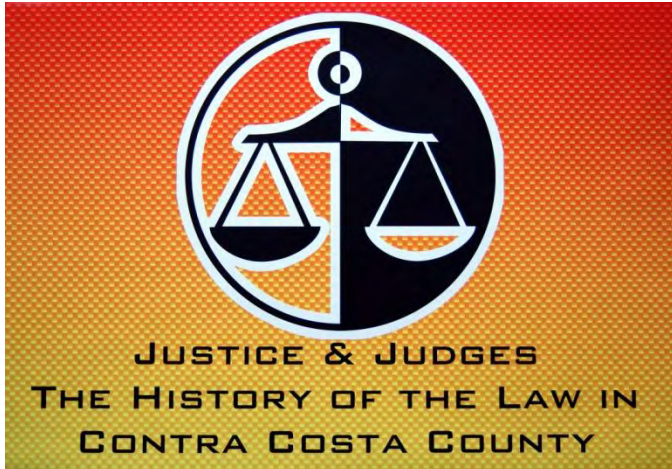


The Law in These Parts

Editor



Our Society recently received a substantial donation from the Contra Costa County Superior Court. The donation consists of artifacts and extensive court documents that once belonged to Judge Richard Arnason, (right), who passed away recently. Judge Arnason served as a Superior Court Judge for 49 years, longer than any judge in the history of our county. He also was the presiding judge in the Angela Davis trial, in 1972, which is arguably one of the most significant (for both legal and political reasons) cases of the latter 20th century. The donation was received from Presiding Judge Barry Goode, who suggested that an exhibit honoring Judge Arnason would be welcomed. Our Executive Director also saw the potential for



using the materials to educate the citizens of Contra Costa County, and thus, an exhibit was born. Creating an exhibit has proved to be a challenging task, but one that has proved to be very enlightening.

The legal system in Contra Costa County has undergone many changes over the years. California's original constitution, enacted in 1850, created a fairly complex system consisting of several courts. At the top (as far as the county was concerned) was the District Court. The district included Contra Costa County and several other counties, originally as far south as Santa Cruz and Monterey. The District Court Judge heard major criminal and civil cases, and appeals from lower courts. Below the District Court were the County Court and the Court of Sessions. The County Court, which handled civil cases and acted as a probate court, was assigned one judge. It also took appeals from the Justice's Court. The Court of Sessions acted in concert with the County Court, handling only criminal matters and criminal appeals from the Justice's Court. Its composition was unique, consisting of the County Judge and two Justices of the Peace, acting as Associate Judges. The Associate Judges were elected by all the Justices in the county.

At the bottom were the Justice's Courts, and in some ways the Justice's Court was the most interesting and has had the longest history. That history goes back to 13th century England, when the office of Justice of the Peace was created. These were community judges who handled local matters. There was a similar office in Mexican California, the Alcalde, who was a respected community member. His job was to resolve neighbor's disputes and to render swift justice

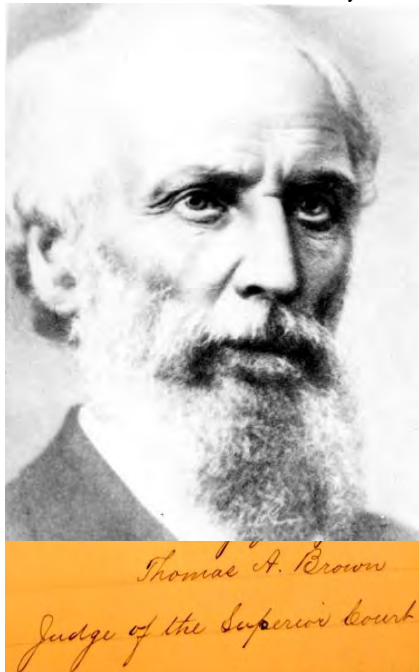
to miscreants. The Americans who flooded into California during the Gold Rush adapted to the Alcalde system without a problem, seeing the office as similar to their own Justice of the Peace. Many Americans served as Alcaldes during the first years of the California Republic and statehood. The Justice's Court was local, easy to understand, and dealt with most of the issues that concern any community. Until late in the 20th century, the local Judge was known by everyone and knew everyone in turn. It



was a system that worked well and helped to foster a familiarity with the law and a respect for its processes. Sadly, it is long gone.

Judge Alexander Hector MacKinnon, Justice of the Peace in El Cerrito, 1914-1939. He died in office.

The California Constitution was completely revised in 1880 (and though amended hundreds of times, it is still the constitution in use today). As a result, the Superior Court system was created. The District Courts were abolished, as well as the County Court and the Court of Sessions. At first, there was only one Superior Court Judge in Contra Costa County, and only one Department. The first Superior Court Judge was Thomas A. Brown, who was also the last County Judge. As the population increased, new departments were created and the number of judges increased. One judge serves in



*Thomas A. Brown
Judge of the Superior Court*

each department, and today there are 40 departments and 40 Superior Court Judges.

The first Municipal Court in Contra Costa County was created in 1953, in the city of Richmond. Richmond, like the rest of the county, had sustained enormous population growth, due the war boom, and the Justice's Courts, often manned by judges untrained in the law, were straining to meet the challenge of this growth. By 1969, five Municipal Courts were in operation (Richmond, Concord, San Pablo, Walnut Creek, and River) and by 1972 they had swallowed up all of the Justice Courts. A long tradition of local justice passed into history, not without controversy. Many people felt that community judges provided common sense judgment and an intimate knowledge of the local population that the Municipal and Superior Court judges could not duplicate.

By the early 1990s, there were only 4 Municipal Courts, as the San Pablo Court had been absorbed into the Bay (Richmond) Municipal Court. The other courts were now known as Delta (replacing River), Mt. Diablo (Concord), and Walnut Creek-Danville (Walnut Creek). But the tide of consolidation was relentless, and in June of 1998, by unanimous consent of all the judges in both the Superior and Municipal Courts, the Municipal Courts were abolished.

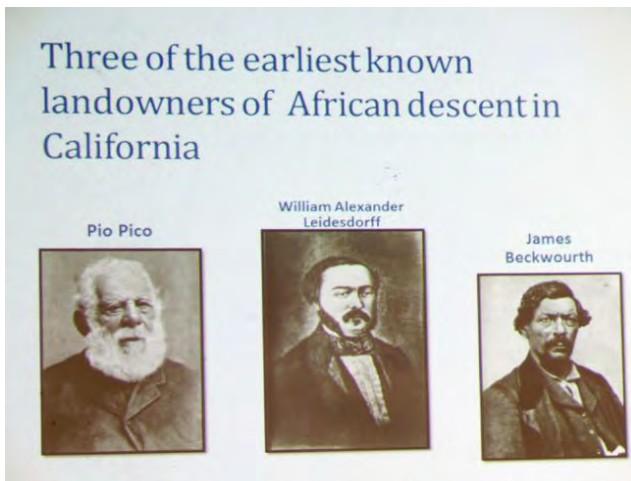
Today, only the Superior Court remains in our county. The name "Superior Court" has lost its core meaning, as it is now superior to nothing. All civil and criminal cases, from small claims to traffic court to divorce proceedings, to the most serious criminal offences, are now carried on in one of the Superior Court buildings in the county (most of them in Martinez).

Our new exhibit, **"Justice and Judges: The History of the Law in Contra Costa County,"** is scheduled to open on Saturday, May 21. Please join us for an open house in its honor.

Author in the Archives: Feb 20, 2016



On February 20, as part of our “Author in the Archives” series, talks which are held on the third Saturday of every other month, historian Karina Robinson enlightened a very attentive audience with information about African American landowners in early California and in Contra Costa County. Karina recently completed work on her Master’s thesis in history, and we were pleased to learn that virtually all of her documentary material was located right in our institution. “The records were here,” she said, and she doubted that she could have completed her work without those documents.



Karina’s original research revealed that African Americans, like other Americans and immigrants to early California, bought land, ran businesses, and became a part of the local community.

Join us for the next in our series, “*Bay Area Iron Master Al Zampa: A Life Building Bridges*,” discussed by local historian John Robinson. Robinson will appear on the 3rd Saturday of the month, April 16.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley Presents:

THE ART OF SURVIVAL
Enduring the Turmoil of Tule Lake

The Japanese American Internment Experience During World War II

The Mochida family tagged and waiting to board their bus.

March 12 - May 15, 2016

**Museum of the San Ramon Valley**
205 Railroad Avenue, Danville
(925)837-3750 ~ museumsrv.org

HOURS:
Tuesday - Friday: 1-4pm
Saturday: 10am - 1pm
Sunday: noon - 3pm

Japanese Americans in the San Ramon Valley

Beverly Lane

Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, meant a change in everybody's life in the San Ramon Valley, but for the Japanese Americans it brought shock after shock. Katsumi Hikido's youngest brother Tatsuya was almost expelled from Tassajara School by the teacher, Miss Olwen Jones. "Fortunately, one of our neighbors, Mr. Theodore Nissen, was a member of the School Board and chastised her for her narrow-minded thinking, reminding her that my brother was an American citizen."

Contra Costa County's Sheriff John A. Miller provided a calm voice after Pearl Harbor. The *Contra Costa Gazette* on December 8, 1941, quoted him: "Most every Japanese here is a loyal American, and those few who are not we have every facility to take care of in a lawful American way."

The promises of the Constitution dissolved in the hysteria of the moment. Thousands of American citizens and their elderly parents were put in internment camps with armed guards patrolling the circumference, solely because of their ancestry. There were no charges made in court; no judges ruled that this should be done.* At the highest level, President Roosevelt included, their rights were denied.

None of the families returned to the valley. As Tanio Hirano said he decided to move to San Jose. "They were a little friendlier there." He didn't want to return to Danville where people knew him.

**(Actually, in 1944, the Supreme Court decided, in Korematsu v. U.S., that the government's action was lawful...Editor)*

www.museumsvr.org

The following is the latest in our continuing series on the historical societies of Contra Costa County

CLAYTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

JoAnn Caspar, President



JOEL CLAYTON HOUSE

6101 Main Street, Clayton, Ca 94517 925-567-6079

The Joel Clayton House Museum is located in the small town of Clayton, on the north side of Mt. Diablo. Joel Clayton came from Buxworth, England in 1837 and into the Diablo Valley area in the 1850's. This house museum was built circa 1860, and is believed to have been the second home of the Joel Clayton family. Behind the museum are the old town

jail from the 1880's and a typical farm "outhouse".

The Clayton Historical Society has a new exhibit that opened February 12th at the museum on Abraham Lincoln's birthday.



It is "Mementos of the Civil War Years", which will be in the museum through July. April 23 and the 24th is our Gardens Tour this year. We have five beautiful gardens. Information can be found on our website: www.claytonhistory.org. This website will give you all the information you will need to answer any question. We have field trips for third graders, scout groups and others. The first Monday of each month "old timers" meet with bag lunches and tell stories and reminisce. Please go to our website and read the latest newsletter called "Clayton Chronicles". The museum is open for extended hours during many of Clayton's downtown events.



From left: Becky Overstreet (volunteer); JoAnn Caspar (president); Dick Ellis (past president). Email: jojocasper@gmail.com

Deer Valley High School Program

Steve James (Treasurer)

In planning our 2016 education goals, outreach was high on the list. We have made attempts before to align ourselves with a High School history program, but getting into the timeline of a public school schedule is difficult. This year we had decided to approach a home school program, when out of the blue we were contacted by a Deer Valley High School (DVHS) English teacher, Joan Setka.

English! We're a History Center. How will this work? At our first meeting it became clear how she envisioned her students writing a paper on an early pioneer of Martinez. The plan was to find a pioneer buried at the Alhambra cemetery. Then find as much information as possible about that person at our History Center, through court records, obituaries, photos, census records, and newspaper articles. The assignment was to write a narrative of what that person's life was like: the struggles they faced, and their successes and failures. It was a cool idea, but we were faced with challenges.

How do we fit 40 students into our Center? How could we teach them to use our records to find the documents needed? The answer to both of these questions was easy, we couldn't.

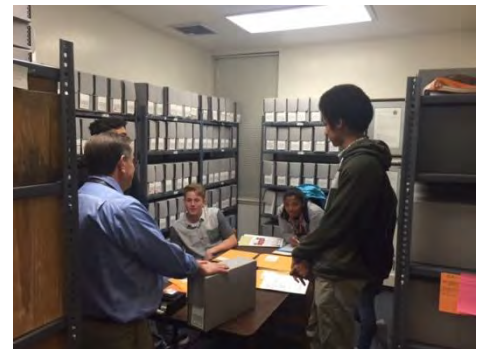


So we split the students into two groups of 20, with one group at the cemetery and one at the Center. Having two groups reduced our list of "interesting pioneers" to 20, which was still tough. This way a student in group 1, had the same pioneer as a student in group 2. Joan handpicked which student got a particular pioneer. As far as the research question was

concerned, we had our expert volunteers pull the documents needed. This required many hours of work, but we felt it was worth it. Plus we kept a set for possible future use.

The program was scheduled for March 17, and the work of compiling the documents went right up to the deadline. We were still nervous about having 20 students in the Center for 1-1/2 hours. How disciplined would these 11th grade students be? The 20 students were broken into 4 groups of 5. We set up 7 stations: Public Access Computer Terminal, Library, Court Records, Tax Assessment Records, Photos, Maps, and Naturalization. We allotted 10 minutes at each station. Each station had one of our volunteers, who explained what their room contained and how the documents in their packages were tracked to that room.

Board member John Greitzer introduces students to our court documents



The students were very attentive and any misgivings we had had about behavior disappeared quickly. They were engaged and asked good questions. One African American student had the package of a slave who came to Martinez and gained his freedom, to which he responded "this is cool". They enjoyed the photos (who doesn't?). We showed them an early 1900s photo of downtown Brentwood and asked if they could identify the area. The photo winner was the criminal mug shots, taken over 100 years ago. Everyone loved the photos, and the identifying information (like "big ears").

As our day ended, we all agreed that it was a success--well worth the time and effort of compiling the documents. We are currently in contact with a home school network and are planning a new program. It will use some of the elements of our DVHS program and incorporate new ones. One size does not fit all.

National History Day

February 27, 2016

John Burgh



Need a strong antidote to despair that “People refuse to learn from history?” Want an overwhelmingly positive affirmation that the next

generation is fully alive to those lessons and excited to make society put them into place? My advice is to get involved in student poster judging for the National History Day contest sponsored in part by the County Office of Education! CCCHS Board President Scott Saftler and I had the pleasure of spending a Saturday with students from various elementary and middle schools in the county, a feature of the nationwide celebration of History Day. Within the theme adopted for each year, the contestants select their own subjects, do research, and present their findings via a written paper and a poster display. Nationally-established guidelines assure transparency and fairness in every phase of the process. Students are grouped together by age and class level, so that the entrants are judged against their peers. A dozen volunteer judges from all over the county meet and talk with assigned students and evaluate their research and sources, and the text and graphic panels they had prepared to illustrate their conclusions.

The creativity in selection of topic, and the diligence in research and presentation by these young people is truly jaw-dropping! The zest for learning, the passion for history, and the refreshing perspectives on complicated issues in these young minds is simply wonderful! All the entries we were assigned to judge were excellent...picking the best was not easy. The top ranked entries from each of the judging teams were then grouped and judged against one another, leading to the selection of the top two submissions in

this year’s county program. Those chosen will go on to the next, regional, level of the competition.



The immersion among students, parents, educators and other judges from all parts of the county made for a wonderful

experience. We have already signed up for next year, and I would encourage all Society members to consider doing the same!

CCCHS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New Renew Gift

Date: _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Apt. # _____

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 \$40 Couple \$70 Sponsor \$100

Patron \$200 Corporate \$500

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.

2015 Annual Appeal Donors :

\$3000 Steve and Priscilla James

\$1000+ John Burgh, Betty Maffei

\$500 Oliver Bray, John Mercurio, Gene Campion and Ann Walker, Condor Consulting

\$200+ Traci Parent, Stuart & Judy Swiedler/Weiss, Donald & Marianne Wood, Earl A. Turner, Jr.

\$100+ Tom & Cindy Silva, Timothy Wilkinson, Webb Johnson, Patty Tardiff, Margaret Ready, Elena Lyn Reese, Clifford Gambs, Wayne Lawson, Barry Goode, Glen Jones, Donald Bastin, H.B. Martin, Jeff & Jennifer Apkarian, Michael Hibma & Caitlin Harvey, Michael & Pamela Walford, Beverly & James Lane, Lisa Gorrell, Anita Heiser, Kay Norman, Priscilla & Henry Couden

\$50 Patricia Whitesides & Don Bauman, Paul & Peggy Grunland, Curtis & Ingrid Wood, Burton C. Bogardus, Janet Berckefeldt, Lynn & Sandi Maack, David & Elaine Seawell, Cindy McKenna, Thomas E. Patterson, John H. Nutley, Linda & Robert Barbero, Nancy & Rich Bentley, Frank & Carol Gregorich, Bobbie Landers, Marlissa Plumb

\$25+ James Moore, Roxanne Lindsay, Richard & Anne Zampa, Mary Solon, Brian Bray, Ronald & Carol Bancroft

\$10+ Nancy Wolfe, Nancy Colchico, JoAnn Ganotti, Linda Maynes

A warm Thank You to all who donated last year. It made a big difference to our bottom line!

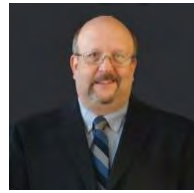


The ROV Has Moved!

The iconic ship *Red Oak Victory*, the only remaining ship built in Richmond in WWII, is now

located in Basin #5, in old Kaiser Shipyard 3. **More:**

<http://richmondmuseum.org/ss-red-oak-victory/>



From The President

Spring has arrived. Things at the History Center are in full bloom! We addressed the Board of Supervisors, welcomed our second “Author in

the Archives” speaker, and helped judge a number of elementary school students at the annual History Day Competition. And that was just February! Continuing the pace, March has seen a talk at the Martinez library on our archives, a group of Deer Valley High School students using our archives to research historical county figures, our first “Scan-a-thon”, and a visit to the John Muir house and Martinez Adobe for our volunteers.

In April, our “Author in the Archives” series continues, and in May, we will be opening our new exhibit on the County court system. Keep tabs on our usual outlets (regular and electronic mail, website and Facebook group) for details on these events.

I’d like to digress a bit to talk about an article I recently came across in the March issue of AARP, entitled “Declutter Your Home”. While many of the suggestions are sensible, a couple of ideas in the article have historians and genealogists upset, because they involve destroying invaluable documents and photographs.

Concerning old family letters, especially the personal ones, AARP’s idea was to “burn them ceremonially and send the love back into the universe”. The suggestion regarding photos was to throw out landscape shots. Then, pick three or four pictures from vacations, holidays and other “meaningful” events, along with “great shots”. Digitize them, then toss all your originals. What was this author thinking?

Old letters can be terrific glimpses into the past, and old landscape photos can be reminders of places that have changed or disappeared entirely. From an historical perspective, they can be invaluable. If you don’t want them, consider donating them to an historical preservation group, like CCCHS!

Scott



724 Escobar St,
Martinez, CA 94553

Return Service Requested

Non Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Concord, CA
Permit No. 630

Mark Your Calendar

Saturday, April 16 – Author in the Archives. John Robinson will speak about his new book on bridge builder Al Zampa. Talk begins at 1:00 p.m.

Friday, May 13 – Presentation at Pinole Historical Society annual meeting, 6:30-8 pm. Conference room, Kaiser Med. Ctr, Pinole.

Saturday, May 21 – New exhibit opening: **Justice & Judges: The History of the Law in Contra Costa County.**

Saturday, June 4 – Talk & Tour, Diablo Country Club, historian David Mackesey, 10 am-noon.

Saturday, June 18 – Author in the Archives: Details to come.

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.....Scott Saftler
1st Vice President..... John Mercuio
2nd Vice President.....Donald Bastin
Secretary..... Webb Johnson
Treasurer..... Steven James

Andrea Blachman	Oliver Bray
John Burgh	Lisa Gorrell
John Greitzer	Beverly Lane
Kathy Leighton	Tara Weber

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 3rd Saturday, 10 am-2 pm; Email: info@cocohistory.com

Website: www.cocohistory.com; Find us on **Facebook** at

Contra Costa County Historical Society