



THE LEFTOVERS

Published by the El Sobrante Historical Society

Issue #7

Summer 2013

This newsletter is issued quarterly, as part of the mission of the ESHS, to preserve and publicize the history of the community of El Sobrante. If you would like to comment on this newsletter, or submit your own article for publication, please do so via: eshistory@gmail.com. Thanks!

PIONEERS OF EL SOBRANTE

Edward Campbell

Donald Bastin

Though its roots go back to the middle of the nineteenth century, El Sobrante is a young town. Just before the beginning of the Second World War, there were estimated to be no more than 100 people in the entire valley. One of those people was Ed Campbell, who moved with his parents and brother, from Rodeo to El Sobrante late in 1934 or early 1935.

Ed was born in Rodeo in 1920. His mother and



father had met during World War I, in England. Walter Gordon Campbell was from Canada while Alice Caley grew up on the Isle of Man, in the town of Ramsey. They moved to Rodeo after the war, near where

Walter's mother lived, and settled down to raise a family. Following the stock market crash of 1929 and the beginning of the Great Depression, Walter's investments failed, and the family found it necessary to move.

Walter found a piece of property in the El Sobrante valley known as the "island," located just east of the present-day intersection of the San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way.



Ed's mother, Alice, with brother Ramsey, with cow, on the "island."

It was called the "island" because, at this point in its travel to San Pablo Bay, San Pablo Creek makes a big loop, creating a circle of land surrounded by water and a line of trees. It was here that Walter decided to build a home. Also, according to Ed, his dad was a "frustrated farmer," and quickly acquired four cows and nine hundred chickens. Ed also thinks that the cows and chickens were part of a clever plot to keep him busy. It was "a lot of work for very little money," he says. The cows were bred each year (for a fee, of course) and the resulting calves were fattened and sold for perhaps \$15 or \$20. They made their own butter and of course they had plenty of milk. "We were drowning in milk," Ed says. They joined a

poultry co-op, the Poultry Producers of Central California (which later became Nu-Laid Eggs). The co-op would sell feed to the poultry farmers in the area, and pick up the eggs on a regular basis, trucking them to Petaluma. At the end of the year, the family would receive a check for all their hard work, though they never knew how much they would make, though it was never very much.



This is a picture of the new Campbell home on the “island” taken shortly after it was built. It has changed little over the years, and is now a rental unit.



Here we see a picture of Ed standing in front of his old home, taken in 2010.

Just across the road (San Pablo Dam Road) was the sprawling Richmond Farm Creamery, also known as the S.P. Skow & Sons Dairy. Though most of the land was leased, the operation covered all of the land from the Dam

Road, from about Appian Way, to the top of the ridge line, and east to around where Greenridge road now intersects the Dam Road (just east of May Road). There was literally nothing else around, recalls Ed, so he naturally gravitated to the dairy, when he wasn't in school or taking care of the chickens and cows. There were kids to play with, and he could earn a little (very little) extra money working at the dairy when he could not find other work. It was here that he met his future wife, Jeanne Stark, the daughter of Clara Stark, who worked as a cook on the ranch. Clara's sister, Freda, had married Wilbur Skow, one of the four sons of the original founder of the dairy, Soren Skow.



All the local kids, of high school age, attended Richmond Union High School. Ed remembers the school bus that came down the Dam Road from Orinda, and picked up the kids at the Skow Ranch. It was on the school bus that Ed first met many of the children who lived on the ranch. Ed graduated from RUHS in 1938.

While brother Ramsey went on to college, Ed became a carpenter's apprentice. This career was cut short when a friend, George Newell (of the Newell Ranch) accidentally shot him through the shoulder. The hollow-point 30-30 round made a small hole going in but a much larger one coming out. Ed says the hole in the cab of the pickup truck was even bigger. Eventually, when the wound was sufficiently healed, Ed was able to secure a relatively non-physical job

with Union Oil in Rodeo, where his father had worked.



Ed's dad, Walter, died at the age of 51 in 1941. He had suffered for years from the effects of trench warfare (including gassing) suffered while serving in World War I. Ed adds that his two-pack-a-day cigarette habit probably did not help. His mother had to go

to work, which she did in the nearby Richmond shipyards. She had experience as an accounting clerk, which she put to good use while working in Richmond.

Due to his injury, Ed was unable to serve in the military in World War II. But he was able to help out with the volunteer fire department in El Sobrante, which he joined in 1942. Before this date, the entire fire department consisted of a single truck, located on the Skow ranch. The truck was supplied by the county, but everything else, including the gasoline, was the responsibility of the Skow family. There was no alarm system, other than the smoke from the numerous grass fires that plagued the hillsides during the summer. Whoever noticed smoke jumped into the truck, along with whoever else was around and off they went. By 1942, with the rapid growth of the area, the town had its own station, on the west side of Appian Way, just opposite the location of the present-day



station. The department now boasted three trucks. But no one was paid.

Ed had been courting Jeanne Stark for years, but she was too young to get married. So the couple waited until Jeanne graduated from High School in June of 1944. Within a few weeks, they were married, and Ed had to start thinking about a home of his own. He decided to

build a new house just across the little lane



that led to the home that his father had built in 1935. Like the original home, that house is still standing. The little road, now called Campbell Lane, runs to Canyon Pool. Craig Ortleib began giving swimming lessons in his pool in the Canyon Park development in 1951. The business moved across the street in 1960 to its present location.

Ed and Jeanne would have two children, a boy and a girl, Steve and Terry. Both would grow up in the town of El Sobrante.



Terry is seen here, in 1949, picking poppies on "Poppy Hill," just at the top of Appian Way before it descends toward what was then the city limit of Pinole. The site is now covered by

the Bay Park Senior Housing complex, and the area has since been annexed to Pinole.

In 1949 the town opened its brand-new fire station, just across the road from the old structure, on Appian Way. “The town started to build up—it was getting bigger and bigger,” Ed recalls. A new station and, more and newer trucks were needed, to fight the house fires that were becoming common. One of the new trucks was an American La France, with a cab over the front wheels. Ed recalls that he put the first dent in that truck, while delivering it to the station. He was not used to driving a vehicle with the front wheels behind him and, while turning onto the bridge over San Pablo Creek, on Appian Way, he misjudged the turning radius, and slammed into the railing. “They were real pleased with me,” he says.



Even with the opening of the new station and the acquisition of modern equipment, the fire department was still a volunteer operation. Shortly after the opening of the new station, the chief, Charlie Matteson, began to be paid a salary (\$300/mo). But no one else would be paid for several years.

According to Ed, fire fighters were alerted by the sound of a powerful air horn, which was powered by air tanks removed from a submarine on Mare Island. The horn could be heard all over the valley, and the volunteers would converge on the station, either to man

the trucks or to follow in their own cars. Ed recalls that the initial phone call, advising of a fire, would go to the wife of Chief Matteson, who would somehow (he does not recall how) get a message to the station to blow the horn. Ed thinks that there were bunks at the new station, so a volunteer might have manned the station, at least part of the time. Not the best arrangement, but a significant improvement over the past.

In the mid 1950s, Ed moved with his family to the White Cliff area of El Sobrante (now Richmond) off May Road. This is where he still resides. His wife has passed on, as has his son, Steve, who, tragically, died in an accident. His daughter, Terry, who recently retired, now spends a lot of time with her dad, thus enabling him to stay more or less independently in the home that he has occupied now for over 50 years. His mind is still solid, and he remembers fondly his years growing up and living in El Sobrante. It was a good place to live, he says. “It wasn’t crowded and it wasn’t a town, a city.” He sometimes worries about the house, whether it will survive the next earthquake or the termites that he sees flying about in the spring. “I used to worry about them a lot,” he says, “but before they eat the house up, I’ll be gone.”



Ed Campbell, with prize trout, San Pablo Reservoir, 1995.

Who Doesn't Like a Garage Sale?

Steve James

Well, maybe the person that has a neighbor who has one every weekend. For me, I'm hooked. Over the years I've tried to limit myself to Estate Sales. Why, well most garage sales have little to offer for us bargain hunters. That's unless you're looking for baby clothes. Me, I'm looking for that collectible or artifact item that sells for a dollar, but is valued at thousands. Right, fat chance, but that's what Antique Road Show has us sold on. That one item, that no one else sees any value in. It does happen, but not usually for a dollar.

Estate Sales are a little morbid. You're viewing someone's worldly possessions. Items of everyday use and those that held treasured personal value. Not necessarily of great monetary value, but something that gave them an inner feeling of joy.

Estate Sales are usually run by professionals, which take 35% of the sales. Items are priced according to their market value, removing the sentimental emotions from the transaction. Items tend to be a little higher in price, than that local garage sale, due to the professional knowing the market value. They're seeking the highest price for their customer and hence a higher revenue for them. Items that don't sell on the first day get marked down on day two.

You have to be early and willing to put up with a crowd, but there are some great values out there. Not cheap, but quality items. Collectibles and every once in a while a true artifact.

What's an Artifact?

A simple question, what's an Artifact? Most people know what that is. It's a, you know, a thing, a thing that's old. Yeh, that's an Artifact, something old. Here are a few definitions from Wikipedia:

- [Artifact \(archaeology\)](#), an object formed by humans, particularly one of interest to archaeologists
- [Cultural artifact](#), anything created by humans which gives information about the culture of its creator and users
- [Social artifact](#), a product of individuals or groups (social beings) or of their social behavior

The El Sobrante Historical Society has a small but growing collection of items that form a rich History of El Sobrante. Preserving these artifacts is a main part of our ESHS charter. Each artifact is a piece of the puzzle that forms El Sobrante. Some El Sobrante artifacts are proud treasures of the owner, which are on display in their home. Some are buried in the garages, with an "oh I forgot I had that", and some lay idle without a hint of their importance.

Our Board members are always on the lookout for items to add to our collection, whether it be on Ebay, word of mouth, or local Estate Sales. We have located items from documents to fire trucks. Of course, not all items are obtainable, nor do we have room for storage (our garages are getting full). Yet, we still seek to preserve.

We ask for your help in any way you can, to help preserve the history of El Sobrante. If an item is a family treasure by all means keep it, but consider the future of having that item preserved for all of El Sobrante. If you're not sure an item is worthy of artifact status, please contact us and let us check it out.

~~~~~  
“Smitty” An El Sobrante Original  
*Lyle Miller*

Mike Smith, born at Brookside Hospital in 1954, attended Hillview school, Juan Crespi intermediate, then graduated DeAnza High School in 1973.

Smitty probably delivered your Richmond Independent news paper when he was a kid. If you got your gas pumped & windows washed at Eshom's 66 station or Oliver's Chevron back in the 1970s thru the '80s, It was probably Smitty providing the smiling service.

At the annual El Sobrante Stroll, you may have seen Smitty sitting at his vintage drum set keeping the beat for his band mates "The Kopy-Kats". Since first seeing the Beatles on Ed Sullivan in 1964, young Smitty took an interest in playing the drums just like Ringo & hasn't missed a beat since 1965 ! He's currently employed by East Bay Ford (since 1995) in their parts dept.

Mike's Mom and Dad first met in high school (RUHS), got married and bought a 2 bedroom house in El Sobrante's Canyon Park neighborhood. When Mike was born, his folks



needed more room and bought his Uncle's house across the street because the garage had been converted to a 3<sup>rd</sup> bedroom.

Mike's Dad (born in Fresno) got a job at Standard oil refinery in Richmond and shortly after got the call from the U.S. Army and was sent to Germany for a few years in the early 1950s. When his term was completed he returned to his old job at the refinery and retired in about 1987.

Mike's Mother, (born in San Pablo) had a job at S.H. Kress dept. store on Macdonald Avenue in Richmond and also worked for Bank of America until she retired. She still lives in the house her kids grew up in since 1954 !



Smitty has some very nice vehicles to get him around, including an original Shelby Mustang, a 1957 Ford Ranchero and a 1969 Honda mini-trail cycle.

*Smitty recently underwent shoulder surgery, which may limit his ability to play the drums. But hopefully, you will be able to see him and some of his cars at the next El Sobrante Stroll, coming up on September 15! ~Ed.*

## **A NEW DOWNTOWN PARK FOR EL SOBRANTE?**

*Maurice Abraham*

A committee of El Sobrante residents have selected the El Sobrante Library site as the location for a new downtown park. Assembled by District 1 Supervisor John Gioia only 4 months ago, the ad hoc Downtown Park Committee arrived at its choice after discarding several other downtown site options due to land ownership issues and other complexities.

Because the library site is already owned by the County, action on the proposed park is expected to move swiftly. The next step will be to hire a Landscape Architect to assist the committee in determining the specific type of park envisioned and to develop a preliminary park plan and construction cost estimate. The Landscape Architect is expected to be on board this Fall and a preliminary design in place by Spring of next year. The goal is to create a park that will best serve the community and will help activate the downtown area.

The new park will be located directly behind the library building and include the San Pablo Creek native plant demonstration garden developed and maintained by the San Pablo Creek Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society (SPAWNERS) volunteers. Preliminary discussions have included the possible construction of a small museum building or an open exhibit pavilion to be shared by your historical society and SPAWNERS.

Funding for the new park will come from the County's existing park dedication fees fund and the East Bay Regional Park District Measure WW program. A combined total of approximately \$1.1 million is available for El Sobrante park projects.

Depending on final design, the proposed park could consume a significant portion of these funds. Approximately \$420,000 is available in locally generated park dedication fees, and some \$640,000 in Measure WW funds are allocated to El Sobrante. However, a Grant application for specific use of the Measure WW funds still must be approved by the Park District.

Measure WW was approved by voters in Alameda and Contra Costa counties in November 2008. The measure extended Measure AA, approved in 1988, to help the Park District meet the increasing demand to preserve open space for recreation and wildlife habitat. It made funding available directly to cities and special park districts for high priority community park projects.

The El Sobrante Historical Society members Donald Bastin and Maurice Abraham are both part of the Downtown Park Committee.

**HISTORIC MARKERS PLANNED FOR DOWNTOWN AREA**     *Maurice Abraham*

San Pablo Dam Road will soon have added interest, as sidewalk markers commemorating the community's history are installed in conjunction with a sidewalk improvement and

beautification project. Initiated by the El Sobrante Historical Society and enthusiastically embraced by District 1 Supervisor John Gioia and the County Public Works Department, the historic markers program is modeled after a similar program in the City of El Cerrito.

The historic markers will be 16" to 24" square and fabricated of either smooth finish concrete or granite. Historic photos with explanatory text will be laser-etched into the surface and impregnated with black paint. The markers will be inlaid in the new sidewalks to be flush with the finished surface.



*At left is an El Cerrito sidewalk marker similar to those planned for San Pablo Dam Road.*

Among the notable historic elements to be included are the valley's early Native American inhabitants, its Mexican Rancho heritage, the California & Nevada Railroad that ran through the valley in the late 1800s and the era of dairy farming so prominent in the 1940s. Among the specific locations to be memorialized are the first Fry's Foods store location, El Sobrante's first dedicated Post Office building, the first El Sobrante Mechanics Bank Building and its first gas station and hardware store, Oliver's.

The cost of twelve historic markers is estimated at around \$6,000, plus installation. Although final funding is yet to be approved, Supervisor Gioia is supporting the use of RSS Funds, a local beautification fund. Richmond Sanitary Service contributes to this fund a small portion of trash collection revenues they collect from El Sobrante business and residential properties.

The RSS Fund currently totals some \$50,000. However, another beautification program is seeking use of these funds as well. The El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and its El Sobrante Renew Committee has requested that

new bus benches and trash receptacles be paid for from the RSS Fund. The Committee considering both requests has determined that the bus benches and trash receptacles should take priority, but we're optimistic that the historic markers will be funded.

The County Public Works Department is investigating the possibility of including in their sidewalk program the installation costs for the benches, trash receptacles and historic markers. Should they pay the installation costs, it is certain the RSS Funds are sufficient to cover all of these.

The entire sidewalk improvement project, including the historic markers, is expected to begin construction next summer.

### New Acquisitions:

As you probably know, the old De Anza High School buildings are in the process of being demolished. Our society was fortunate in being able to go through the old structure and retrieve artifacts for our collection.

Unfortunately, we were a little late in contacting the folks in charge of the demolition, so many things, like tables and chairs, were already moved out. But we were still able to collect many items of interest, such as clocks,



signs, pencil sharpeners, lighting fixtures, etc.



We were lucky to save the old sign that was at the entrance to the school. We have not yet had time to evaluate what we have or place the artifacts in our collection database, so a more detailed report will have to wait till our next issue.

We particularly want to thank the construction manager, Marc Alojegan, for graciously allowing us access to the old buildings.

### Mark Your Calendar:

**Sunday, July 21**—100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party for the Contra Costa County Library. Pleasant Hill Park, 147 Gregory Lane, Pleasant Hill, Noon to 5 p.m. We and other historical societies will be there. Learn more: [guides.cclib.org/July21st](http://guides.cclib.org/July21st)

**Wednesday, August 7**—History/Nature walk along the San Pablo Reservoir. 5:30-8 p.m. Meet in Kennedy Grove. Hosted by SPAWNERS. Guides: Bob Flasher and Donald Bastin. Terminates at the rock wall/ stairway built by the CCC in 1935. Learn more: [SPAWNERS.ORG](http://SPAWNERS.ORG)

*The El Sobrante Historical Society is an informal nonprofit organization, dedicated solely to the preservation and display of the history of the community of El Sobrante. We depend on our members and local residents for the information, artifacts, and photographs that make up the society's collection. Become a member and help out! It's free and simple. Just visit the website, at [ESHIST.ORG](http://ESHIST.ORG).*

### We're On Facebook!

#### ESHS Steering Committee:

- 1. Maurice Abraham:** Administrator, Facebook Page; Historical Researcher and Writer.
- 2. Donald Bastin:** Administrator, Website; Newsletter Editor; Historical Researcher and Writer.
- 3. Steve James:** Membership and Communication Secretary;
- 4. Lyle Miller:** Community Liaison and general support.
- 5. Joseph Camacho:** Historical Researcher and Writer; MAC Liaison; Tech Support.

Visit us on-line at: [ESHIST.ORG](http://ESHIST.ORG)  
 Questions, Comments, and  
 other communication? Send to:  
[ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM)