

# THE LEFTOVERS

Published by the El Sobrante Historical Society

Issue #20

Fall 2016

*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](mailto:eshistory@gmail.com). Thanks!*

## RANCHO BOUNDARY LINE MARKERS PLANNED

Maurice Abraham

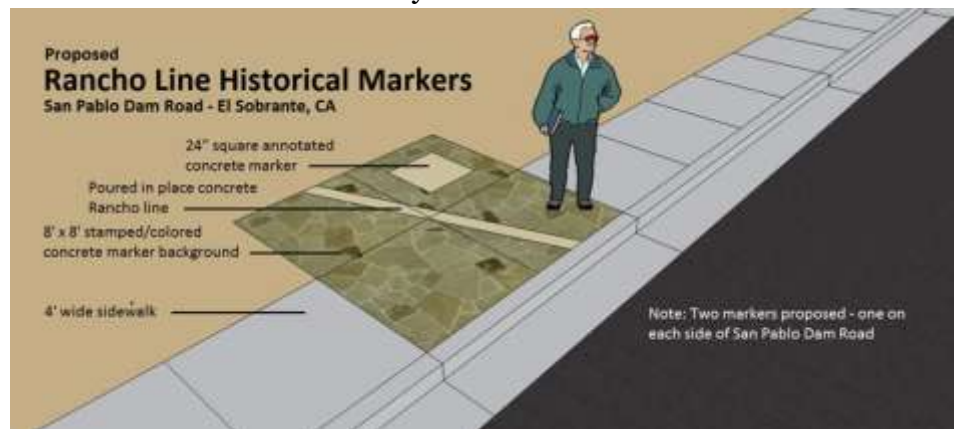
The El Sobrante Historical Society has received positive feedback from Contra Costa County Public Works Department about commemorating the location of the historic boundary line between Rancho San Pablo and Rancho El Sobrante. Many people may be surprised to know that the rancho boundary divides the El Sobrante Valley, crossing San Pablo Dam Road between Clark Road and Milton Drive.



The County is planning sidewalk improvements along both sides of San Pablo Dam Road between Appian Way and May Road. Our proposal is to incorporate into the new sidewalks two small commemorative “plazas”, one on

each side of the road. The map exhibit above shows the boundary line location and the illustration shows a conceptual design of what’s proposed.

The County has tentatively indicated the “plazas” and the boundary line could be incorporated into the sidewalk project budget with little additional cost. The commemorative markers



themselves would be provided by the Historical Society and would either be cast bronze, engraved granite or etched concrete, similar to the historic markers in the downtown. Funding for the markers has yet to be identified, but their cost is not expected to exceed \$1,500 for both.

“We’re excited about the prospect of having these markers in place to inform visitors about one more important aspect of the community’s history,” said Maurice Abraham who, on behalf of the Historical Society, is coordinating this project with County staff. Although a definitive schedule for the sidewalk project has not been established, construction is not expected to begin for two to three years.

## **60 Years Ago: A New Bridge Opens While Car Ferry Service Ends on the Bay**

*Donald Bastin*



*Friday, August 31, 1956.*

*Celebration of the opening of the newly-constructed Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. The man in the middle is California Governor Goodwin Knight.*

*This was the last day that the Richmond-San Rafael Ferry system operated its boats between Pt. Castro in Richmond and Pt. San Quentin in San Rafael, and the last day of car ferry service on the Bay. The bridge opened to vehicle traffic the next day, September 1.*

*The official name of the bridge is the John F. McCarthy Memorial Bridge. McCarthy was a well-respected State Senator.*

Typically, our local newspaper, the El Sobrante Herald, made no mention of this historic event, even though it undoubtedly affected the town’s population. Indeed, such was the intense focus on purely local events that the editor, Eddie Galli, even declined to make any mention of the assassination of President Kennedy, in November, 1963.

In any case, the opening of the new Richmond-San Rafael Bridge was an historic occasion. Before this time, motorists traveling directly between the East Bay and Marin had only one option: the Richmond-San Rafael ferry.

The ferry system entered into operation on May 1, 1915. The little ferry Ellen was converted to accept automobiles, but it proved to be unsafe and was soon replaced by bigger boats designed for the purpose of carrying cars. Eventually, the service grew to include a fleet of four boats. These were

wooden side-wheelers, using oil-burning steam engines. Crossing time was around 20 minutes. Below is a steaming schedule for the Summer of 1927. As can be noted, traffic was heaviest on the weekends. This is the opposite of today's bridge traffic, which is heaviest during the week due to commuter traffic. In the days before World War II, most ferry traffic was related to pleasure driving, primarily folks headed toward the resort areas along the Russian River.

## Summer Schedule

Effective June 8, 1927

Subject to Change Without Notice

<b>LEAVE</b>		<b>LEAVE</b>
<b>RICHMOND</b>		<b>PT. SAN QUENTIN</b>
<b>6:00 A. M.</b>		<b>6:30 A. M.</b>

EVERY HALF HOUR UNTIL  
10:00 P. M. || 10:30 P. M.

**SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS**  
6:00 A. M. || 6:30 A. M.

EVERY TWENTY MINUTES  
UNTIL  
12:00 P. M. || 12:30 A. M.

**4 BOAT SERVICE**  
**When Traffic Demands**

*Dining Service On All Boats*

**PHONES:**  
Richmond 231      San Rafael 827W

By around 1940, the boats were replaced by steel, propeller-driven vessels, which were considerably larger and faster. But the rapid population growth that occurred due to the local war effort meant that the days of the ferry system were numbered.

People were thinking about building a bridge between Contra Costa and Marin Counties as early as the 1920s. Most plans envisioned a connection between Pt. San Pablo and Pt. San Pedro, at the entrance to San Pablo Bay. This made some sense, as the distance was shorter than at any other point. Another logical route would ground the western end of the bridge on the Marin Islands, just off San Rafael. Indeed, Thomas Crowley, who operated a successful tug and chandlery business on the Bay, bought the islands in 1926 in the expectation that their value would increase tremendously when the bridge was eventually constructed, with the islands part of the plans. As it turned out, the main island became a vacation home for the Crowley family for 60 years. Long

after the bridge was built, the Crowley family donated the islands to the State. They now belong to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, serving as a rookery and wildlife refuge.

Construction of the new bridge began in March, 1953. The photo at right was taken about a year later, in 1954, by Ed Campbell, whose family moved to El Sobrante in 1934 (Ed's dad built a house along what is now Campbell Lane, which is still standing). The boy is Ed's son, Steve. In the background we can see construction proceeding on the bridge's support structures. Construction actually proceeded fairly rapidly, and the bridge was completed ahead of schedule and under budget.





This picture was probably taken late in 1954 or early 1955, also by Ed Campbell, and shows construction proceeding on the bridge superstructure. Red Rock is the island in the background.



Friday, August 31, 1956, was the last day of ferry service on the Richmond-San Rafael run. Many people took one last ride for old times' sake. The three people on this ferry boat are Ed Campbell's son Steve, daughter Terry, and wife Jeanne.



This picture was taken shortly after completion of the bridge. In the foreground are the idled ferries of the now defunct ferry system. While car ferry systems continued to operate on the Sacramento River for a time, all car ferry service ceased, on the Bay, as of September 1, 1956.

The long roadway pier at the left was used as a public fishing pier. But after years of neglect, the pier deteriorated and was closed. The structure has now completely collapsed and is no longer visible.

A few bridge facts:

Total length, including approaches: 5.5 miles.

Bridge toll, passenger car, 1956: 75 cents.

Total Cost: \$62 Million

Average daily usage, 2015: About 80,000 vehicles

The bridge spans two ship channels, conspicuous by the two main cantilever spans above them. As the channels are not parallel, the bridge does not follow a straight line.

Plans are now in place to allow walkers and bikers on the bridge, as part of the San Francisco Bay Trail. This new trail section should open sometime in 2018.

## 60 Years Ago: Stories From the

# El Sobrante Herald

BEE-PRESS

### June 14, 1956: Work on New Appian Bridge Set For July

The *Herald* announced that the County Board of Supervisors had set aside \$45,000 for construction of a new bridge over San Pablo Creek, at the intersection of the Dam Road and Appian Way. The construction of a new crossing was long overdue:

“Civic leaders of El Sobrante long have sought the improvement. For years the narrow, angled old bridge, designed for minor traffic flow of a pre-war era, has been a major bottleneck in the area.

Since the widening of Dam Road and the sharp buildup of traffic resulting from El Sobrante’s steadily increasing population, the bridge intersection has been the scene of several accidents and vehicles are stacked bumper to bumper along Appian Way during traffic rush hours.”

In the December 13 issue of the *Herald*, it was reported that the bridge would open early in the new year. Work had temporarily halted, while waiting for the concrete to “cure.” Apparently, all went smoothly thereafter, as no more is mentioned about the new bridge.

### September 13, 1956: Groundbreaking is Started for Local Postal Structure

El Sobrante was finally to get its own, stand-alone post office, thanks to the efforts of landowner and developer, Claude Lee. According to Lee, the new facility would “be completed in the latter part of November in time for the Christmas mailing rush.” Lee was too optimistic, as the opening was delayed until Monday, January 28, 1957. Gust Allyn, the local Postmaster, was in attendance.

At the same time, Lee opened his new variety

store, right next door. Today, the old Post Office building, at 3927 San Pablo Dam Road, is the site of Wadsworth Glass Company. The variety store is now the core of a larger structure, which houses the Richmond Elks Lodge, #1251.



### August 8, 1956: Sheldon School District Starts Construction of New Modern Building



Grading on the site of the new Hillview School, on Clark Road, was reported to be completed. Actual construction of the new school building would now go forward, with an anticipated opening in early February. That estimate proved to be only a little off; in fact, the new school opened on March 4, 1957.

The new school, built to relieve overcrowding at Sheldon School, contained eight classrooms and one kindergarten room. The site covered 10 acres, and was part of the old Skow Dairy property.

Today, the site is the home of the East Bay Waldorf School.



## Another El Sobrante Stroll

The El Sobrante Historical Society had a small presence at the last Stroll, on September 18. As most of our steering committee members were out of town or otherwise engaged, only your editor, Donald Bastin, was available to show the flag. He did so while also assisting at the SPAWNERS booth, answering questions about local history, handing out literature, and displaying a few artifacts. We also were able to add some folks to our membership list. If we read their e-mail addresses correctly, they should be getting this newsletter.

Despite the heat and lack of a breeze, the Stroll was well attended, and, as usual, everyone

seemed to have a good time.

I especially like the Sikh guys with their twirly things.



The dancing horses are always a treat.

I love the old cars. This year my favorite was this magnificent 1932 Packard Convertible.



The El Sobrante Stroll is a unique event, and perfectly showcases the down-home, friendly feel of our town.

*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](http://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 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: [www.eshist.org](http://www.eshist.org)  
Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to: [ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM)