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THE LEFTOVERS

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The Biggest Castro Reunion Ever

Janice Castro



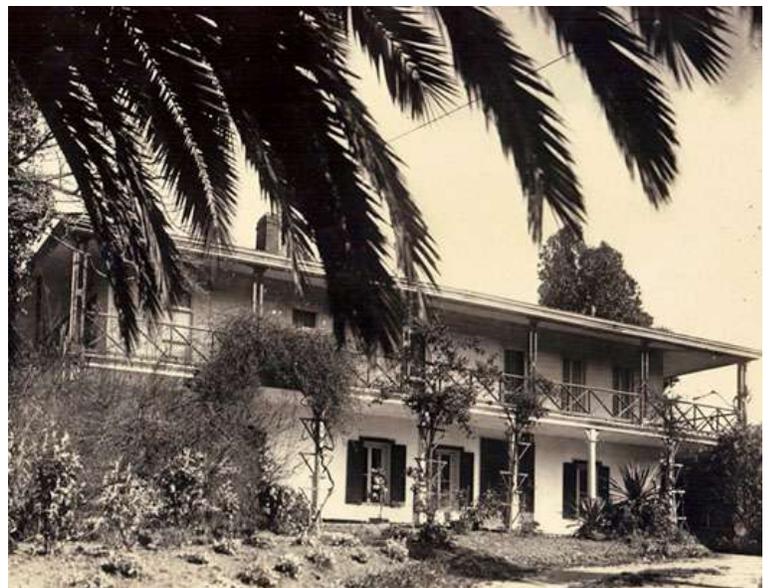
Castro Family at Brennan's in Berkeley. Photo courtesy of Craig Martin.

The author is directly below the name "Castro" in the picture.

Growing up on the Castro cattle ranch, on

Castro Ranch Road in El Sobrante, in the fifties and sixties, I heard lots of stories about our family's history. How great-great-great-great-grandfather Joaquin Isidro Castro came north to the Bay Area with his family in 1776 as part of the Juan De Anza expedition out of Mexico. How his grandson, Victor Ramon Castro, built his hacienda on his part of his father's Spanish land grant in what is now El Cerrito. When I was about four or five, my parents took us to visit Victor's onetime hacienda one Sunday. The once beautiful, richly-appointed home was now a California Historical Landmark, but was falling into disrepair. A few years later, it was burned down by an arsonist or arsonists.

Victor Castro Adobe in El Cerrito, 1950s.
Photo Courtesy of the Oakland Tribune



My ancestors were among the founders of San Francisco and San Jose. As a child, I heard about Victor operating the first ferry line across San Francisco Bay. About his son, Patricio, my great-grandfather, who built our ranch house. His son, Percy Castro, started the Castro meat company to provide food to the laborers who built the San Pablo Dam. As a young girl, I would ride my horse through the fields in springtime, and imagine my ancestors riding there, seeing the same lupines and poppies bursting into bloom as the dry summer grass turned into the ocean of green that flowed over the El Sobrante hills. My father once told me that when he was a boy, before the San Pablo Dam was



built, salmon ran in Castro Creek, which still flowed through our ranch.

In those days, the ranch extended into the hills across Castro Road where the Greenbriar development would later be built. We also used to graze cattle on the land across from what would become the site of De Anza High School (I'm De Anza '67). We had a big cattle roundup every spring. I once went along

on a roundup that gathered cattle from those distant fields. *Photo courtesy of Janice Castro*

After college, I moved to New York City and pursued a career in journalism, and later, university teaching. It seemed that every time I visited my folks, more homes were being built in El Sobrante. The explosive growth of Silicon Valley made Contra Costa the fastest-growing county in the state. You could certainly feel it, waiting to make a left turn on the Dam Road.

During the past twenty or so years, I've been doing family research off and on as I found time, wanting to know more about my ancestors. My mother's family was from Ireland. So was my Dad's mother's. Thanks to the Internet and its constantly-expanding wealth of research resources, I was developing a family tree, and learning about hundreds of relatives I'd never heard of before I started. Along the way, I got to know some nice people at the El Cerrito Historical Society, Tom Panas and Joanne Rubio, who are quite interested in the Castro history. My brother Jim, sister Evelyn Miller and cousin John Brennan and I provided them with some information, including photographs and caption material. John's family gave the ECHS a redwood slab door that had once been part of the Castro ranch. It is now part of an exhibit in the El Cerrito City Hall.

About a year ago, Tom and Joanne told us El Cerrito was planning a huge Centennial year in 2017 to celebrate the town's history. Victor Castro had named the place (it means "little hill"), and El Cerrito grew up on what was once his land. The El Cerrito planners were wondering if my siblings and I and some of our cousins might like to march in the Centennial Parade on September 16. We'd be a unit: the descendants of Victor Ramon Castro and his first wife, Maria Louisa Antonia Martinez. Cousin

John and his sister Maryann Brennan Cates and I volunteered to help organize our far-flung family. How complicated could it be? I think we were imagining maybe 20 people marching.

We had no idea what we were taking on. While a few of us live far from the Bay Area (Montana, Pennsylvania, Hawaii, Washington, D.C.) most of our family is still on the West Coast, ranging from Seattle to San Diego. The majority live in central and northern California: Santa Rosa, Healdsburg, Granite Bay, Sacramento, Chico, Berkeley, Moraga, Walnut Creek, San Francisco, Danville, Livermore, Oakdale, Salinas, Carmel. And most of them wanted to come! One of my cousin's daughters asked me a few days before the parade: "When was the last time this many of your cousins got together?" I thought for a second: "Never." We realized we were organizing the biggest Castro family reunion any of us had ever heard of.

By June, I was the main information contact for most of the family members interested in coming. Cousins working in everything from cattle ranching and crop science to software development, digital media and banking were excited about connecting with family, some of whom they'd never met. I was talking to some newfound cousins. I had found two of them through Ancestry.com, after submitting my DNA. They were descended from Victor's daughter, Isabella (for whom he named Point Isabel). Another cousin, whom I'd met online in an early genealogy BBS in the mid-1990s, and met again through Ancestry DNA, was descended from Victor's daughter Josefa. Our Brennan cousins (whose family owns the wonderful sports bar in Berkeley by that name) are the grandchildren of Patricio's daughter Victoria. Our ranching cousins were bringing their horses. My brother was organizing a big post-parade after-party at Brennan's. Our group included a retired Berkeley Fire Chief: he used to cook Thanksgiving dinner at the firehouse, with top-quality meat from the P.L. Castro, Jr. Meat Company in El Sobrante. Our group kept growing. As the day approached, even with the inevitable last-minute scheduling and logistical conflicts, we were expecting nearly seventy family members. Three generations of Castro descendants (the 7th, 8th and 9th generations in California) would be marching, the youngest just nine months old.

During the last week of August, when my husband and I were visiting family and fly-fishing in Montana, the parade organizers contacted me and asked if I would do an interview with Rick Radin of the *East Bay Times*. His article ran on August 30

(<http://www.eastbaytimes.com/2017/08/30/centennial-el-cerrito-pioneer-family-to-be-in-anniversary-parade/>). On the day before the parade, my husband and I drove the route to



familiarize ourselves with it. We would be driving a classic Mustang provided by a friend of El Cerrito the next morning. When we stopped to visit great-great-grandfather Victor's grave in Sunset View Cemetery, we watched a flock of wild turkeys and a small band of white tail deer roaming across the field where he rests.

Photo courtesy of Janice Castro

And so it was that at 10:30 a.m. on September 16, I was driving a Mustang convertible at 3-5 mph, just behind our Murray cousin horseback riders, along with my sister, Evelyn Castro Miller, my husband Bob Petri, and cousin Roger Ostarello in a cowboy hat. Up front, about 50 family members marched behind a banner reading: “Descendants of Victor Ramon Castro and Maria Luisa Martinez.” We waved at the celebratory crowds along the route winding up to Cerrito Vista Park in El Cerrito and they smiled and waved back.



Car Photo courtesy of Marin Stuart



The horses were a hit: Seven of our cousins were riding, and two little Murray girls had decorated their ponies with glitter and hoof polish.

Photo courtesy of Jovita Kerner

My brother, De Anza ‘64 and a proud United States Air Force Veteran, was delighted to see the De Anza Air Force Junior ROTC marching. The townspeople could not have been friendlier. “Viva El Cerrito!” we said. And a few folks shouted back, “Welcome home, Castros!”

ROTC Photo courtesy of James M. Castro

After the parade, about fifty family members gathered at Brennan’s for a reunion lunch. Everyone found parking nearby, even our horse riders with their 32-foot truck-and-trailer rigs. Later, as people were beginning to head home, we suddenly remembered the group picture. We gathered everyone outside for a windy few moments. The next morning, as my husband Bob and I headed home to western Pennsylvania, we stopped at a deli in the San Francisco airport to buy a sandwich to take along. I couldn’t resist the one called “The Castro.”



Photo courtesy of Janice Castro

Photo courtesy of Janice Castro

Editor’s Note: As a member of one of the oldest and most important families in West County, Janice Castro occupies a unique position from which to examine the historical landscape of our community. She has graciously offered to write up her memories of her family and of growing up in El Sobrante. We look forward to publishing these works as installments in our future newsletter editions.





This year, the El Sobrante Historical Society was pleased to be able to host a booth at the 24th annual El Sobrante Stroll. The day was fine, the mood festive, and the strollers were interested in the history of their town. We have hosted a booth at many a stroll, but we do not remember the level of interest that was manifest this year. It was obvious that many families have become new residents of the town, no doubt partly due to the relatively affordable homes in an otherwise high-priced market. And they wanted to know about the town

that they had chosen to be their home. We signed up over 30 new members and sold 12 of our El Sobrante history books (Arcadia Press). We were chatting all day long, and by the end of the day, as the wind was picking up, we were glad to give our jaws a rest. Total take for the day was \$264, which is a modest sum, but far more than we have ever generated in the past.

The car show was a hit, as usual. And this year, our own Maurice Abraham took away a “Fabulous Fifties” award for his flawless 1956 Chevy. More on Maury’s car follows.

The parade was another highlight, and went off with the usual hitches and unexpected gaps between the groups, but few seemed to notice or care, and the enthusiasm of the participants was heartwarming.



the early 19th century.

El Sobrante has long been a town of horse-lovers, and the horses in the parade are always a treat, as are the riders. This young girl was doing an excellent job of channeling a California girl of

As he always manages to do, our County Supervisor, John Gioia, made an appearance.



Maury Abraham, Lyle Miller, and Clementina Diaz.

A long-time supporter of the Historical Society, John is here talking with ESHS member and local historian, Emil Munkres. Emil helped out at the booth, as did

ESHS Board Member's Award Winning Car

ESHS Board member, Maurice Abraham, was pleasantly surprised at this year's El Sobrante Stroll when his classic '56 Chevy Bel



Air hardtop received the Fabulous Fifties award. This particular car was built in GM's



San Leandro plant, purchased new by a San Francisco Insurance broker, and then gifted by him to his secretary.

Maurice acquired the car in 2005 from its third owner who twenty years earlier had modified the car from stock to a mild street rod. However, time had taken its toll. Not only had the paint began to pit, both the metallic brown and caramel color and the tuck and roll interior were tired and dated. Maurice undertook what turned out to be a ten-year restoration project. The entire body was stripped and restored to better than factory tolerances. It was then painted Ferrari red and Porsche white. Out of a desire to give the car a mostly stock appearance, Maurice replaced nearly all the exterior and interior trim. The interior

upholstery was completed by El Sobrante's O&R Upholstery in factory stock style. Rally wheels were added as a final touch. The original engine was replaced by a Chevy 350



small block with several performance modifications. The engine appearance has been enhanced with numerous polished aluminum accessories, including a Griffin radiator and air conditioning by Vintage Air.

Since completion in 2016, the car has seen little driving time. "Driving a classic like this makes me nervous," says Maurice, "and finding a safe parking space is nearly impossible." He went on to say "this car has never seen rain since completed." And he said he'll be entering the car in other local shows.

The Capri Club

Lyle Miller

The owner of the Capri Club, Don Peterson, born in San Francisco, finished his military commitment in Korea, and came back to the bay area looking for work. Don stayed with his sister for a while and he would hang out at the Capri Club in El Sobrante, have a beer and visit friends. Don continued his patronage at the Capri nearly every night for about 15 years when he found out it was for sale. It was 1989 Don and his wife of 10 years, Marylou, purchased the bar & later acquired the property that 3 separate businesses occupied.

At one time, the building (built in the late '30s-early '40s) was the home of the El Sobrante

Scared Burglar Gives Self Up

EL SOBRANTE, March 28.—James Turner, 20, of 559 La Paloma Road, doesn't like the sight of blood, especially his own flowing from a deep leg gash.

He got scared and telephoned to police who took him into custody at his own request while burglarizing a local creamery.

This is his story as recounted by police:

Turner had burglarized a market near the creamery and was frightened away by a passing citizen. He cut his face and leg on broken glass while making a get-away.

Then he entered the dairy at 4156 Appian Way but became alarmed at the trail of blood he left. He picked up the telephone and called Richmond police.

"Come and get me; I'm burglarizing this place and I'm badly injured," he told Dispatcher John W. McMullin. "Besides I can't find any money."

McMullin kept him in conversation while Sgt. Wade McCain notified Deputy Sheriff Walt Young.

Turner opened the creamery door for Young.

"I'm glad you're here," he said. At Richmond Field Hospital attendants took 12 stitches in Turner's leg and patched up his slashed face. He is in the Richmond city jail pending transfer to the county jail at Martinez.

Fountain, known popularly as John's Soda Fountain. There is a walk-in cooler with a huge sliding door that was probably installed for the Ice Cream originally. Now it keeps the beer perfectly chilled. One of our history team, Maurice, recalls going there in the early '50s for an Ice cream cone with his pals.

The fountain was also the site of a botched burglary in 1947, according to this clipping from the

Oakland Tribune (submitted by member Roxy Miravalle).

John Marchetta, the original owner, lived in the old California Spanish style home to the right of the bar. In the late 1950s, the building housed a restaurant called "The Broken Lyre," owned by Florence Marchetta (possibly John's daughter-she is referred to as "Miss Florence" in an article re the grand opening in the ES

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Herald). The continental offering may have been a stretch for the locals, as the restaurant lasted less than two years. The Capri Club opened in 1959.

There was a time when our town was labeled by some as a "biker" town. We had two Harley shops and the (many) local watering holes would feature rows of gleaming two-wheelers parked in front and the leather clad riders



perched on stools inside. The Capri Club drew its share of hell-raisers even in its early days. Don says he remembers hearing about town folks riding their horses INTO the bar and asking for a drink. Then went on to tell me how a couple of motorcycles have ridden through the bar. One evening, a guy came riding a dirt bike through the open back door, went around the pool table and raced out the front door into the side of a car parked at the curb. It was the bike rider's own car!

The Capri Club has hosted several charity fundraisers for local clubs, individuals who needed help with medical expenses and one person who lost her home to fire. Classic cars and bike shows have filled the large tree covered parking area numerous times while as many as 200 "friends" gathered to enjoy BB-Q and listen to music.

The clientele here are more than just customers, Many are like family and many ARE family. I have seen Father & Son, Mother & Son, Mother & Daughter, Brothers & Sisters socializing over a pint of suds or watching their favorite sports team on one of the T.V.s. The

Capri “Gals” are like Sisters, most of them would come running anytime, anywhere to help their own. They show up after work, meet inside, order their usual cocktail and if the weather is nice, leave their handbag and phone on the bar and sit outside under the canopy and visit.



The Capri Club was locally famous for its pool players. They had some real

good ones including the proprietor, (pictured here) who hosted tournaments for about 20 years. They still have 2 coin-op tables that are well-kept and stay busy.

Don and Marylou are in the process of selling the Capri and the new owners have big plans for renovations including a name change. We wish everyone involved success!

Photos courtesy of Don Peterson

El Sobrante Opens New Downtown Park

*This is an edited version of an article that appeared in the local **Marketplace** magazine*
Maurice Abraham

On September 9, El Sobrante celebrated the opening of its newest park. Some five years in the works, this welcoming



new public place is now open to the public. The new park, located directly behind the existing library and adjacent to San Pablo Creek, includes significant new improvements to the grounds around the library, including long-overdue parking lot rehabilitation.

A key feature of the park is its brick-paved terrace overlooking San Pablo Creek.



This beautiful space, with its oval configuration, wide arcing stair steps and raised ‘stage’ platform, functions as both a casual outdoor gathering place and a mini-amphitheater.

Anticipated uses for the park are endless, ranging from outdoor meetings and open-mic readings, to small performances and private events such as birthdays and weddings. While the terrace/amphitheater space is available for general public use, scheduling for organized events will be managed by Library staff.

Other improvements include new library entrance features with ADA access upgrades, new street-front sidewalks and considerable new landscaping. Much of the landscaping features native plants, as does the native plant demonstration garden developed and maintained by the SPAWNERS (San Pablo Creek Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society) volunteers. The existing Memorial Rose Garden has been preserved as have the tiled benches featuring student art.

A Memorial plaque honoring former El Sobrante Attorney and community leader, Robert N. Sharp, has also been added. For over forty years, Bob was active in multiple efforts aimed at community improvement and guiding

El Sobrante's future. At the opening day ceremony, the plaque was unveiled by Bob's



widow, Shirley Sharp, with Supervisor John Gioia assisting.

Planning for the new park was initiated in March 2013 by Supervisor John Gioia with the creation of an Ad-Hoc Downtown Park Task Force. After considering multiple downtown sites, the County-owned library site was selected because it eliminated land acquisition hurdles and was

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**.



seen as an opportunity to integrate the existing Children's Reading Garden, the SPAWNERS native plant garden and underutilized portions of the site into a comprehensive overall park design.

Above: Head Librarian Tom Schween, leading a story-time session in the Children's Reading Garden.

Funding came from the County's existing park dedication fee fund and the East Bay Regional Park District's Measure WW program, a combined total of approximately \$1.1 million.

El Sobrante residents are excited to have this new venue for small outdoor events, and anticipate it's becoming a popular community gathering place. *Photos by Donald Bastin*

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.

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

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