



Bulletin

April 2022

EXHIBIT ON PIONEER WOMEN NOW SHOWING

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley, located in Danville, has a fascinating exhibit on pioneer women of the Valley, as well as indigenous and Californio women, in the pre-statehood era and beyond. Read more about this interesting display of information and artifacts on page 2.

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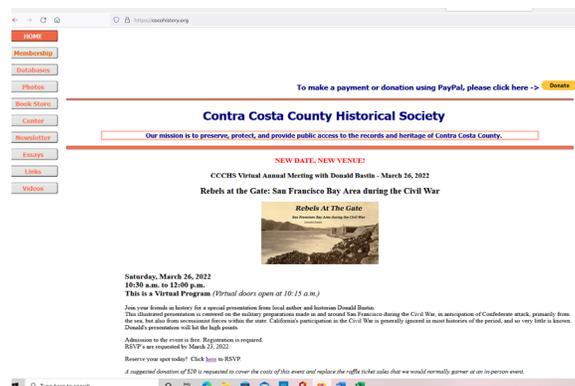
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CCCHS Begins Long-Awaited Revamp Of Website

The Contra Costa County Historical Society has begun a long-awaited revamp of our website, expected to be complete by the end of the summer.

The goals of the project are to make our website easier to navigate and easier to use the online data search functions for researchers; to place more of our documents, photographs and other archives onto the website; and update the visual look of the website.



The new site will use widely available software and technology, to make it easier for us to edit, update or change the website in the future. It will be compatible with PastPerfect, the software we use to store and catalog our archives.

We have hired Hitch Media Group to perform the work for us. They will work closely with our staff and Board as they design and implement the site. Hitch Media Group has experience creating websites for historical societies, among their other clients.

Pioneer Women's Stories Told In Exhibit At Museum of The San Ramon Valley

By Beverly Lane

The exhibit *Her Side of the Story: Tales of California Pioneer Women* is on display at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley in Danville. The offering comes from Exhibit Envoy and features photographs, diary excerpts, 1860s dresses, quilts, daguerreotypes, and nineteenth century objects from pioneer kitchens and the Gold Rush.



The exhibit ends on May 22 and is open Tuesday through Friday from 1-4 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 3 p.m. at 205 Railroad Avenue in Danville. The museum's website is museumsrv.org.

Her Side of the Story shows the hardships, joys, and lives of female pioneers, through first-person stories from the women who came to California prior to statehood. The exhibit is based on reminiscences that were compiled by the

Association of Pioneer Women of California in the early 1900s. The Museum also has added information about the Indian and Californio women who lived in the San Ramon Valley before the pioneer women arrived.

We Need You!

Do you love history, or looking through old photos and records, or helping the public? If you do, please join us at the Contra Costa County Historical Society. We need volunteers in these areas:

- **Archival Aide:** help us archive our vast collection of historical records;
- **Historical Preservation Aide:** scan and catalog historical charts, maps, and other items;
- **Photographic Assistant:** scan and catalog historical photographs;
- **Research Aide:** help our visitors conduct research into family histories, immigration records, property records, and other matters of interest to them;
- **Membership Aide:** assist us in retaining members and finding new members;
- **Administrative Assistant:** assist the Executive Director with general office duties;
- **Computer Technician:** help with our computer network and website; and
- **Additional positions: Data Entry, Docent, Event Planning and Social Media.**

The amount of time you volunteer is up to you. If you are interested, please contact us at info@cocohistory.org or call (925) 229-1042 and ask for our Executive Director Michael McCarron.

In The Archives... Voter Registration Books (“Great Registers”)

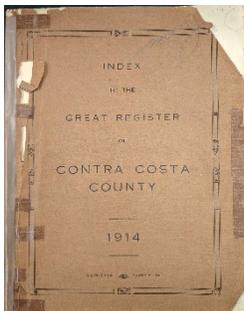
Article and photos by Lisa Gorrell

The History Center has numerous copies of voter registrations for Contra Costa County, beginning in 1890. Some have been in our collection a long time. Other volumes came with the Pleasant Hill Library collection that we inherited in 2021. We have issues for 1890, 1898, 1900, 1902, 1904, 1906, 1910, 1914, 1916, 1918, 1932, and 1938. Some are delicate, as the paper has become brittle.

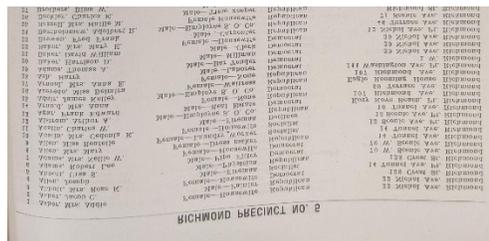


The first voter registration began in California in 1866 as an effort to prevent voter fraud. By 1872, counties were required to publish an alphabetical list of all registered voters every two years, and these were usually printed in the even-numbered years. These lists are not the actual voter registrations, but rather an index to those records created by the county clerk.

Voter registrations are useful both in historical and genealogical research. They help locate people between the decennial U.S. federal census years and give information about residence, occupation, the person’s physical features (before 1900), and political party. The early Great Registers, as they were called, also gave the location and date of naturalization for voters who had become naturalized citizens. The 1898 issue is divided by towns and precincts. First there is a listing of names in rough alphabetical order, then their occupation, age, height, complexion, eye and hair color, and any visible marks. Also listed was country of birth, place of residence, date of naturalization, the date they registered to vote, and whether the person was able to communicate in English, write their name, and mark the ballot. A map and written description were included for each precinct. Only men aged 21 and older could vote until 1911, when California granted women suffrage.



After 1900, the registration books have less information. They are organized alphabetically by towns and precincts, but the entries contain only name, occupation, political party, and town of residence. The 1914 issue we have is the first to include women (we do not have the 1912 issue). Shown below is a page from Richmond Precinct number 5 showing many women registrants.



Colton's Journal: A Yankee's View Of California

By Donald Bastin

*Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles based on the fascinating journal, Three Years In California by the Reverend Walter Colton, the first American alcalde, or administrator, of Monterey, prior to California statehood. This series of articles is written by former CCCHS Board Member **Donald Bastin**, who also is the former editor of this newsletter.*

As alcalde of Monterey during California's transition from a short-lived republic to a military possession and then to the nation's 31st state, the Reverend Walter Colton encountered (and often judged) people from a wide variety of ethnic groups, including the indigenous peoples. Through his eyes, we see them in one of their many periods of transition. They had endured the wrenching transition from a state of nature to one of paternalistic imprisonment under the mission system. By the late 1840s, when the mission period had ended, indigenous people were dispersed into an alien environment, trying to survive, looking like nothing so much as immigrants in their own land. Whether learned as a result of their galling treatment, or part of their natural upbringing, the legendary stoicism of the natives comes through in Colton's journal.

The Reverend described how he was approached by "an Indian woman of good appearance" who stated that she had worked as a domestic in a Mexican family. Her husband had died and she was pleading for the return of her child, who had been "forcibly detained" by the family for whom she had worked. The father of the family had baptized the child, claiming "a sort of guardianship over it, as well as a right to a portion of its services." Sensitive both to the rights of the mother and the child's welfare, Colton offered the following compromise:

I asked her if her child would be kindly treated where it now was: she said she thought so; but added, she was a mother, and wanted it with her. We told her as she was going to marry again, she had better perhaps leave the child for the present; and if she found her husband to be a good, industrious man, and disposed to furnish her with a comfortable home, she might call again on our office, and we would get her child. She went away with that mild look of contentment which is as near a smile as any expression which lights an Indian's face.

As a man of the cloth, Colton was interested in the spiritual beliefs of the people in his charge. He had this to say about the Indians' belief in an afterlife:

The wild Indians here have a vague belief in the soul's immortality. They say, 'as the moon dieth and cometh to life again, so man, though he die, will again live.' But their future state is material; the wicked are to be bitten by serpents, scorched by lightning, and plunged down cataracts; while the good are to hunt their game with bows that never lose their vigor, with arrows that never miss their aim, and in forests where the crystal streams roll over golden sands. Immortal youth is to be the portion of each; and age, and pain, and death, are to be known no more.

To my mind, this sounds like what many people believe to this day.

Perhaps the most vivid account of Colton’s encounters with Indians involves the capture of around twenty of them who were accused of horse theft. Their pride and stoicism are palpable.

They were as wild a looking set of fellows as ever entered a civil tribunal. The chief was over seven feet high, with an enormous blanket wrapped round him and thrown over the shoulder like a Spanish cloak, which set forth his towering form to the best advantage. His long black hair streamed in darkness down to his waist. His features strikingly resembled those of Gen. Jackson. His forehead was high, his eye full of fire, and his mouth displayed great decision. His step was firm; his age must have been about fifty. He entered the court with a civil but undaunted air.

Colton found “no satisfactory evidence” that these Indians were horse thieves and turned them over to the military commander of the town.

They were marched into the centre where they expected to be shot, and still not a muscle shook, and the features of each were as set as if chiseled from marble. What must have been their unbetrayed surprise when Capt. Mervin told them they were acquitted by the tribunal! He then told the chief he should recognize him as king of the tribe—that he should not permit any of his men to commit the slightest depredations on the citizens, that he should hold him responsible for the conduct of his tribe, and that he must come and report himself and the condition of his tribe every two moons. To all this the chief fully assented.

The group was put on a warship and the crew mustered “for the occasion.” They were given “fresh blankets and red handkerchiefs” and the chief was given the naval uniform “of one of our tallest and stoutest officers. . . recognizing him as the high chief of his tribe.”



He looked every inch a chief. The band struck up Hail Columbia, and they departed, vowing eternal allegiance to the Americans. The sailors were delighted with these savages, and half envied them their wild life.

Photo from *Three Years In California*

Walter Colton, born in 1797, was a Navy Chaplain who arrived in Monterey in 1846 with the Navy and was appointed *alcalde* of Monterey by Commodore Robert Stockton as part of a transitional government bridging the Mexican and American administrations. Colton built a town hall-and-schoolhouse building that still stands at Monterey Harbor and is open to the public (it also was the site of California’s first constitutional convention in preparation for statehood). He served as *alcalde* until 1849 when his transitional duties were completed. Colton then returned to his home in Philadelphia, published his journal in 1850, and died in 1851.

Traci Gibbons Returns To CCCHS Board

By John Greitzer

CCCHS is delighted to have filled a vacancy on our Board of Directors with a highly esteemed former Board member who has agreed to return to service. Traci Gibbons is a lifetime member of CCCHS and previously served on our Board from 1983 to 1989 and from 2002 to 2013. She served as President of the Board from 2004 to 2006.



Traci worked for the East Bay Regional Park District at its Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve for over 35 years, working in oral history, staff training and overseeing the park's archives, which involved documenting and preserving thousands of artifacts and photographs. She is the author of two books on the Mount Diablo Coal field – *Images of America: Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve*, and *Rose Hill—A Comprehensive History of a Pioneer Cemetery in the Mount Diablo Coal Field*.

Our Board is pleased to welcome her back. She joins Andrea Blachman, John Burgh, John Mercurio, Beverly Lane, Tara Weber, Steve James, John Mercurio, Barry Goode, Oliver Bray, John Greitzer and Glenn Umont on the Board.

Presentation on Civil War Military Activity in San Francisco Highlights Our Annual Meeting

By John Greitzer

CCCHS held its annual meeting online for the second consecutive year on March 26, highlighted by a fascinating presentation on Civil War military activities in San Francisco given by former Board member Donald Bastin. The presentation provided a surprising look at a little-known aspect of San Francisco history and was well received by the roughly 50 people in attendance.

The annual meeting also featured the election of two new Board members, Traci Gibbons (see above) and Glenn Umont, whom we introduced to readers in January. Traci and Glenn will provide valuable insight and fresh ideas as we move into an exciting new phase at the Society.

Executive Director Michael McCarron briefed the attendees at the annual meeting on our accomplishments in 2021 and goals for 2022. Treasurer Steve James reported on the Society's financial condition, which continues to look good due to revenue provided by funding sources including the Chevron Federal Credit Union, Contra Costa County, and a generous grant from the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation.

Board members expressed the hope that next year's annual meeting can be held in person.

President's Message

By John Burgh



As I take up the mantle of the second half of the two-year term shared by John Mercurio and myself, I am reminded of the proverbial wish: “May you live in interesting times.” As I look about the Society’s world at the moment, I am struck by not just how interesting but how the exciting the view is in every direction.

Traci Gibbons previously served many years on the Board. She has now returned, bringing us new ideas and proven leadership (see page 6). A new five-year extension of our stipend agreement assures continued financial support from Contra Costa County and our careful investments continue to nourish our financial stability. Although challenges remain to secure long term off-site storage for items previously stored in the old County Administration Building, volunteer activities and public use of our archives should expand as Covid-19 recedes. All signs point to an early return of our “Author in the Archives” series of events at the Campbell Theater in downtown Martinez, which is flourishing in a full season of post-pandemic productions.

Our Annual Meeting was an event not to be missed! Even though Covid concerns led us to conduct the meeting virtually again this year, keynote speaker Donald Bastin – longtime Board member and former newsletter editor – delivered a riveting presentation on the drama of Civil War life in the Bay Area. His narrative reminded all of us why we love history and cherish the opportunity to help preserve County heritage.

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Hours: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

First and third Saturdays of each month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

If you plan to visit, please call ahead first to make sure we’re open.

For research visits, we ask that you contact us to make an appointment.

Additional Information

Website: <http://www.cocohistory.org> or find us on Facebook

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