



BULLETIN

Fall 2019

We Do Research: Recent Work for the County Administrator's Office *John Greitzer*

The Contra Costa County Historical Society is not just a building full of archives, but also a research center. Visitors can access our archives to do their own research, or our staff and volunteers can perform the research for them. This article describes one such request for historical research.

Early in 2019 the Contra Costa County Administrator's Office asked us to determine where the previous County administration buildings were located, before the building currently in use at 651 Pine Street (if you're familiar with downtown Martinez, it's the only tall building in town). By "administration building," we mean the building that houses the County government including the Board of Supervisors' meeting room and many of the various County departments.

The County wants to put together an exhibit on these older County buildings for display in the new County admin center currently being constructed. We performed the research from February to July 2019.

Our research led to some fascinating facts, questions and discoveries. Read on, for all the details.

The Big Picture

The new County admin building now under construction in downtown Martinez will be the sixth County office location since statehood and countyhood began in 1850. Only the fourth, fifth and the new sixth one were built as County administration

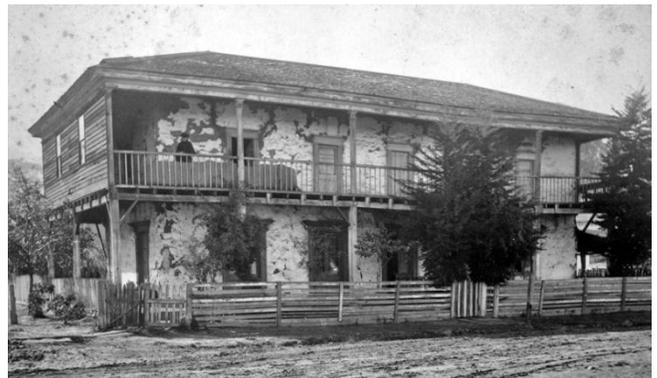
buildings. Earlier on, the County's offices were in the County courthouses, except for the very first location which was in a private home. It wasn't until the late 1920s that County officials decided that administrative functions needed their own building.

All six of the past and future County buildings were located within several blocks of one another in downtown Martinez (all but one of them along Escobar Street). The first two County admin buildings no longer exist; the third and fourth still exist but are used for other purposes. The fifth and current County building will be torn down when the new one is open.

The County Buildings, One By One

The following paragraphs describe all of the County administration buildings. Fortunately, our archives contained photographs of every one of them.

The first County office, 1850-1855:



The Berreyesa Adobe, at the northwest corner of Escobar Street and Smith Street (now Alhambra Avenue), served as the County's first government office from the formation of the County in 1850 until

the first County Courthouse was ready in 1855. The adobe belonged to Jose de los Santos Berreyesa and his wife Francisca Martinez Berreyesa (the City of Martinez is named for her father). The adobe was built in 1849 or 1850 (sources vary on the date).

The Berreyesa Adobe very quickly became a multi-use facility. Not only was it used by the County's first governmental body, the three-member Court of Sessions, starting in 1850, but it also served as the meeting place for the County's first Masonic Lodge, a school house, a meeting place for a church congregation, and a voting place during elections.

We don't have information on how the Berreyessa Adobe came to be used for these functions. It would be interesting to know if the Berreyessas offered the use of their home to be good citizens, or if the County and the other groups approached them and paid them for the use of their home, or if the County simply commandeered the home since it was the largest building in central Martinez at that time.

In any event, the Court of Sessions only met four times per year, so it wasn't too much of an imposition on the Berreyessas, and by 1855 the County no longer needed the use of their home. The adobe was razed in 1906 after one of its walls was severely damaged in the 1906 earthquake. It was still owned by the Berreyessas' daughter, Guadalupe Berryessa Plum, at the time. Today, the site is an open lot, one of the few in downtown Martinez.

The second County office, 1855-1903:



The first County Courthouse was built on the southwest corner of Court Street and Escobar Street and opened for business in 1855, with a jail in the basement. It served as the courthouse and as the County government office, except for the County Clerk's office which was located in a home owned by a Mr. Douglas somewhere in central Martinez. In 1875 a new County Clerk's office was added onto the County Courthouse building. The Courthouse was damaged in an earthquake on October 21, 1868, which brought down a portion of the roof and rear wall. The bell that was on the roof of the building was saved and removed. While the courthouse was being repaired, the county court and government temporarily operated in a nearby carpenter's shop (location unknown).

The earthquake damage led to repeated calls to condemn the Courthouse and build a new one. It took about thirty years, but the County finally did.

The third County office, 1903-1933:



The second County Courthouse was built across Court Street from the first courthouse, on the east side of the street (the address today is 625 Court Street). Construction was begun in 1901 but not completed until 1903. County government moved into the new building in March 1903. The first County Courthouse was torn down. In the new Courthouse, which was larger than the first, the County government operated in the basement. A new jail was built as an annex on the back of the building. On display in the rotunda was the bell that had been removed from the roof of the first

courthouse. The new Courthouse was built with a dome on top, which was removed in 1957 due to fears that it would fall through the roof in an earthquake. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It has been the County Finance Building since 1966. The bell from the roof of the first Courthouse is on display at the Martinez Historical Society Museum, 1005 Escobar Street.

The fourth County office, 1933-1964:



The Hall of Records

was constructed in 1932-33. County officials believed they needed

an administration building due to the growing volume of County records that had to be maintained and services that had to be provided as the population grew. County administration moved out of the courthouse basement and into the new Hall of Records in 1933. The address is 725 Court Street. The Hall of Records was later converted into a courthouse in 1966 and is now called the Wakefield Taylor Courthouse, named for the longtime Martinez judge who passed away in 2005. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The fifth County office, 1964-2020:

The Contra Costa County Administration Building (renamed the **Joseph P. McBrien Administration Building** in 1986) was built in 1963-64. County Administrator Joseph McBrien wanted to build it near Highway 4, close to the then-recently constructed Sheriff's Department, but



the business community in downtown Martinez successfully lobbied to keep the County government downtown. When the new building opened in 1964, it set off a wave of governmental musical chairs – County government vacated the Hall of Records and moved into the new Administration Building; the County Court left the 1903 Courthouse and moved into the Hall of Records; and the County Auditor-Controller then moved into the vacated 1903 Courthouse, which became (and remains) the County Finance Building. All the transitions were completed by 1966.

The Joseph P. McBrien Administration Building will be torn down after the new admin center is complete, making way for additional parking for County workers.

The sixth County office, 2020 – ?:

The Contra Costa County Administration Building is located across Escobar Street from the Joseph P. McBrien Administration Building. Aside from the Berreyessa Adobe, the previous County buildings each were used from thirty to fifty years before they were torn down or converted to other uses. Time will tell how long the new building will stay in use for the County.

CCCHS greatly appreciates the chance to perform this research for display in the new County building. We hope this article indicates the quality of research we are able to perform, using our own archives and other sources.

Sources: Contra Costa County Historical Society (CCCHS) Newspaper Archives and Photo Archives; Contra Costa County Library Online Archives (Magazines/Newspapers); Mero, William J., “*Historic Martinez Courthouses*,” accessed via CCCHS website cocohistory.org; National Register of Historic Places, U.S. National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm> Purcell, Mae Fisher, *History of Contra Costa County*, Gillick Press, 1940; San Jose Public Library California Room Archives, accessed via calisphere.org, the online archive of the University of California Libraries; Slocum & Company, *History of Contra Costa County, California* (J.P. Munro-Fraser, Historian), 1882; republished by CCCHS, 2000.

ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS

Marjorie Newton

October is National Archives Month. An archive is a place where historical papers are stored. Located in the Telfer building on Escobar Street in Martinez, the History Center is an archive of documents about Contra Costa County. Prior to becoming an archive, the building served as the site of Internal Affairs for Contra Costa County's Sheriff's Department.

Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society and Chief Archivist is UC Berkeley Ph.D. Priscilla Couden. From the maps, newspapers, Superior Court Records, Biographies, Obituaries, Tax Assessment records, and a library of reference materials and collections contributed by individuals, Priscilla can locate many individual records.

Aside from the E.D., the History Center's staff is made up of unpaid volunteers, some of very long standing. For instance, our former executive director, Betty Maffei, is a wealth of information on local history and is the author of *Amelia's Nortonville*. (available at our bookstore).

In our archive we have thousands of photos. If you wonder what the Mothball Fleet looked like, come in and ask Janet, the head of our photo department, to show you pictures. Janet hails from England and was educated as a biochemist. In 2011, she chanced by, noticed our display, and volunteered.

Lost your yearbook? A copy could be in our collection. Jim is always scouting various sites and sales, gathering local yearbooks. He would love to add your yearbook to our collection.

Would you like to see a copy of your grandparents' immigration records? Margie copied the Index of the records so that now names can be found on our website www.cocohistory.org, by clicking on databases, then Immigration and Naturalization Papers. Margie first volunteered in the 1990s when the History Center was located near the present Pleasant Hill Library.

Peggy is a retired geologist who is in charge of our maps. Among the collection are maps dating from 1775 to the present. There is a plat map of downtown Martinez listing the homeowner of each lot.

Intern Adria recently indexed the Bernie Freedman collection. Freedman collected newspaper articles about each of the schools in the county. For instance, in his collection, the John Swett District schools information begins in 1905. There were two high school graduates that year. Adria has a Master of Museum Studies from the University of Oklahoma and an MBA from Saint Mary's.

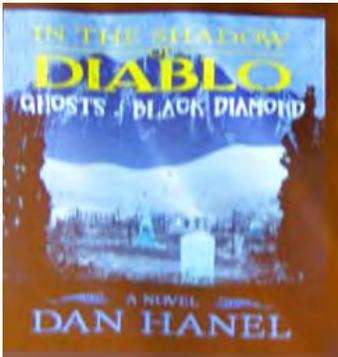


From left: Janet Stapleton, Scott Saftler, Kaori Evans, Richard Blue, Priscilla Couden, Peggy Holmes, Maxine Brown, Susan Bryggman

When you come to visit you may meet some of our other volunteers who have tasks that are not archival but are necessary to the running of the History Center. Steve, our treasurer, is a retired Chevron employee; Jennifer, our bookkeeper, has a degree in Art History. Together, they handle our finances. Scott, a former Bank of America employee, keeps the computers and the website running. Maxine is an archivist trained at Simmons College in Boston. She helps out on our monthly 1st and 3rd Saturday openings.

We hope to see you soon.

Author Dan Hanel Takes Us Down a Few “Rabbit Holes” in Latest Author in the Archives Talk



On September 21, at the Campbell Theatre, Dan Hanel treated his audience to a wide-ranging trip through history covering over 2000 years, all to explain how he came to write the latest book in his “In The Shadow of Diablo”

series. Dan, a former history teacher, loves local history and loves to weave local stories into mystery novels. He also loves to follow curious bits of information wherever they may lead (rabbit holes, he calls them).



Dan, signing books, with his wife, Jackie.

Dan’s enthusiasm kept the audience quiet and attentive for more than an hour, and many had questions at the end. Dan’s books are available at our bookstore.

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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 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.

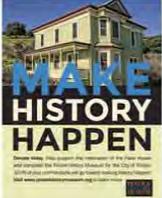
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TICKETS WILL BE HELD AT THE DOOR

The money raised will help to establish a museum in the historic Faria House, 2100 San Pablo Avenue.

Donate Your Vehicle, Get a Tax Write-Off, Support the CCCHS and the Rotary!



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Remembering Avice Taylor

Long-time volunteer Avice Taylor passed away on August 25. For over 15 years, Avice responded to research questions and helped to sort photographs and clippings. Her husband, Lee, also a volunteer, worked in the photo department, and Avice was a great help in identifying “mystery” people in our photographs.

Avice grew up in Lafayette, California, and graduated from Acalanes High School in 1951. She attended nursing school and graduated as an RN in 1955. Shortly after her graduation, Lee and Avice were married, and, after some world travel in conjunction with Lee’s work, settled in Walnut Creek, where they spent the rest of their lives. They had two children, Audrey and Lee (Jr.), who both have children of their own. “We really *really* enjoy spending time in the company of our four marvelous grandchildren” said Avice some years ago when she and Lee were interviewed for an article in our newsletter.



Lee Taylor passed away a few years ago, and Avice, whose health was failing, had to stop her volunteering activities. But for the time that she was with us, “without fail,” every Thursday, she was part of the bedrock group that our society came to depend on. Avice and Lee were “great volunteers” and we will miss them.

CCCHS

724 Escobar Street, Martinez, Ca 94553



Ballot 2019

Contra Costa County Historical Society Board of Directors

The following candidates are offered for election to the Board of Directors. Elected candidates will serve a 3 year term beginning January 1, 2020. (Vote for up to four)

Write-ins

_____	Donald Bastin (incumbent)	_____	_____
_____	John Greitzer (incumbent)	_____	_____
_____	Oliver Bray (incumbent)	_____	_____
_____	Beverly Lane (incumbent)	_____	_____

Please print out and complete ballot. Mail to address at top. Results will be announced at our General membership meeting in January.



From the President

One of our goals for 2019 was to increase our visibility and connections with the community at large. We hope to accomplish this through several different methods, one of which is meeting with community groups and civic organizations to provide information about the Society and what we offer.

I am pleased that we have made a number of these connections over the course of this year and hope to provide more presentations before the year is out.

Presentations this year were given at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church in March, the Alamo Rotary Club in July, and the Pittsburg chapter of Soroptimists International in September. All three groups were very welcoming and we appreciated the chance to meet with them and talk about our archives, our services, and ways in which their members can volunteer, or contribute historic information, or become members of CCCHS.

We also are looking to “up our game” in the web and social media arenas, to modernize our online look, and have a more active social media presence. Our staff and volunteer army are continuously working on scanning our archives so they can be accessed online via our website, or at least to provide an online index. Board members Tara Weber and Oliver Bray are working on a comprehensive outreach plan.

There is positive news to report on some earlier goals that are now accomplished or nearly so. We will be purchasing a new multi-purpose computer system for viewing, scanning and printing microfilm and microfiche. This is something we were seeking funds for and I am happy to report we were able to find the money and buy the machine (and thanks to any of you who donated for that machine). It will enable our research clients to use the many old editions of the now-defunct *Contra Costa Times* that the publishers donated to us on microfilm and microfiche.

All the above has made for a busy summer and early fall. We hope to see you at the History Center sometime soon.

John Greitzer

From the Executive Director

Summer is pretty much gone; the finale and the first of fall event having been a great talk by author Dan Hanel at the Campbell Theater on September 21. We have received large new accessions from the Diablo Chorale and the Pleasant Hill Historical Society. Our volunteers are hard at work indexing and entering information into our Past Perfect database and processing for preservation a large collection of real estate brochures from the last 50 years. Ask for McGoldrick’s collection, if you are interested.



YES! One of the goals from the first day of my tenure at the History Center has been to get a Finding Aid to our collections completed, and now, thanks to Board member volunteers Lisa Gorrell and John Greitzer, the Finding Aid is not only extant but available on the Online Archive of California (OAC), which makes it available to the world! (Check it out at www.oac.cdlib.org.)

I cannot thank you enough for your responses to our appeals/renewal requests. Our Summer Appeal has garnered over \$8,000 to support our ongoing needs.. Special thanks are due to the contributions made by the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation, the Chevron Federal Credit Union, the Martinez Community Foundation, and the City of Martinez.

The last quarter of the year and the first of 2020 offer two events you won’t want to miss. From November 2nd, through our holiday closing, we are offering a preview of our Spring exhibit “Women Win the Vote,” a celebration of the 100 years since California ratified the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. To kick off this year-long celebration, we will be holding special events. Watch your mail and email.

Next, please mark your calendars for our January 11, 2020 Annual Meeting, and send in your (enclosed) ballots so they can be counted. We promise a wonderful speaker this year.

Yours as always, Priscilla

