

THE LEFTOVERS

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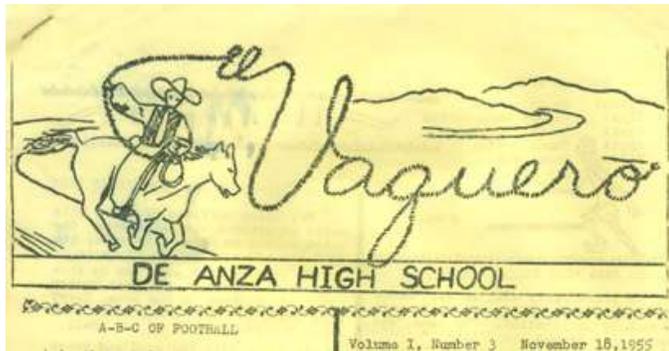
This newsletter is issued quarterly, as part of the mission of the ESHS, to preserve and publicize the history of the community of El Sobrante. If you would like to comment on this newsletter, or submit your own article for publication, please do so via: eshistory@gmail.com. Thanks!

Looking Back

Lyle Miller

Looking back at the 1950s in rural America, it seems life couldn't be better. Our post-war economy was booming, new automobiles were exciting and each year new innovations to make our lives better and easier like no other period in history. Today unfortunately, the news informs us of only brutal, shocking, violent or scandalous events.

A short time ago I was given a collection of newspapers from our DeAnza High School dated 1955- 1959. (DeAnza H.S. first 4 years!)



At first it was a little hard to get excited reading them, but as I dug deeper I found myself laughing at the juvenile content and imagining how life was then and there. Here's some examples: From EL VAQUERO NO.1 VOL2 (Feb. 1956), this article titled "Worm's Eye View"... "Say, have you seen a few pale-faced kids staggering from Mr. Jacobson's BIOLOGY class lately? Well no wonder! It seems the class

has been doing some lab work on WORMS. Of course the worms were dead as door-nails and almost as stiff, & they'd been preserved in some liquid called FORMALDEHYDE, But still cutting up worms is no joy. It's required though & educational, So buck up kids, the worst is yet to come !"



Here's another. It's kinda long so I'll summarize it for you: "**BOYS !!!**" by Gale Byassee, "Teenage boys are what girls go with. They have 2 hands, 2 feet & sometimes 2 gals but never more than one dollar or one idea at any one time. Generally speaking, they may be

divided into 3 classifications: Boyfriends, Girl chasers and Girl-less..."

"Cupid's Arrow February Night Dance will be on the 17th from 8:00-11:00 in the Cafetorium. Dress in Sports Attire 50cents /couple with student body card. 75 cents without..."

From El Vaquero, April 1957: "Slang: DIG THAT CRAZY WASHING MACHINE" = look at that girl walk. "SWEET MAMA" = pretty girl.

"DIG THAT CRAZY BUGGY" = look at that neat car. "THE PERSUADER" = Mr. Crouch's Swatter. "YOU KNOW IT DADDIO" = that's right.

"THE GARBAGE CAN" = the cafeteria. "GET OFF THE WALL" = quit kiddin' me.

Another one titled: "NOT ONE ????" "Last Thursday there was not one girl in the telephone booth during one of the lunch periods. What Hoppin' Girls? Did you have a fight with your boyfriend or did you talk too long & the dean helped you stay away? At any rate, we wager this is the first (& probably the last) time this has happened since DeAnza H.S. opened."

Other news for April '57: "...Seeking votes for president of the 7th grade were: Bobby Ballard, Donald Bastin, Thomas Classick, John Griffin & Ricky Weddle..." (Donald Bastin is now editor of this newsletter !).

El Vaquero April 1958. There is a story titled : "UNDER THE HOOD WITH HESTERLEY" ... "Owner of this week's car is Stanley Benninger, who has been a Sophomore here at Deanza for THREE years. His car is the ultimate in customizing. Stanley started with a wrecked '36 Ford Roadster. It has been channeled 6" and a rake obtained by oversize [tires] in the rear. The interior is done in blue & white leather to match the metallic blue paint job. Under the hood reposes a '55 Chevy OHV V8 engine running a full cam & high lift rocker

arms, a 3 pot Edelbrock manifold & the engine has been ported & relieved to facilitate breathing. All in All, this car is an example of American ingenuity (plus a rich father) AND FAST ! This rod will do 0-60 in 7.6 seconds & clocked the quarter doing a fabulous 135 mph"

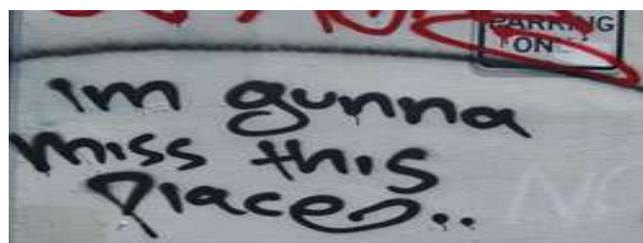
Also in April 1958: "The Cafeteria will be featuring the following: Wednesday, spaghetti w/ cheese, cole slaw w/dressing, french bread & butter, plums, celery sticks & a cookie. Thurs. Menu Pups in a blanket, buttered peas, lettuce wedge & dressing, red gelatin w/ fruit & milk."

Friday menu: "Crusty fish filet, mash potatoes, buttered corn, bread & butter, apple cobbler w/cheese." Mmmmmmm !

Just a note... The school paper was called "El Vaquero" through October 17 1958 (vol.4 issue4). "The Donzette" debuted October 31 1958 (vol. 1 issue 1).



Editor's Note: Thanks to Tom Mason, for passing these historic newspapers along to Lyle. Tom, as you may know, is the husband of the late Karen Mason, who taught for years at De Anza High School, and who now has a wing of the new school named in her honor.



The Road to El Sobrante

Steve James

Prior to WWII the El Sobrante valley was a rural ranching community with a population ranging between 100-125 people. The Kaiser shipyards and post war boom brought families to West Contra Costa County, from all corners of the United States. My family was one of those, that set down roots in this now bedroom community. My Grandparents left their tenet farming life in Northern Iowa, in 1943, for the job rich war effort in Richmond, California. After the war their four sons did what most kids do--followed their parents. My dad Ernie James was the second son and he and my Mother (Mary), lived in the El Portal war housing, that was between Walter T Helms school and Contra Costa college. In 1953, they moved to El Sobrante.

Ernie was raised on a farm during the depression near Rockwell, Iowa. The family never wanted for food, but having spending money for personal needs was out of the question. He and his brothers would trap muskrats, fox, rabbits, and if lucky get a mink. They sold the pelts in town to a fur trader. This was their only extra money avenue. It was a simple life, dictated by hard work. Then WWII changed it all.

By 1944, Ernie was in France and by the end of the European theater he was deep into Germany. He, like thousands of other GIs, was sent to Camp Roberts near Pittsburg, California to prepare for the invasion of mainland Japan. Luckily that never happened.

So now, the farm boy from Northern Iowa has trekked across France and Germany, only to end up miles away for where his parents settled in San Pablo and eventually living in El Sobrante; but his travels are far from over.

Ernie found a job working for the Cal Spray Co. in Richmond as an accountant and auditor. Cal

Spray Co. was purchased by Standard Oil and became the Chevron Chemical Co. His audit duties took him throughout the United States and to increased job responsibilities within the Company. In 1967, he started a work assignment that took him around the world with a six-month stay in Hyderabad, India. There he helped to set up accounting procedures for a joint venture fertilizer plant. India's caste system had him dealing with the upper society and government officials, but having his farm boy roots Ernie easily connected with the working class.

Beyond the day-to-day office work, he experienced many adventures, including a gem-buying excursion with one of the government officials. He described a scene right out of an Indiana Jones movie. Going through back allies, entering a dark room where a crossed legged salesman emptied out small bags of diamonds and other precious stones for purchase. He felt obligated to buy something, so he purchased 3 black star sapphires. I still have them, with the bill of sale slip. He also got to do some hunting. It started with some duck hunts and then his most treasured adventure, a tiger hunt.

At a cocktail party, a high level government official found out that Ernie was an avid hunter. He was taken on duck hunting excursions. They would drive through a local village, picking up some kids who were their retrievers.



Ernie felt a little strange about having young boys swim out as far as 50 yards to retrieve a duck, but was told that's what they were getting paid for. I think he said they gave them a couple of rupees (Indian currency); a rupee equaled about 27 cents. The boys were thrilled to get the money. I think this was not unlike that farm boy selling his furs in town. After a few duck hunts came the invitation to the tiger hunt. He was excited.

The tiger hunt required staying overnight in villages. They stayed in dirt floor huts that were sprinkled down each morning with fresh cow dung to keep the dust down. He spent the days in the village and the nights hunting. I'll save the suspense: he did not get a tiger, but did shoot several spotted deer and a Chinkara Antelope. The people of the village were very excited to have the fresh meat. He had the hides tanned and the antelope horns mounted. I still have them.



With the fertilizer plant office system up and running, Ernie headed back to good old El Sobrante. Quite a life: Starting out a farm boy in Northern Iowa, to one of the thousands of U.S. GIs in Europe, to hunting tigers in India. Ernie's El Sobrante life included being one of the co-founders of the El Sobrante Boy's club of America (the second President) and serving on many local councils and boards. I think his biggest pleasure was being a coach and/or manager of several baseball teams from Baby Ruth leagues to El Sobrante Boy's Club Pony and Colt leagues. I still encounter men who, as

boys, played on these teams. They tell me how much he meant to them and how much he was liked.

Quite a legacy for a farm boy from Rockwell, Iowa.

Can't find our website? It seems that the link to our domain name, ESHIST.ORG, has been broken for some reason. Not to despair. You can directly link to our website by typing in the actual address:

sites.google.com/site/elsobrantehistoricalsociety/

Hopefully, the link will be restored soon.

AN EL SOBRANTE ACRE – A GLIMPSE OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

Maurice Abraham

Our Santa Rita Road home sits high on a hill overlooking the El Sobrante Valley and the panoramic hillsides of San Pablo Ridge. I moved here as a four-year-old in 1946 and grew up on this property, but not in this home. That was the year my parents, Maurice and Jean Abraham, purchased a one-acre property here from the McClure family, and relocated our family from Richmond to the tiny two-bedroom home that sat on the property.

There was only a scattering of homes along Santa Rita Road then, and the road dead-ended at a large ranch leased by the pioneer Castro family for cattle grazing. The ranch's grassy hills extended from San Pablo Creek to Valley View Road, and from May Road to our Santa Rita Road neighborhood. Today, those hills have been transformed from their native state into the De Anza Vista and Whitecliff neighborhoods.

In my early 70's now, recollections of my younger years in El Sobrante are vivid as ever. As you might imagine, El Sobrante was largely

undeveloped in 1946, a rural community with only hints of the suburban community it would become. I witnessed that change. When I relocated to Silicon Valley in 1969, the El Sobrante community looked much as it does today, as most of its growth occurred between 1955 and 1970.

Like so many other post-depression Richmond residents, my parents had immigrated to Richmond from other parts of the U.S., dad from Ragen, Nebraska and mom from Nashwauk, MN. They, their parents and most of their siblings came here for the post-depression job prospects. The young couple was introduced by a mutual friend at a Richmond dance and, in 1935 they eloped to Reno and married.

The move to El Sobrante was driven by dad's desire to live in the country and have a little farm. That lifestyle was in his roots. Although mom was reticent about leaving the city comforts, I believe both recognized the long-term investment potential of an acre of El Sobrante land. And, that investment potential began to be realized in the early 50s, the start of El Sobrante's boom years.

My sister, Glenna, and I were growing up quickly and the tiny home we shared seemed to shrink at an equal pace. So the decision was made to build a new home next to the old one, a two-year project that was completed in late 1954. Dad, a craftsman and perfectionist, did much of the work himself with help of a neighbor and co-worker, Bob Combs and from other family members that pitched in when they could. The old home became a rental providing a modest boost in income. Around the same time, my mom returned to the work force, joining the Macy's Department Store in downtown Richmond.



Original family home-c. 1947



The 'new' family home completed in 1954

In 1964, it was decided to subdivide the Santa Rita acre into four residential lots. Several factors underlay that decision, beginning with the building of our new family home in the early 50s. That experience ignited in me an interest in architecture and construction. That was followed in the mid-50s by countless hours I spent watching the development of the old ranch behind us by the behemoth Utah Construction Company. I was fascinated how hillside grazing land could be reshaped to accommodate new streets and utilities and homes and new families. The entire process offered me endless fascination and further fed my curiosity.

As a 9th grader at the 'new' De Anza High School, my interest in architecture was inspired further by two mechanical drawing instructors, Winston Howe and John Briscoe. Their guidance and encouragement led me to enter several Bay Area architectural design competitions throughout high school and

receiving awards in every one. In my final year at De Anza I designed and prepared construction drawings for an all-steel home which won me an honorable mention in the Ford Motor Company's International Industrial Design Competition.



June 1957...a turning point event for me and for the destiny of our El Sobrante acre. That's me on the right along

with another winning De Anza student, Charles Smith, and Principal William Plutte.

Shortly after graduating in 1960, based on those high school accomplishments, I was hired by an El Sobrante start-up, Schelin Engineering Company. Under the tutorship of E. Richard Schelin, PE and other senior staff, I received invaluable guidance, training and solid practical experience in land development planning and engineering. It was this experience that equipped me with the knowledge and skills to subdivide the family acre just four years later.



Schelin Building (my design) 1963 - 435 Valley View Road...formerly a pharmacy.

Again, the year was 1964. A few years later, mom and dad decided to demolish the old house (it sat where the new access

road would eventually be), and enlarge the side yard of the family home to its new lot configuration. The El Sobrante Fire Department was offered the opportunity to burn the old place as a training exercise, an offer eagerly accepted. In a matter of weeks, only ashes provided evidence of where the old house had stood. The family home lot was then graded and a new fence erected around its new boundary leaving an access corridor to the three "back" lots.

Although dad often talked of building on the three vacant lots, they remained undeveloped for some 25-years. Over that time, mom and dad gifted one lot to my sister and another to me. In 1990, I designed a home for Glenna and her husband, Bill Nash, on their lot. Bill, a teacher and building contractor constructed the new home where they still reside. Then, in 2003, my wife Jeannie and I completed our new home, also of my design and constructed by brother-in-law Bill.



Our home - 4334 Santa Rita...completed in 2003.

Below: Nash home...4336 Santa Rita...completed in 1990



Mom and dad have since passed on, dad at 82 in 1997 and mom at 89 in 2006.

Glenna and I inherited the family home as well as the fourth lot. She later purchased my interest in the home and currently rents it to her oldest daughter and her family. We still own the remaining lot jointly, its final destiny yet to be determined. Surely it, too, will one day be the place another family calls home. For now though, this acre will continue on as our 'family compound'.

Opening Day of Brand New Exhibits at the Rosie Visitor Center, May 24, 2014.

Donald Bastin

The Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historical Park is located smack on the Richmond Bay Trail, right next to the old Ford Building. That's convenient, as the VC celebration also included a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Bay Trail Project, an ambitious attempt to completely encircle San Francisco and San Pablo bays in a 500-mile walking and bicycling trail. Richmond has been ahead of the curve for years in completing its part of the trail, and the Marina section, which includes the VC, is probably the most beautiful, developed, and varied.

The new VC exhibits are extraordinary, and include wonderful static displays as well as well-thought-out interactive components. Here



we see a visitor trying her skill with a rivet gun. Be sure to bring the kids, as they will be fascinated. The park rangers and docents offer a wealth of detail, and you will usually run into an actual Rosie, one of the extraordinary women who worked in the Richmond shipyards during WW II, or in one of the many yards or military facilities around the Bay. At the top of the next page we see Mary Torres, sitting next to one of the unique mannequins that are scattered throughout the VC. She



enthralled all around her with her story of traveling on a bus, for 5 days, to Richmond, with little to eat, no showers, and few bathroom facilities. Like many who came, she decided to stay.



Feeling guilty about commuting alone?

The many vintage posters offer a wonderful glimpse into wartime life in the Bay Area.

So be sure and visit the Rosie Visitor Center soon. Remember that El Sobrante only started growing during the war years, and it is the workers who came to work in the Richmond shipyards who make up many, if not most of our founding mothers and fathers. The VC is open 7 days a week. Find them online at: nps.gov/rori/

New Acquisitions:



In addition to the De Anza (El Vaquero/Donzette) newsletters already referred to, we received these Polk's Richmond City Directories from Judith Ward. The directory on the left dates from 1934, while the one on the right dates from 1954-55. City directories are a wealth of information and a great aid in tracking down information about individuals and businesses. Unlike a simple telephone directory, these old books contain information regarding a resident's occupation, marital status, business information, as well as householder names by address. With a good collection of directories, the track of an individual or business can be traced through the years. And you can often find who lived in your home long before you did! Thanks Judy!

Save the Date! The Stroll is Coming!

The 21st annual El Sobrante Stroll will be held on Sunday, September 21. As usual, there will be a parade, lots of music and food, and a bunch of old cars to drool over. Unfortunately, due to conflicting demands on our time, the El Sobrante Historical Society will not have a booth at the Stroll this year. But don't let that stop you from attending! The Stroll just gets better. See you next year!

*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:
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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!