

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!

LETTER FROM HERMAN STEPHAN

Former El Sobrante Resident

This is another in our series of letters from people who grew up in El Sobrante and have generously agreed to share their experiences with our members. We encourage anyone who has a similar story to share it with us. Just e-mail your story to:

ESHHistory@gmail.com.

Let me start by telling you it was the time of my life...enjoyed every moment of it. I was eight years old and my parents bought three lots on Solano Court...corner of hilltop and Solano Court. There was nothing there, and I mean nothing.



Our Home 1940

The Stephen family home at the corner of Hilltop Road and Solano Court – 1940. The home is still there, but has been remodeled and significantly added to.

Went to Pinole-Hercules School 'til the eighth grade with a lot of kids from El Sobrante. Walked to the bottom of La Paloma and caught the bus with a lot of kids from all over. The store at the bottom of the hill was operated by 'Rosie'. She lived just across the street in a small house with a white picket fence. You may know some of them...Carol Olson, Dick Martin, Alma, Larry and Jack Williams, The Little brothers, Allen and Phillis Casebolts, Pettit kids. Allen became a doctor and Phillis a missionary. There was a Donna Osborn and a lot of other kids.

Had a paper route during the early part of the War (WWII) and that's when the El Centro area exploded. We slid down the hills on the dry grass with cardboard boxes...caught salamanders in the creek and built dams in the creek. Had soooo much fun.

We played hit the bat, hide and seek, kick the can...before the war it was cowboys and 'injuns', after the war started it was Army. Just riding the bus I came to know everyone on it regardless of age. It was just fun. We had to play with all age groups because there was not a lot of us. After a few years it was going to the soda shop on Appian Way by the bridge...it was "John's Soda". You took your chances of someone being there because there was more than one meeting place.



Wine Janet, Hermit Bobby

Herman Stephen...second from right, in El Sobrante in the 1940s

Sometime in the early forties everyone went to the square dance at the clubhouse on Saturday night...where the firehouse is now. Did the club become the firehouse or what? Then there was the clubhouse on the “curve” ...across from Ray Vogel’s Market. He had a little store...about as big as a garage just where the Nursery is now. The gas station was another place the boys would meet..just up the street from Vogel’s. We played football with as little as ten guys in the empty land just down from Vogel’s. I had to walk everywhere I wanted to go. Most others did too. There were dances at the “new” club house also.

Rollingwood was a sugar beet farm and the road from San Pablo to El Sobrante was called “Chinaman’s Hill”. There was a farmers market there where the hillside would slide all the time. This area was just above Rollingwood. My mother, after the war, was an airplane spotter, and I would go with her to identify the planes. I was good at it...the place was up in back of the road on a high hill...in back of the club house. There was an airplane crashed just above Chinaman’s Hill in the early forties.

(In later correspondence, Herman identified the plane as an Air Force P-38. He also said as an airplane spotter his mother would spot a plane and call it in at a

small shed with a phone in it. She would identify it and tell its direction of travel. The was a volunteer position to keep civilians involved in the war effort)

There was a bus service to Richmond..don’t remember how long it lasted, but it went to town twice a day as I recall. It picked up passengers at different locations. There was no road from Rollingwood to El Sobrante because it did not exist. Then El Portal and Rollingwood were built.

My paper route took me all through the El Centro neighborhood...down La Paloma, up Appian, up Rincon Road and Renfrew Road, past the Bressems, Al Konze place then home. Talk about a farm, we had three types of chickens, two types of pigeons..homing and tumblers, two hogs, two goats (Daisy Mae and Little Abner), ducks, rabbits (sold the pelts to someone for about 35 cents for insulation in combat gear for the services)...one collie dog, cats and a big garden...and all the free comic books I could read as my parents worked at a paper recycling plant on Cypress Street in Oakland. The covers were removed so they could not resell them. Allen Casbold’s parents were a little religious...and was not supposed to read them but on the weekend before I got up he would be sitting in our living room reading them.

It was just a fun time of my life.

Did time in Korea 1950 to 1952. Married in 1953 and lived on Rheem Avenue and Tara Hills (Fisher Street), moved to Arizona in 1969. I live in the country with an A-frame home. Wife died 2.5 years ago. Had four kids that went to Kerry Hills School. Am now 82 years young and it snowed last night. Thank you for your time.

Herman Stephen
Payson, Arizona

Ribbon –Cutting Ceremony for El Sobrante’s Downtown Walkability Project—Wednesday, July 8



Though there appeared to be a bit of unfinished work yet to be done, the reconstruction of the sidewalks of downtown El Sobrante was officially celebrated on Wednesday, July 8. Above, we can see Supervisor John Gioia operating the scissors. At the right end of the ribbon is Chamber President Marie Carayanis, while at the other end is board member Lois Boyle. MAC Chair Barbara Pendergrass is to John’s right (in blue). Behind Barbara is ESHS Steering Committee member, Steven James. The pictures for this article were taken by Steering Committee member, Lyle Miller. Lyle also took a short video of the actual ribbon-cutting, which can be seen on our Facebook page.

Steering Committee members Maurice Abraham and Donald Bastin (newsletter editor) were out of town and unable to attend this important event. Ours was a particular interest because it was your historical society that was responsible for the installation of the twelve historic markers at various points in the

downtown area and all of us (but particularly Maury) went out of our way to make sure that nothing went wrong in the long months that led up to this event. Of course, stuff happened, but by keeping on top of progress, we were able to head off serious problems.

But back to the opening. The following is Lyle’s account of the event as he recalls it:

The ceremony drew a bigger than expected crowd at the Mechanics Bank parking lot.



Several notables attended, from the County Supervisor to Cities of Richmond & San Pablo staff members, E.S. M.A.C., chamber board members (dressed in period clothing to represent important El Sobrante pioneers).

Our historical society was acknowledged & thanks was given for the addition of historical markers to the downtown sidewalk project.

A special award plaque from the county was presented to young Bob Sharp & his mother Shirley recognizing Bob Sr. for all his work to



make E.S. a better place & a poster featuring a drawing of the proposed "Bob Sharp Amphitheater" to be built near the El Sobrante Library.

For more information about the ceremony and other events in El Sobrante, visit the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce website, at:

www.elsobrantecachamber.com

Or check out the ESHS Facebook page.

EL SOBRANTE'S DOWNTOWN GET'S A NEW LOOK

Maurice Abraham

With much fanfare, the ribbon was cut that officially introduced downtown El Sobrante's new look. An important part of the new look are twelve concrete markers commemorating significant aspects of El Sobrante's history. Each marker is strategically located to create an interesting and informative downtown walking experience.



Historical Society Steering Committee members inspect a historic marker prior to final installation. Left to right: Maurice Abraham, Steve James, Lyle Miller and Donald Bastin. Donald and Steve are also on the Board of the Contra Costa County Historical Society.

Your historical society began this project almost two years ago as Contra Costa County's Public Work Departments was planning to improve the 'walkability' of the downtown area.

The completed overall project includes new wider sidewalks along with new street trees, traditional-style metal tree grates, bus benches and trash receptacles. Numerous large planted pots were also installed to further enhance the downtown and improve the pedestrian experience.

County Supervisor John Gioia enthusiastically supported our efforts, and secured funding to acquire and install the historic markers. Our role was to design and acquire the markers and make certain they got installed correctly and in their designated location. As can be expected in any complex construction project, a few glitches cropped up along the way, things such as sidewalks being completed where markers were supposed to go, and a marker text being damaged slightly when a worker 'scrubbed' it to remove excess mortar. Oh yes, and juggling our personal schedules to match an ever-changing construction schedule was a challenge too.

But all those challenges were overcome and are behind us now, thanks to the cooperation of the County's inspection team from consultants, Ghirardelli Associates and General Contractor, Vanguard Construction, Inc. They always responded positively and quickly to any issues we raised. Our desire going forward is to see El Sobrante Valley residents enjoying a stroll through the beautified business district as they learn some interesting community's history tidbits.

Installation of First Historic Marker , June 5, 2015

Donald Bastin

In early June, I was asked to attend the first installation of one of the twelve historic markers that were part of the Downtown Walkability Project. Maury had followed this project with great care, but was out of town.

With me was Lyle Miller, which was appropriate, as the first tile to go in was in front of his shop, El Sobrante Wheel & Brake.

Joining us were two employees of Ghiradelli Consulting, David Eldridge and Cheryl Miller. It was their job, as they were working for the county, to see that the work was done to the county's specifications. Actual installation of the tile would be done by father-and-son team Ismail and Armando Caro, of Vanguard Construction.

The first problem to overcome was the size of the diamond-shaped opening in the sidewalk, meant to accept the tile (historic marker). The markers are exactly 2 ft square. Unfortunately, so was the opening; the contractor had failed to allow for an additional ¼ inch around the



outside to accommodate the grout. So, a quarter-inch had to be taken off the sides of the opening, using a power grinder and hand tools. This had to be

done with care, particularly to avoid having crossing cut lines at the corners.

Once the edges were cut and smoothed, the bottom was leveled and the entire hole filled with grout. The amount of grout had to be calculated with care, as the weight of the tile, and the tight



dimensions, made it difficult to remove (and forceful levering could lead to cracking of the tile).

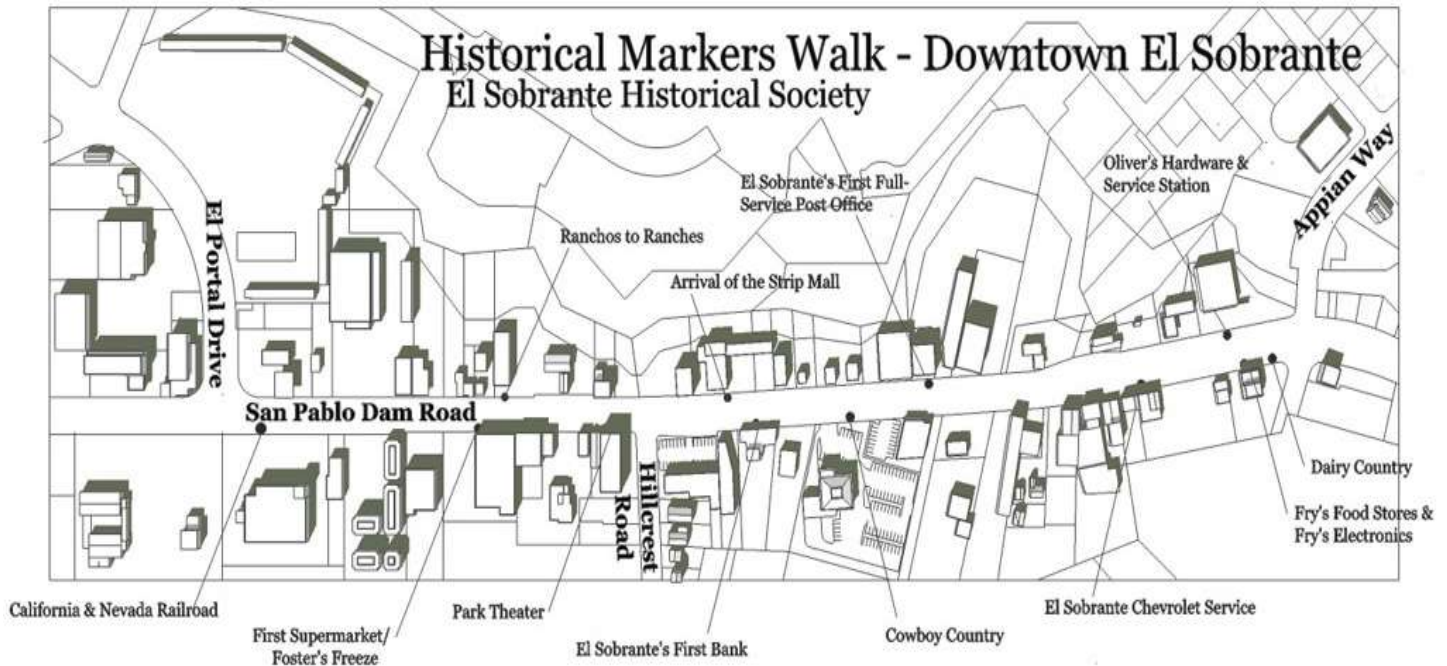
It was a slow and tense process. We had no idea just how much man-handling the tiles could take without breaking (fortunately, we had a little money left over from the grant to cover such a contingency). But Armando and Ismail were clearly experienced workers, and with patience and skill, completed the job to our complete satisfaction.



From left: Armando and Ismail Caro, Cheryl Miller, David Eldridge.

Thanks to all, for a job well done.

Join us at the El Sobrante Stroll, Sunday, September 20!



This map was created by Maurice Abraham to serve as a guide to the 12 markers now placed in the sidewalks of downtown El Sobrante

Remembering . . .

George Schmidt

George died on May 6, at the age of 85. Anyone who has lived in El Sobrante for awhile knew George. He was very active in local civic organizations, such as May Valley Citizens Association, Rotary of El Sobrante, El Sobrante Library, Richmond Neighborhood Coordinating Council. He was also a director for the West County Sanitation District.

When I moved back to El Sobrante, with my family, in the mid-1980s, there was a lot of turmoil concerning what was considered over-development of the El Sobrante hillsides. I remember that George was courageously involved in this on-going struggle, alongside locals such as Eleanor Loynd, Bob Sullivan, and Bob Sharp. He was quiet but forceful in his efforts to secure the best future for the El Sobrante Valley. He will be missed.

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 WWW.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.

Send questions or comments to:
ESHHistory@gmail.com