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THE LEFTOVERS

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From Farm Yard to Ship Yard

Roxy Miravalle

In 1859, Andrew Abrott and F. W. Weyhe acquired 512 acres of land in the hills above San Pablo Creek. Both men built homes and went into ranching. In 1914, Jacinto and Maria Nunes, immigrants from the Azores, leased part of the land from the Abrott family. The Nunes ranch (in Scow Canyon), is located off Castro Ranch Road, not far from the Carriage Hills subdivisions. The Nunes family grew vegetables in addition to raising cattle. When the crops ripened, Filipino workers, all men, would help with the harvest and be put up at the old Weyhe Ranch house. These men would move from ranch to ranch as needed.



"Nick," NUNES RANCH, late 1930s.

Nick was one of those workers whose photo was donated to the Historical Society courtesy of Laverne Nunes Banducci, and is found on page 44 of the Arcadia Publishing of "El Sobrante" by Donald Bastin. However, not much is known about these farm hands, and not much is ever written or documented about them.

So, in reviewing the 1930 U. S. Census on Ancestry for the San Pablo Creek area around the Nunes ranch, I found a "Nicolos" Roldan listed. He is one of several "Filipino" workers who are listed as working on a farm near resident, "Jess" (Jacinto's nickname) Nunes, and is listed as a farm hand living in Township 10 of Contra Costa County. His occupation is noted as "picking peas."

Born Nicolas Ares Roldan on December 10, 1904, in Catmon, Cebu, Philippines, in March 1928, at the age of 23, he departed from Manila in the Philippines arriving at San Francisco, California aboard the S. S. President Taft. His final destination is recorded as San Leandro, where his uncle, Isaac Roldan was living at the time. From there, we can surmise he started working as a farm hand on the ranches in Contra Costa. That is, until he moved to Vallejo, California. By 1935, he was among many others from the Philippines boarding in a residence on Sacramento Street who are listed as working for the government. In the 1930s, historical narratives indicate many were called to go work for the federal government as an apprentice, initially being paid 30 cents an hour at first, and \$1 an hour after

becoming a journeyman in four years. No doubt, Nicolas answered this call and moved to Vallejo away from working as a farm hand to earn better wages.

Many Filipino immigrants came to Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Compared with the low wages and seasonal work of their compatriots working in the fields or as domestics, Filipino workers on Mare Island were now making a living wage. Not only were they making better wages, depending on their position, their employment was year-round, they had vacation leave, paid holidays, sick-leave, medical insurance and a pension. By 1939, approximately 6,000 men were employed at Mare Island in the construction and repair of ships. Mare Island Naval Shipyard (MINS) was the first United States naval station established on the Pacific Coast.

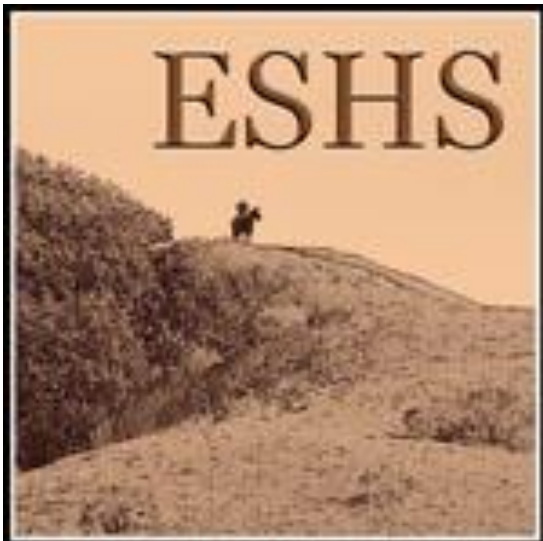
The 1940 U.S. Census indicates he was a "Classified Laborer" working at the U.S. Government facility at Mare Island Naval Yard. Roldan's wages are recorded as \$1400 per year. By October 1940, Nicolas is registered for the Draft. After the war, for the duration of his employment at the Mare Island Naval Yard, his occupation is listed as Pipe Fitter. He petitioned for naturalization and it was finalized in 1947. He retired in 1970. Nicolas Ares Roldan died on May 19, 1982, in Vallejo, California, when he was 77 years old.

Not a bad legacy for a "Pea Picker!"

Sources: Ancestry.com; Filipinos in Vallejo by Mel Orpilla | Arcadia Publishing Books;
<http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist5/mareis.html>; Mare Island Naval Shipyard history from Wikipedia

We Have a New Website!

After over five years with our old website, we have decided, on the advice of our new board member, Roxy Miraválle, to go with something a little slicker and with more of the bells and whistles that most folks have come to expect in a website. Recently launched, our new site has fun buttons to click on, text and images that move, and more pages to tell the story of our society and the community it serves. We now have a separate page just for our new museum (which, hopefully, will open this summer!) We even have a quiz, to test your knowledge of our local history.



When you visit our new site, you will notice that many things have changed. For instance, our list of historic sites has been considerably expanded. Our newsletter page now features all of our past issues in chronological order, so it is easier to find and read the issue that you are seeking. Our collections page outlines and describes our collections of maps, artifacts, and photographs; it is our intention to eventually place most of our collection online, helping us to realize our goal of making our history accessible to all.

Take a look at our new site. It's easy. Just click on our new address: <https://www.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com/>

Digging, Cutting, Planting and Building: *The Civilian Conservation Corps at the San Pablo Reservoir.*

Donald Bastin



Clearing brush at the SP Reservoir, December, 1934

In the Spring 2012 edition of the *Leftovers* (only our second edition) we discussed the building of some check dams and a rock wall and stairway by the boys of the Civilian

Conservation Corps in the 1930s, on land surrounding the San Pablo reservoir. It was the discovery of the historic structures that led our society to take on the task of stabilizing and repairing the rock wall and stairs for the enjoyment and appreciation of hikers and bikers that frequent the area. However, the activities of the CCC boys covered much more than the building of rock walls and dams, and this article is intended to flesh out the larger story of the camp that lived, worked, and played around the reservoir, an area now generally recognized as one of the amenities of the El Sobrante community.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was probably the most popular program of the many that were instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt during the period of the Great Depression. The President submitted the legislation to the Congress on March 21, 1933; ten days later the legislation was passed on a unanimous voice vote. Just three months later, there were almost 1500 camps in operation, employing 250,000 young men (18-25 years old). In addition, veterans and Indians were enrolled. Nine departments, or districts, were created. California was included in the Ninth District, which also included Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Nevada, and Yellowstone Park. The boys were paid \$30 per week, and \$25 of this amount was sent to their families; only \$5 was paid directly to the hard-working young man. But, all his needs (shelter, food, medical care, etc.) were taken care of and the struggling families were often in desperate need of extra cash.

Normally, camps were set up on state park land, with soil erosion control, fire-fighting, and general maintenance high on the list of necessary work. EBMUD was not strictly parkland, but right about this same time, the East Bay Regional Park District was being formed, and much of the land came from EBMUD, which had surplus land which they were willing to part with to help form the new district. So perhaps this was one reason why EBMUD was successful in securing sites for not one, but three CCC camp sites: San Leandro reservoir, Lafayette Reservoir, and our own San Pablo Reservoir. In addition, the general manager and chief engineer of EBMUD, Frank Hanna, was very conscious of the benefits to be obtained from the CCC youth, and actively petitioned for camps at the reservoir sites, and successfully secured the renewal of the federal contracts for many years.

By the summer of 1933 the CCC boys were already working at the San Pablo reservoir, known as SP (State Project) 7, and, like virtually all the boys in other camps, living in tents. This would not do for



the upcoming winter, and in October work was begun on permanent (more or less) wooden structures, located in the wooded area below the dam (now the site of Kennedy Grove).

Newly constructed barracks, February, 1934. View east, toward dam.

With the confusion of setting up such a massive national program, it was inevitable that details would be overlooked, and it was not until early December that the issue of heating the barracks was addressed, and a rush order was placed for 30,000 wood-burning stoves. No doubt the boys at the dam may have gotten cold for a time, but did not suffer like those in the mid-western or eastern states.



Cutting trees and splitting logs for firewood. This appears to be an African American group. The groups were integrated initially, but objections from Southern congressmen quickly reversed this policy.

The camp would house 200 boys, divided into groups of 25 each. Each group would work at a particular site for at least 6 months, but not more than 2 years. The work was similar to that carried on at regular state park sites, with tree thinning, planting, fire control, and road building among the daily activities. By late December of 1933, General Manager Frank Hanna reported that work at the Dam was “fully underway.” One of the most important projects at that time was the building of “Sobrante Road,” (which is still in use) around the Dam, which was used for vehicles and also served as a firebreak. At the time, Hanna reported that the rainfall had been light so far that year, and had

not interfered with the road work. The next few months saw a lot more rain, and work on the road was slowed considerably.



Sobrante Road, February, 1934. This section of the road runs along the arm of the lake on its north side, not far from the dam face.

With the coming of the rains, planting was begun, and Hanna reports that the boys were mainly planting pines and Douglas fir. The pines, in

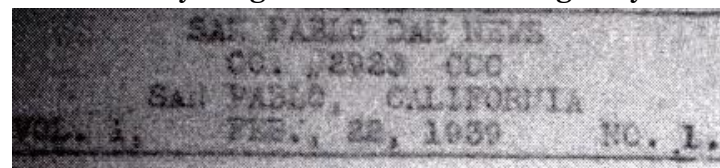
particular, were planted in great numbers, most of them on the bare slopes on the north side of the reservoir. Most of them are still there, though they are beginning to reach the end of their normal life span, and signs of a gradual die-off can be seen.

The CCC site at the San Pablo reservoir was a busy place during the 1930s. The area around the barracks was

thinned of trees, streets put in, and the whole nicely landscaped, as can be seen in this photograph taken in March, 1935. This photo was taken from approximately the same place as the one taken just a year before, and the improvement is dramatic.



It is not entirely clear how long the CCC program was in operation at the San Pablo reservoir, but it is certain that young men were continuing to cycle through the site as late as 1939, as can be seen from



this clipping of the *San Pablo Dam News*, dated February 22 of that year. Much of the newsletter is taken up by a discussion of the vocational and academic classes that were being offered at the

site. In fact, by 1937, the mission of the corps had been altered to include such training, rather than relying simply on manual labor to keep the boys occupied. The training offered was considered to be non-traditional and progressive, and was described in the newsletter in the following manner:

The Civilian Conservation Corps Educational program avoids the handicap of having to construct its curricula to meet the entrance requirements of Universities and Colleges. Instead, the Camp curriculum offers a generalized body of knowledge and activities which will directly and immediately contribute to the social and general growth and development of each and every enrollee no matter what his educational background.



In addition to the educational program, a “Putter” shop was opened, in which the enrollee could “putter” around, learning various crafts, such as “Leather-craft, Metal-craft, Horn-craft (?), Lino block printing, and wood-carving.”

Apparently, the regular work at the dam did not suffer, as the newsletter highlights the fact that the “rating” of the Camp, based on a regular review, was raised to “Excellent.”

The CCC program officially ended in June, 1942, but was in a period of decline for several years before that. The draft, in 1940, decreased the availability of eligible young men, and the outbreak of war in late 1941 completely shifted the nation’s priorities.

Lucky Guy

Lyle Miller

Lee Olguin has been walking past my shop on the Dam Rd. for years and we have done a lot of work on his Mustang over the years. I knew he was a grocery clerk and he was a veteran with a Purple Heart medal but I didn’t know much else until today.

Lee was born on an Indian reservation in Gallup, New Mexico, soon after, Lee’s father Joe, moved his young family to California looking for work in and around Richmond.

Lee’s father was only 8 years old when he started working in a New Mexico coal mine. At the outbreak of World War II, he joined the army and fought under the command of General George Patton. He fought with the 7th infantry in North Africa and then parts of Europe with the 3rd infantry, liberating concentration camps.

After seeing a lot of the world, Lee’s Father settled in California about 1947 and got a job defusing bombs at the Port Chicago munitions depot. Around 1952 he found work at the International Harvester plant in San Leandro, continued working there until the plant closed in 1975.

Lee graduated from Richmond Union High School June 16 1967. On June 18, Lee was at the Marine Corps recruitment depot in San Diego and started basic training. Lee spent his first day in Vietnam November 10 1967.

Lee's older brother Ernest joined the Army (101st Airborne) in 1967 and he too was sent to Vietnam. Ernest started as an enlisted man returning home in '68 he earned a degree at Contra Costa College & went back to Vietnam as a sergeant and reached the rank of Captain. Lee's younger brother Joseph, after graduating Richmond Union High School in the mid 70's joined the 82nd Airborne division of the army.



Early in 1968, while fighting in Vietnam, Lance Corporal Lee Olguin was ordered to take a small group of new recruits into a real hot zone and was ambushed by enemy fire. Lee suffered gunshot wounds to his right arm and did his best to continue the mission. Medics told Lee his injuries, though not life threatening, were severe and that they may not be able to save his arm. Fortunately, the doctors did save it, He was awarded the Purple Heart and Lee finished his tour in December 1968.

In the photo, (left -right) Lance Corporal Lee Olguin,

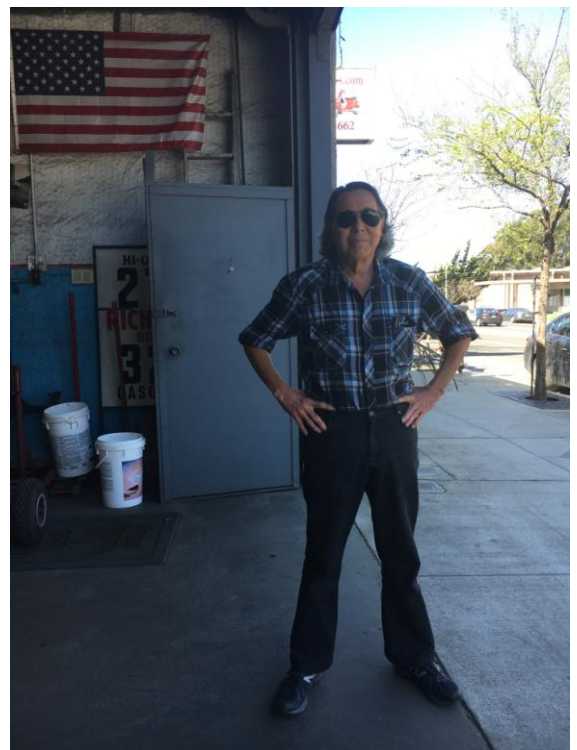
20; Vernon aka "Lurch", 19; Marty p.f.c. from Maryland, 17; Cooper p.f.c. from Ohio, 18 (kneeling). Sadly, both Marty & Cooper killed in action 1968. Lee & Vernon both wounded during the battle. Photo taken May 18 1968. Happy Valley, southwest of Danang, Quang nam province. 269 allied soldiers killed in operation "Mameluke Thrust".

After coming home, Lee took up studies at Contra Costa College receiving his Associate degree and he has fond memories of those days. Popular musicians of the time, Janis Joplin, Creedence Clearwater, Santana, performed in the quad for free. Lee remembered seeing Caesar Chavez, Angela Davis, Huey Newton and others speaking on campus.

Lee received his bachelor degree from Sacramento state and a paralegal certificate from Cal State Hayward, then got a job at Montgomery Ward in Richmond. In 1973, he started work at Lucky's grocery store in El Sobrante as a courtesy clerk, bagging groceries. Eventually, Lee worked into a spot at a checkout lane and that's where he stayed until the store closed in 2002.

My friend Lee has a very positive outlook & he knows his history. He asked that I include this passage in his bio...

"The wonder & joy of life often lay in memories we have forgotten to remember. When youth made all things beautiful & time precious & everlasting. May God bless us every one !"



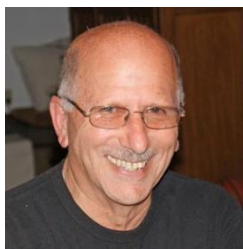
New Acquisition:



This cute little ¼ pint cream bottle is the only glass bottle that we have from the Richmond Farm Creamery, operated by the Skow family from 1899 until 1955. For most

of that time it was located along Clark Road and was named for the largest community that it served (Richmond) rather than its location. The bottle includes a phone number (1311-J) which may place its manufacture date in the 1930s. We are grateful to the donor, **Sonny Jackson**, for this, to us, priceless gift.

Maurice Abraham Elected President of ESHS



According to our by-laws, the principal officers (president and vice-president) cannot serve more than 2 years, consecutively, in office. So at our last meeting in March our board elected Maurice Abraham as president and Donald Bastin as vice-president. The position of treasurer was retained by Steve James, while the office of secretary was retained by Lyle Miller.

The Leftovers is published quarterly. Articles for publication are encouraged, as are comments. See e-mail address below.

The El Sobrante Historical Society is a formal nonprofit organization, and donations may be tax-deductible. We are dedicated 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.

Visit us on **Facebook**.

Mission Statement

To promote the awareness and appreciation of El Sobrante Valley history through preservation and education, and chronicling of the community's heritage for current and future generations.

ESHS Board of Directors

Maurice Abraham: President; Administrator, Facebook Page; Historical Researcher and writer.

Donald Bastin: Vice-President; Newsletter Editor; Historical Researcher and writer.

Steve James: Treasurer; Membership and Communication Secretary; Researcher/writer.

Lyle Miller: Secretary; Community Liaison; Researcher/writer.

Roxanne Miravalle: Director; Historian and Writer; Genealogist

Emil Munkres: Director; Historian.

Visit us on-line at: www.eshist.org
Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:
ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM