting to hear the Annual Recap and meet new friends.
- **Donate an item to the Silent Auction.** We are gathering a wide variety of items to bid on and are looking for additional items that will generate interest and make great holiday gifts. Vacation rentals, art work, tickets to attractions and sporting events, and good 'ol fashion gift certificates/gift cards are always popular. To make a donation, please contact Tara Weber at 510-501-0342 or mkting@cocohistory.org.

Thank you for your continued support of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. We hope to see you on December 3rd!

A special **Thank You** to the Diablo Country Club for donating the event space and making it possible for the Society to hold its annual program in such a beautiful, historic setting.



FROM RUSSIA TO PITTSBURG by way of China and the Philippines

Margie Newton

My curiosity was piqued when, while entering immigration records into the computer, I came across the records of several Russians born in China who had immigrated to Contra Costa County from the Philippines in the 1950s. I wondered what was their story?

The United States Army Transport Ship General M. L. Hersey, built by Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond,



sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge on November 30, 1950 with a cargo of displaced and stateless persons, including Klavdia Avdonin (left) born in Russia, her son, Alexander, born in China, and his wife, Zinaida, born in the USSR. The ship had made similar voyages carrying other White

Russians from the International Refugee Organization (IRO) camp on Tubabao in the Philippines to Australia, Europe and South America.

The White Russians, a name given to people who had fled from Russia during the 1919 revolution because of the color of the Tsarist soldiers' uniforms, crossed into Manchuria or Europe. In the early 1920s, 20,000 settled in Shanghai, where they were poorly received. The emigres to Harbin, in China, had developed a more agreeable living situation until the Japanese occupation began in 1932.

Called the Oriental Moscow, Harbin today is renowned for its unique, Russian-influenced architecture, remnants of the days when Harbin was a crucial stop on the Russian Manchurian Railroad.

*Blagoveschensky Temple
in Harbin*



Those Russians who had settled in China had to migrate again in 1949, when Mao and the Communist regime took over China.

With no place to go, an appeal to the United Nations was made. The only country to respond was the four-year-old nation of the Philippines. Tubabao Island, a four-hour boat ride from Guiuan in Easter Samar, became the home of 6300 refugees between 1949 and 1951. Evacuation from Shanghai to Guiuan was by plane or aging boats, crewed by Chinese former prisoners. The refugees were dropped on the desolate often typhoon-struck island on a former WW II US Navy site. A small group of men and Boy Scouts had preceded the main body in order to clear the land and set up tents. There was no electricity or running water. Food left over from WW II and some tins of food left on the island by the Navy was all they were given.

From this desolate beginning, a city of tents arose. The tents were divided into districts. Each district had a kitchen. There was also a hospital, a movie theater, schools, churches, a dental clinic and a police force. Each night canonized Saint (then Orthodox Archbishop of Shanghai) John Maximovitch blessed the island in all directions. During that time no typhoons hit the island. Since that time several storms have nearly destroyed what remained of the camp.

But, the problem of permanent settlement continued to exist. US Senator William Knowland of California inspected the camp. He was a moving force in amending the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which, when signed by President Harry Truman, opened the door for 3000 refugees on Tubabao to enter the United States. Two requirements for admittance were that applicants had to have a sponsor who would



guarantee housing and that applicants would not displace American workers.

Zinaida and Alexander, on board the General Hersey, November 30, 1950.

The Avdonin family was sponsored by an Oakland Baptist Church. Their first address was 214 Turk Street in San Francisco. After Alex obtained a job at Columbia Steel as an electrician, they moved to 145 May Avenue in Pittsburg, a subdivision called the Heights, built in 1945. The Avdonins had three children, two sons and a daughter. Klavdia, the mother, died in 1962; Alex died in 1964, and Zinaida died in 1991. All are interred in the Serbian Cemetery in Colma, California. Klavdia's other son, Nickolas, graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. He and his wife today operate Navdon Technology and Computer Services based in Michigan. His sister, Sandra, became an artist. She died in 2011. Brother Victor lives in Placentia, CA and is a Supervisor at Ferro Corporation.

Other White Russians who immigrated to Contra Costa County were Peter and Bertha Pootzihin, Danville; Lev Leonoff, Concord; Ivana Stockoff, Concord; Michael Rojnovsky, Lafayette; Jacob and Galina Koorganoff, Pittsburg; and George and Mila Zapolsky, Antioch.

These people endured years of hardship in reaching their final destination. They became strong and resilient in overcoming many hardships. Their story should be an inspiration to all.

This is just one of thousands of stories that form a part of our huge immigration archive. Find your family roots or just follow a story that piques your interest. Come in today and begin your journey.

Are You Looking For a Sign?

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY SIGNAGE

Steve James, Treasurer



Our History Center has been at its new location, 724 Escobar St. Martinez, for 4 years. We knew moving in, that we needed a sign that

would show the public who we are and that we are open for business. With limited funds (the move was expensive) we opted for a simple window sign mounted in a flower box. However, the sign could only be seen when standing in front of the window. We wanted something that would attract visitors from the sidewalk or the street. As always, funding was a challenge, but recently, an opportunity presented itself when a local business, GLT Sign Solutions in Martinez, was recommended.

We vetted them and received great feedback from Main Street Martinez and local businesses that had used them. Great, let's go talk. James Patton and Jose Ronquillo of GLT were very helpful. They suggested styles, mounting, and placement. And they were familiar with the city sign regulations.

Statistics show a sign attracts new business. Hopefully, our sign will attract people who have no idea what treasures lie behind our door. Come by and take a look.

Native American Day *Dean McLeod*

On Saturday, September 24th, with a standing-room only crowd in attendance, the Contra Costa County Historical Society honored the culture and heritage of



the County's first human inhabitants. Author Dean McLeod talked about his research on one of the County's first

people – the Chupcan tribe.

Author/researcher Richard Schwartz also gave an excellent introduction to the earliest migrants into what is now California. He also spoke of the weather and geography changes that gave rise to the landforms that we know today. He spoke particularly about the imminent destruction of the remaining Emeryville Shellmounds and their importance to understanding inhabitants there.

About the Authors:

Dean McLeod is a long-standing member of the CCCHS and served on its board for 10 years. Dean has served as a board member of the Bay Point Historical Society for over 15 years. He is the author of two books, *Images of America: Bay Point*, and *Port Chicago*. A forensic genealogist, and a founder of the Association of Professional Genealogists, he has been researching the Chupcan tribe for 20 years.

Richard Schwartz has been a historian in the East Bay for about 35 years and he has given many talks for many historical societies and libraries. He has been



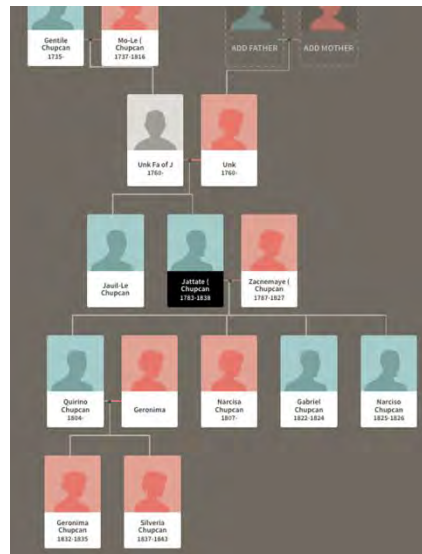
studying the West Berkeley Shellmound for decades. He has recorded many burials and artifacts and spent many hours meeting with archeologists.

Now a developer wants to put an underground parking structure over the landmarked area of the West Berkeley Shellmound site. The object of Richard's talk was to gather support for preventing further destruction of this ancient and irreplaceable sacred place. His work can be seen at <http://www.richardschwartz.info/>

Research has conclusively determined that the Diablo Valley belonged to the tribe that called themselves Chupcan during the Spanish/Mexican contact period (about 1772-1848). The family of Mo-Le are proved to be of the Chupcan tribe, so lived at one of the

several villages in the valley.

This is a chart that shows the discoverable genealogy of Mo-Le's descendants, based on baptism, marriage, and burial records from Missions San Francisco and San Jose. Zoom in for more detail.



The Chupcans, a tribe of the Bay

Miwok Indians, are known to have inhabited Diablo Valley likely from Clayton to north Pacheco. They escaped Spanish dominance from 1805 to 1810 by moving to Solano County before going into the missions.

The charting of each of the partial Chupcan genealogies, as revealed in the Catholic Mission registers, could provide a model approach to determine how many DIDN'T get listed in the registers, but MUST have existed. A large sampling from California tribes would provide a much more accurate count for the Contact Period population in California. Contact Dean at: firstvillages725@gmail.com

Remembering:

Leland Taylor

August 21, 1932 – July 30, 2016



It is with great regret that we report the passing of one of our most well-known, productive, and diligent volunteers. For as many years as anyone can recall, Lee Taylor was the face of our photo collection. If you wanted to know if we had something, or where it

could be found, Lee was the go-to guy. The newspaper obituary described his experience with the Historical Society as follows: "His passion for his community was focused as a long standing volunteer at the Contra Costa County Historical Society where he took great pleasure in sorting old photos and images and memorializing local history using new fangled digital imaging technology. He accepted the challenges of new PC technology as a means to capture history, with the occasional curse of a sailor at unwanted PC upgrades, to the end."

Marvin Epstein, M.D.

June 14, 1923 – August 11, 2016



A long-time member of the Society, and an active volunteer, Dr. Epstein led a distinguished career as a leading physician at John Muir Hospital. His community interests were wide-ranging. Retiring in

1993, he worked on a history of medical care in our county, which was published by our Society in 2000.

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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___ Benefactor \$1000 ___ Student \$20

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.com.

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.

Not Another Election?!

Yes, five of our board members are up for re-election this year. You should receive your ballot soon, either electronically or by snail mail. Follow the directions in completing and returning your ballot.

Thank You!



From the President:

It's hard to believe that two years have passed, and that it is now time to hand the reins on to someone else. Thinking back over the past two years,

there have been a lot of small steps by our board and volunteers, but in total, they have added up to a much larger effort to make our Society and History Center a useful resource to all members of the community.

Among the more memorable:

- We are working with history teachers in the area, bringing students to the Center for a living workshop on county history and historical figures.
- We have brought in local history authors who did some of their research at our facility to talk about their experiences using our archives.
- We have tied a number of our Saturday openings to special events. Each of these events, offered free to the public, have increased our awareness to those that did not know about us.
- On the Social Media side, we have established a Facebook group devoted to a general discussion of Contra Costa History. To help facilitate the discussions, we have been posting photos, videos and other treasures from our archives. We have also established a YouTube "Channel" where we have posted our historical videos for the public to view.
- We continue to catalog and digitize our archives, with a view to making the information more easily available, not only to people who visit us in Martinez, but to researchers worldwide through our website.
- We have received some historically important collections, such as Judge Arnason's personal artifacts and documents from his many years of service in the county's court system. These documents were the starting point for our current exhibit "Justice and Judges: The History of the Law in Contra Costa County".
- We also recently received a large collection of photos and negatives from the Contra Costa Times.

This is the third or fourth batch of photos and documents we have received from the Times in recent years. They are closing their larger facilities around the county, a result of their merger with other newspapers around the Bay Area, with more to come, so I have been told.

These are but a few of our successes over the past two years, but they are ones that stick out in my mind.

I wanted to note that we lost two longtime volunteers over the summer. Leland "Lee" Taylor, who was our Photo Department Manager and resident picture guru, passed away on July 30. Two weeks later, on August 11, Dr. Marvin Epstein also passed away. Dr. Epstein was a retired physician and volunteer who wrote a book titled *The Progress of Medical Care in Contra Costa County, 1951-2000*. The book was published by our Society in 2000, and is available through our bookstore.

On behalf of the Board and the entire membership of the Society, I want to, once again, offer condolences to the families of these two gentlemen whose significant contributions to the Society will never be forgotten.

I would also like to thank outgoing Board member Webb Johnson for his faithful service to the board for many years, including keeping me and the rest of the board on track as our Secretary over the past few years. Webb is a member of two of Contra Costa's oldest families, and his knowledge of the early days of the county have proven invaluable to the Society in general and the Board in particular. We're all sorry to see him leave the board, and wish him well in the future.

In closing, I'd like to thank all of our members for giving me the chance to head up the Society over the past couple years. I also want to wish each and every one of you a great holiday season, and a healthy, happy and prosperous 2017.

Scott



From the Director:

Dear Friends,

It's been a fruitful quarter, with many projects moving forward, thanks to our expanding volunteer

force. Most of all, we are well on our way to a Finding Aid to the Archives, which will make it easier to understand the contents of the many special collections that make up the Archives.

We continue to need funds to make this all possible. Please support our Annual Appeal and come to the Annual Dinner on December 3. I am so very thankful to our members and donors, our volunteers, and our Board of Directors, all of whom make the enhancement of the CCCHS Archives and its availability to the public more and more possible.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Priscilla

Scan-a-Thon Returns!

Saturday, November 19

Gather together your historic and valued documents, especially the over-sized ones, and bring them to the History Center to be permanently digitized and preserved. If your document has some local historical significance, you may allow us to make it a part of our archives, to be shared with researchers world-wide.

Our large-format scanner is available to scan very large documents, such as newspapers, maps, charts, and blueprints. If you are concerned about preserving one of these fragile items, this is your chance to create a file that can be viewed over and over, without further damaging your precious document. You should receive, or will receive, notice regarding this important event.

60 Years Ago: Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Opens; Car Ferry Service Ends on the Bay

Donsld Bastin



August 31, 1956. Opening ceremony of the new Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. The man in the middle is Governor Goodwin Knight..

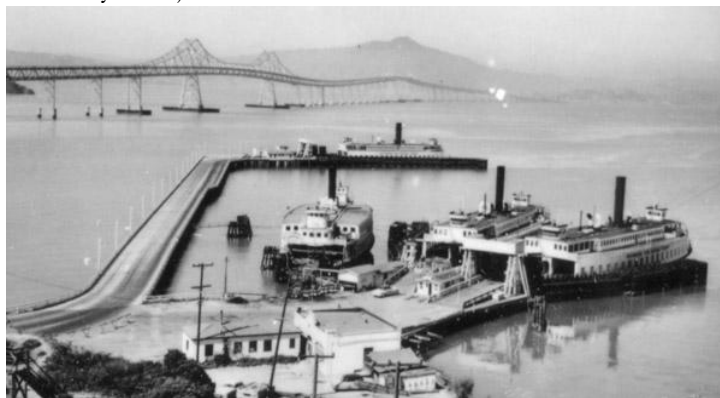
The bridge opened to vehicle traffic the next day, Saturday, September 1. To see an historic video of this event, go to:

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/189372>

The opening of the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge (Official Name: John F. McCarthy Memorial Bridge) was indeed an historic event. Since 1915, Contra Costa and Marin Counties had been linked by a ferry system, operating between Pt. Castro in Richmond and Pt. San Quentin in San Rafael. A bridge connection had been proposed as early as the 1920s, but it took the population growth of the War years to spur plans for a new bridge.

Construction began in March, 1953, and moved along quickly. In fact, the bridge was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. Seems incredible today.

As of Saturday, September 1, 1956, car ferry service ceased on the Bay. On August 31, many people took a ferry ride just for old times' sake.



In the distance is the completed bridge. In the foreground are the ferry slips and the four boats of the Richmond-San Rafael ferry system, now idled. The roadway on the pier at the left served for years as a public fishing pier, but has long since deteriorated and collapsed into the bay mud.

