

THE LEFTOVERS

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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!

Update on the CCC Rock Wall Site:

Donald Bastin

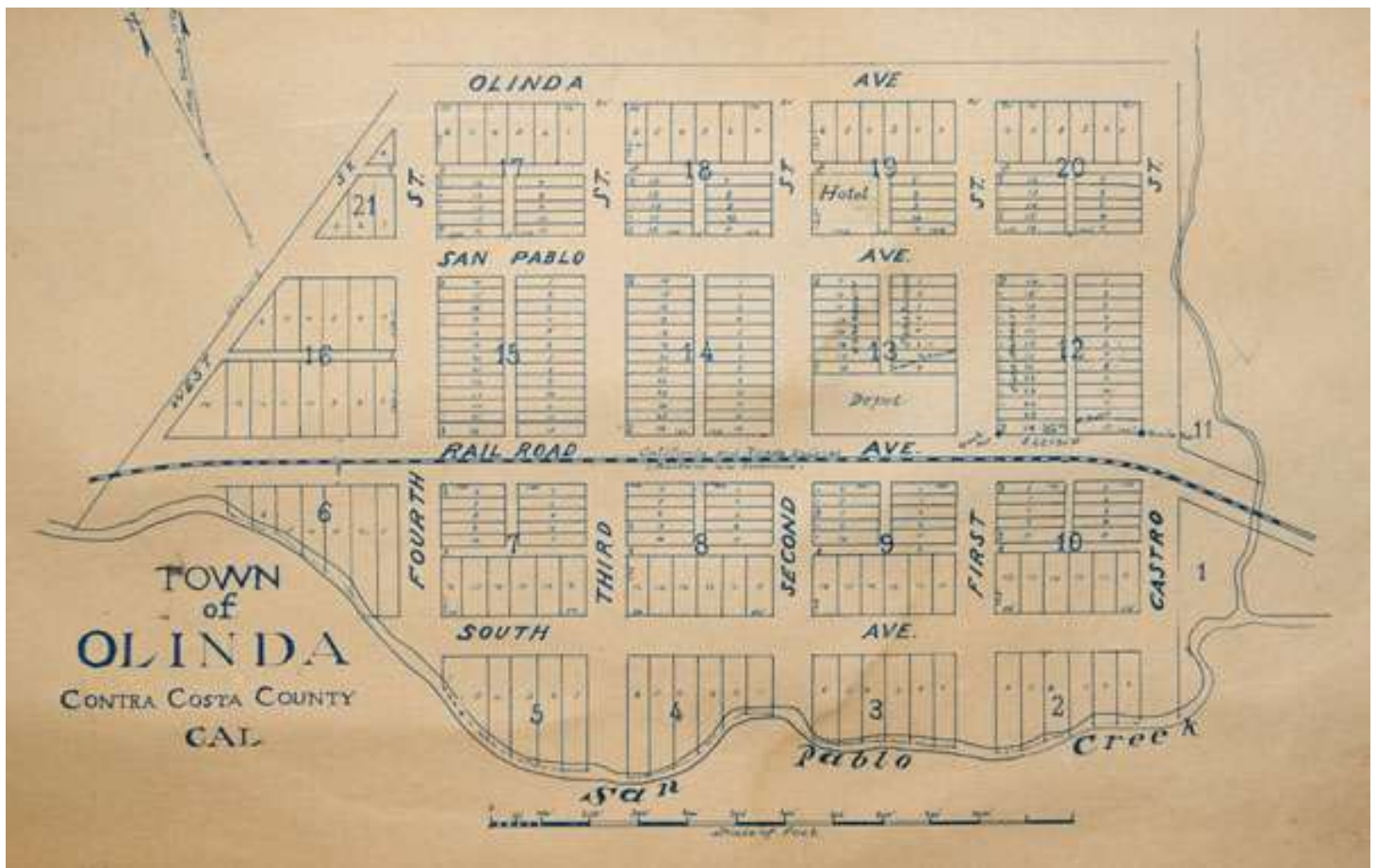


The ESHS Steering Committee members assembled at the Rock Wall site on a rainy day in early March, with significant others. From left: Priscilla & Steve James, Clementina Diaz (my wife), Lyle & Jackie Miller, and Jean & Maurice Abraham. I am taking the picture.

As some of you may recall, the El Sobrante Historical Society has been working with EBMUD to preserve and enhance a site near the reservoir that has been identified as having been originally constructed in 1935 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The site consists of a rock wall (and stairway), that was intended to serve as an “observation point” to draw

motorists off the old San Pablo Dam Road (now an EBMUD service road) to view the lake. After the new Dam Road was constructed in the mid 1950s, the wall lost its function and the entire structure was forgotten. Now rediscovered, by members of our historical society, we are now moving forward with plans to make the site one which has recognizable historical significance. The folks at EBMUD have indicated that they will focus their attention on the site some time later this summer. At that time, we can begin the work of clearing vegetation, and possibly some dirt, to make the wall more visible to passers-by. El Sobrante’s creek restoration group, SPAWNERS, has also committed to helping out with the re-vegetation plan. As a final touch, we plan to erect an informative historic interpretive panel. We will keep you informed as work progresses.

Olinda: The Little Town That Never Was



In September of 1887, the manager of the California Land and Improvement Company announced plans to develop a new town along the right-of-way of the California & Nevada Railroad. The site was to be located on land referred to as part of the “Victor Castro Ranch,” about mile from the Oak Grove terminus, a favorite picnic spot which later became well-known as La Honda Bowl. The town was to be called Olinda, though the first choice had been “Castroville,” but it was determined that too many Castrovilles were already around. The land company was preparing to sell “handsome resident property” at an upcoming auction. The C & N line was planned to run right through the new development, and arrangements were made to have the railroad bring out prospective buyers. Numerous trips were made to the new town site in 1888 and 1889, complete with band music, speeches and food, but it is not clear that any land was actually sold.

Looking at the map, the railroad follows present-day Olinda Road. The land at the top covers the site of present-day Olinda Elementary School and a good deal of land to the west, as well. Below the railroad line the proposed town boundaries extended to San Pablo Creek, which is in roughly the same channel as it was over 100 years ago. The town clearly covers much of what is today the Sherwood Forest home development.

In late May of 1889, the town site of Olinda was still the last stop on the C & N line. But the construction crews were just finishing up the job of bridging Castro Creek, just to the east (the map clearly shows the rails crossing Castro Creek). From there the rails would run along the route that would later become Hillside Drive, ending at the next stop, Laurel Glen (or Clancy’s) which is now the

site of Kennedy Grove. Just short of Laurel Glen, the crew would build another bridge over a little stream called “Clancy’s Creek.” Though we cannot be sure, this was likely present-day Kennedy Creek.

By 1890 the railroad had reached Orinda and would go no further. Sporadic excursions took place over the next few years, but the Olinda site was now bypassed in favor of the Laurel Glen resort, with its clubhouse, dance floor, and huge picnic area.

In 1894 the last regular runs of the C & N Railroad took place and for the next few years the line drifted in legal limbo, with the final dissolution coming early in the next century. But even as late as 1908, on what is probably the last Rancho El Sobrante map to be produced (now owned by Richard Oliver) the Olinda town site stubbornly appears.

The memory of the “town that never was” never really died. In January of 1957, work began on the new Olinda Elementary School, which would be constructed on the old Olinda town site. And in late 1963, the people of Sherwood Forest (who also shared land with the imaginary town) voted to rename Castro Road, from its intersection with Valley View to Hillside Drive. It would now be known as Olinda Road. At the same time, Castro Road, from the Dam Road to Alhambra Valley Road, was renamed Castro Ranch Road.

Originally, Hillside Drive was also to be known as Olinda, but the residents objected to the name change and they were able to keep the name by which their street had been known for decades.

So the next time you pass by Olinda Elementary School, and come to the intersection of Olinda and Castro Ranch Road, imagine for a moment that you have just driven over the tracks of the little train that once ran

through the middle of the little town that never was.

Information taken from the book, “California & Nevada Railroad: Narrow Gauge in the East Bay” by Erle Hanson.



Juvenile Vandalism Runs Rampant During Week in

El Sobrante *Excerpt from the El Sobrante Herald, Sept. 3, 1953*

Juvenile vandalism in El Sobrante was at high tide last week, according to the San Pablo Patrol.

Patrol Lieutenant Art Friend reported that the air had been let out of the tires of approximately 40 cars on Rincon Road and Manor Road on Monday night while on Appian Way three juveniles were apprehended stripping a car belonging to John Haas which had been burned in a recent auto accident. The tires and wheels had been stolen previously and the owner finally had the car towed away. . . . Juveniles who stole a case of beer from the Trio Club were apprehended and the beer recovered by three other juveniles Friday night.

Last, but not least dangerous was the story of three 13-year old boys found wandering around on La Paloma Road at 2 a.m. Friday. The youths had been given permission to rough it by spending the night in a tent but decided instead to view the world through the eyes of night marauders.

Pretty tame stuff by today’s standards. And we would like to know more about the “three other juveniles” who “recovered” the case of beer from the Trio Club bandits. And just what did the “night marauders” do?

UPDATE: DOWNTOWN HISTORIC MARKERS

Maurice Abraham

Plans to install historic markers in El Sobrante's downtown business district are progressing smoothly, and the markers should be in place by spring of next year. Part of a larger 'Walkability' project undertaken by the County, the historic markers will be placed in the all-new sidewalks planned for San Pablo Dam Road. The 'Walkability' project will significantly beautify the downtown and make it a more pedestrian friendly environment. In addition to the historic markers, the project will add new traditional-look iron and wood-look bus benches, trash receptacles, 40 large plant containers and some 70 new street trees (all but 6 existing trees will be removed).

The historic markers will give people a reason to explore the downtown on foot and to appreciate some of the community's history. A total of 12 markers will be installed between Appian Way and El Portal Drive. The selected markers are 24" square concrete 'tiles' to be fabricated by Quickcrete Products. 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, flush with the finished surface. The markers are identical in design to ones now in place along San Pablo Avenue in the City of El Cerrito.

The image at the bottom of the left column is an El Cerrito historic sidewalk marker similar to those planned for San Pablo Dam Road.

Among the notable historic events and places to be commemorated are El Sobrante's 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 1940's. 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 (Ace Hardware), Park Theater, its first and only movie theater (Peniel Baptist Church), and one of oldest downtown buildings, Diebenderfer's Chevrolet Garage (El Sobrante Wheel and Brake), which started as in 1946 and has been in continuous use since as an auto repair business.

Initiated by the El Sobrante Historical Society and supported by District 1 Supervisor John Gioia and the County Public Works Department. Supervisor Gioia has secured a total of \$8,000 for the historic marker project. The source of funds is El Sobrante's RSS Fund, a local beautification fund that Richmond Sanitary Service contributes to from a portion of trash collection revenues they collect from El Sobrante customers.

The entire 'Walkability' project, including installation of the historic markers, is expected to begin construction in August of this year.



Dating Photographs

Donald Bastin

Any historical society has a collection of photographs, usually received as donations. Many of these images come with little or no information; nothing is written down, either on the face of the photo or on the back. Or, what is written is indecipherable or meaningless (except to the person who did the writing). The donor, just as often, can offer little of value in placing or dating the image. Thus, our volunteers must become detectives, seeking clues in the image that will place it in time.

We are all faced with this challenge. Who of us does not have family photos that are undated and unidentified? We all have to become detectives. What are the clues that can help us to date a photograph?

FASHION

Clothing, accessories, and hair styles can all be of great help in dating a photograph. In particular, women's fashion changes quickly and can be used to place an image within a few years. Men's fashion is more subtle, but can be as useful in our quest. Below, we see a happy group gathered together on a ranch in El Sobrante.



Looking at the women's dress, we see the high collars, tight bodices and full dresses typical of the 1880s. Also typical of that era is the swept-up hair style. The men wear the typical waistcoat of the time, and two sport modest mustaches, which will grow into the "handlebar" of the 1890s.



This is a photo of Henry Alvarado, showing the fully-developed handlebar mustache of the 1890s.

Fashion can be broken down into eras, which often fall neatly into decades.

Thus, the "flapper" style of the 1920s differs markedly from the much more modest style of the pre-WWI period. Dresses gradually become shorter during the 20s (which has been linked to a "booming" economy) but return to ankle length during the depression years of the 1930s.



In the 1940s, women's dresses took on the squared shoulders that we see in the image on the left, while dresses again became shorter. Wide lapels and double-breasted suits were still in fashion for the men.

AUTOMOBILES

Beginning in the early 20th century, cars begin to make an appearance in photographs. The more autos that we can see, the more precise we can be in our dating. For instance, take a look at the following image:



A knowledgeable car fan will identify the car as a 1930 Ford. Based on this one piece of information, we

might conclude that the picture was taken in the early 1930s. But we would be wrong. Take a look at the full image:



Behind the Ford is a 1941 Cadillac. So we know that the picture cannot have been taken prior to 1941. So we can probably state, with some degree of certainty, that the picture was taken some time in the 1940s (but based just upon the two cars, we cannot even be sure of that). If we had five cars in the picture, and the newest was a 1941 model, we could be much more confident in our estimate.

BUSINESSES

Buildings can last for hundreds of years, but the businesses that occupy them come and go. And just as more cars are better for an accurate dating, so are more businesses. If we can identify businesses in our photograph (grocery store, pharmacy, barber shop, etc.) it is an easy task to determine when those businesses were operating by simply checking old city directories (the precursor to the telephone directory). If a business first shows up in 1921 and disappears in the 1929 edition, we can be fairly sure that our photo was taken between those years. And if we have three businesses in the picture, it may be that that they were all in business at the same time for only a year or so.

THEATRE MARQUEES (and other stuff)

Beginning about 1910 or so, movie theaters begin to pop up in photographs taken in an urban setting. If we can zoom in on the theatre marquee, we can see what was playing, and that can be a very valuable piece of

information. Take a look at the following image:



No trouble here in reading the marquee. A quick Google of “Charley’s Aunt” tells us that the movie came out in 1941. A little more digging reveals that the movie was released in early August of that year. So what is the parade about? It can’t be an Independence Day parade as the date is too late, and the people are too lightly dressed for Christmas. So what other holiday rated a parade in 1941 and would take place in late summer or early fall? This could be a Labor Day Parade, but how to tell for sure? Luckily, with the help of a high-quality scanner,

we can answer this question.



By zooming in on a sign in the Safeway Store, we can see that the store was giving notice of its closure for Labor Day. So that pretty much clinches it. Without too much fear of

contradiction, we can say that this photo was taken on Labor Day, September 1, 1941.

Most photographs contain information that can help us in making dating possible. As Hercule Poirot would say, we just have to exercise our “little gray cells.”

Memories of El Sobrante

An Interview with Josephine Maslov Bastin

Donald Bastin



My mother, Josephine, was born in Richmond, California in March, 1920. She just celebrated her 94th birthday. Our family moved to the newly opened Sherwood Forest development in 1955

and I asked her to reminisce about this change in her life. “Moving into the El Sobrante area was a happy time for me. We watched the homes being built in Sherwood Forest and, strange as it seems, I remember that some of the men even grabbed pieces of lumber and helped to add a nail or two.” Coming from a typical two bedroom, one bath home, the Sherwood Forest homes, featuring four bedrooms two bathrooms, and a brick fireplace, seemed incredibly spacious. “The women, especially, were delighted with the number and size of the rooms and were already planning their decorations. For me, it was a joy to decorate.” She also was charmed by the name of the development and the street names. “Imagine living on Robin Hood Drive.” But one thing bothered her (and still does). “There was no dining room!” Even our little house in San Pablo had a dining room. “All they had to do was add a wall!” There was also no laundry room, just a couple of faucets in the kitchen, so that’s where the washer and dryer went. But even without a dining room or separate laundry room, my mother was very pleased with the house and the yard. “It was mine, and I could do what I wanted with it.”

The back yard was large and a very nice place to visit with friends and relatives on a sunny day. It was accessed via a sliding door from the kitchen, which opened onto a patio. In this picture, my mother is sitting in the chair at the left, with her parents, Helen and Peter Maslov



in the swing. I am sitting on the lawn at the far right.

And everyone was friendly and ready to help out. “When you needed them, they were there.” She got her first hearing aids from a neighbor across the street, Floyd Burt. She also remembers the decorations at Christmas. “They all decorated,” she says.

Certain businesses stand out in her memory. She says that she is still remembered at the Park Pharmacy, one of her favorite places to shop. The Park Theatre was also a favorite place in town. “A lot of people went there,” she states. And Oliver’s Hardware she remembers as a very helpful place, especially to a woman who didn’t know what she wanted or needed.

My mother learned to drive while living in Sherwood Forest, in a 1941 Ford Coupe. Lots of gear grinding and jerky starts. Learning to drive at 40 years old is a challenge. “How scared I was.” She remembers making a “California stop” at the corner of Valley View and the Dam Road. A cop pulled her over. She explained that she had looked carefully in both directions and that no one was coming. The weary policeman pointed to the sign and said, “It says stop, lady!” But he let her off with a warning.

Soon after graduating high school in the early '60s, we kids left home and soon thereafter, my parents divorced. Mom moved back to Richmond but returned to El Sobrante in the 1980s, buying a condominium. In 2000 she moved into Bay Park Senior Housing, built on a site long known in El Sobrante as "Poppy Hill" but now within the borders of Pinole. She enjoys being one of the "old-timers" there, but still remembers living in Sherwood Forest as one of the happiest times in her life.

*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**.*

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.

Visit us on-line at: **ESHIST.ORG**
Questions, Comments, and
other communication? Send to:
ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM

The El Sobrante Historical Society is always looking for objects and photographs that help tell the story of our town. If you have any photographs of early El Sobrante, remember that it is not necessary to donate the original. All we need is your permission to scan your image and make it part of our archive. Your original photo stays with you.

It's a Win-Win!