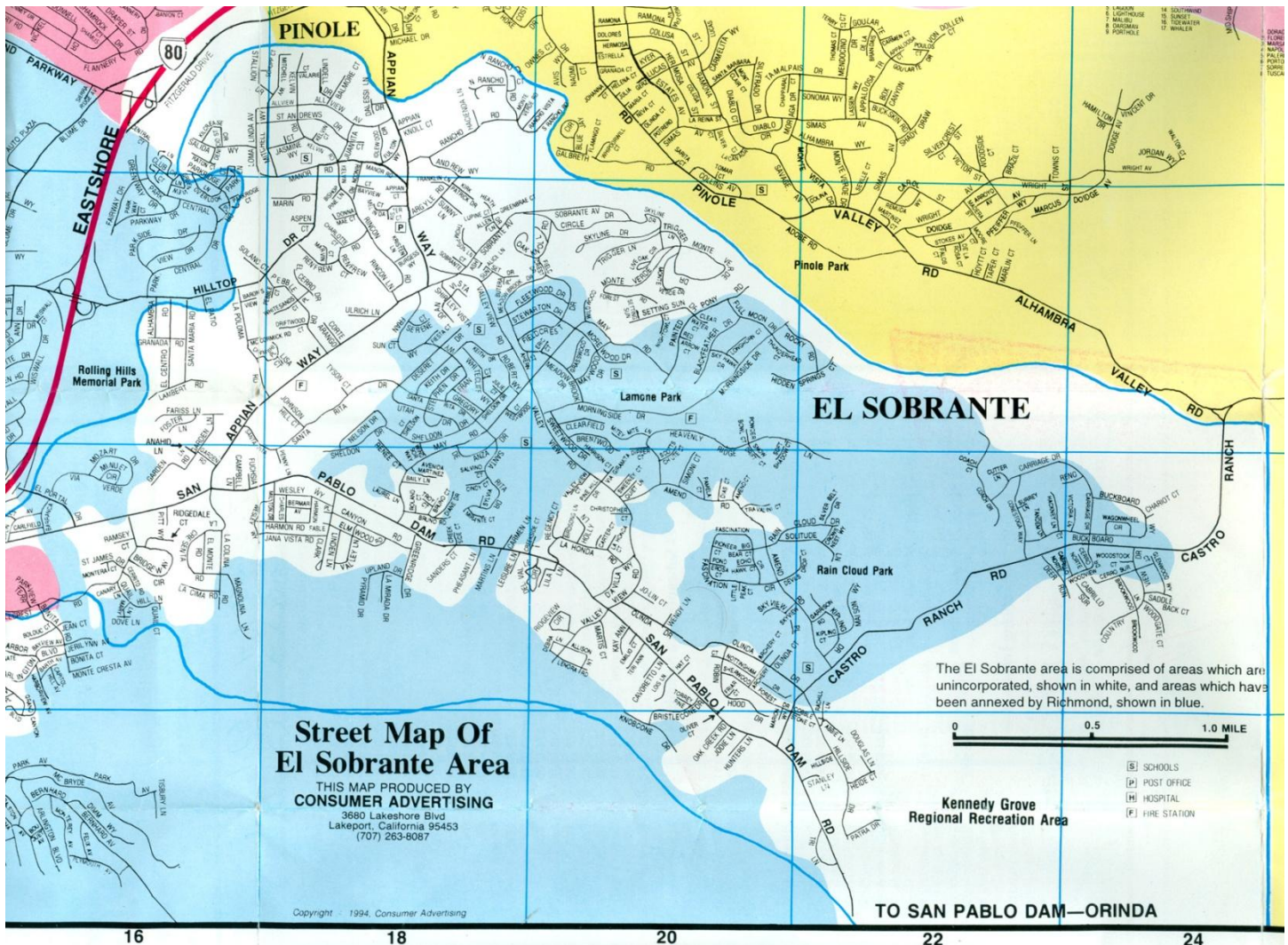


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# THE LEFTOVERS

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## Just what is the community of El Sobrante?

Donald Bastin

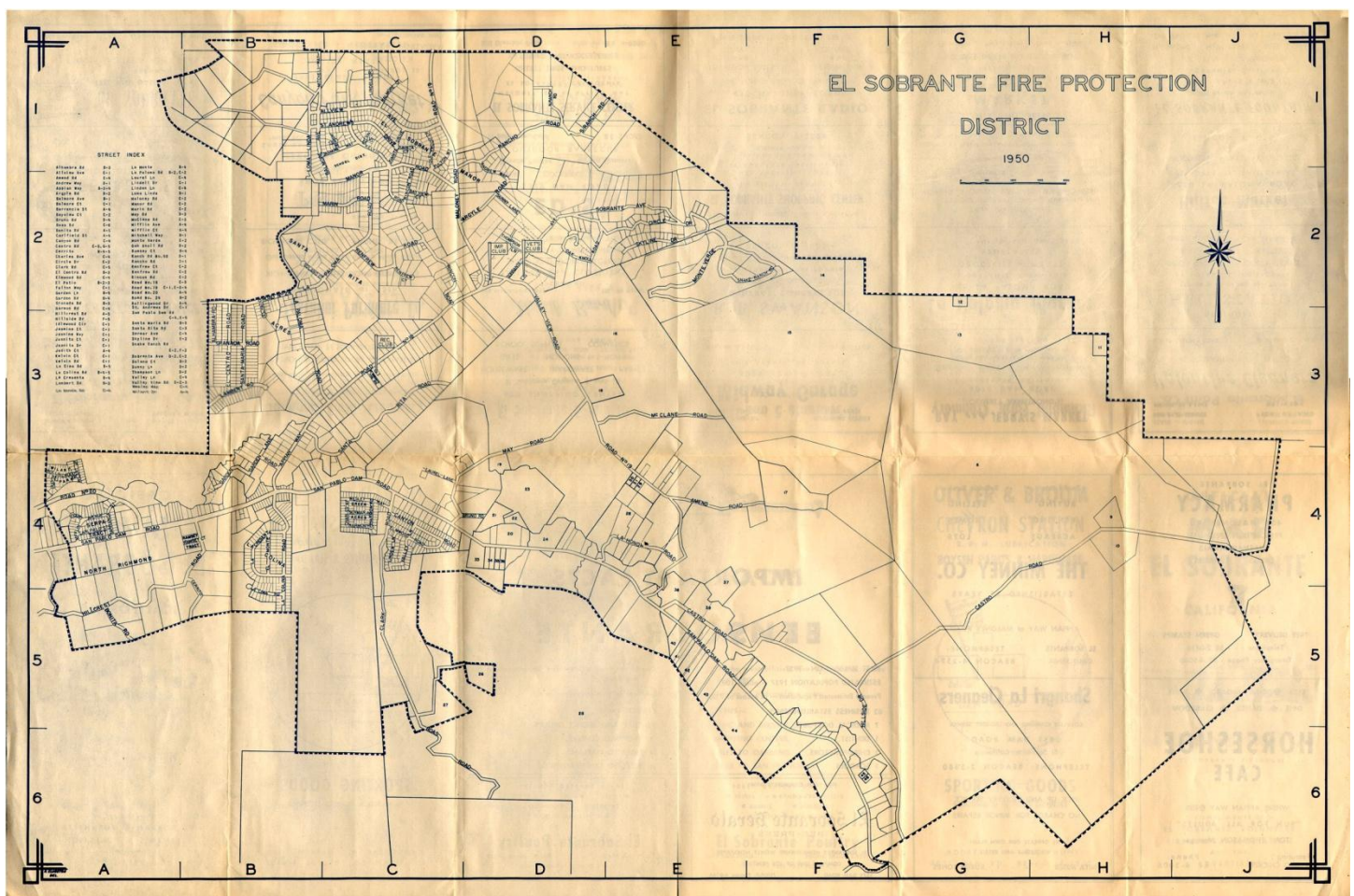
There seems to be a lot of confusion about just what constitutes the community of El Sobrante. Many residents seem to think that the community is limited to the unincorporated area solely within the County. Indeed, that view is fully justified by the township sign which greets motorists on the San Pablo Dam Road, as they enter the downtown area heading east. According to the sign, the population of El Sobrante is around 12,000 individuals. That represents, in fact, a rough count of the people in the unincorporated area of El Sobrante. However, this is not an accurate estimate of the total population in our community.



Take a look at the El Sobrante map above, which was issued by the Chamber of Commerce in the late 1990s. In the lower right-hand corner is the following statement:

*The El Sobrante area is comprised of areas which are unincorporated, shown in white, and areas which have been annexed by Richmond, shown in blue.*

From the point of view of the El Sobrante Chamber, there has never been any doubt that our community includes all the areas annexed by Richmond, beginning in the 1950s. This may seem strange, but it is not an unusual situation. Many people think that the community of Point Richmond is a little town all its own, but of course it is not. It lies totally within the city limits of Richmond. But it has its own unique identity, as does our community. In addition, we happen to have a postal zip code, 94803, that is unique to the larger boundaries of our town. In other words, if your address contains this zip code, you are an El Sobrante resident. As to the population? It is around 25000 residents, which is a community of respectable size.

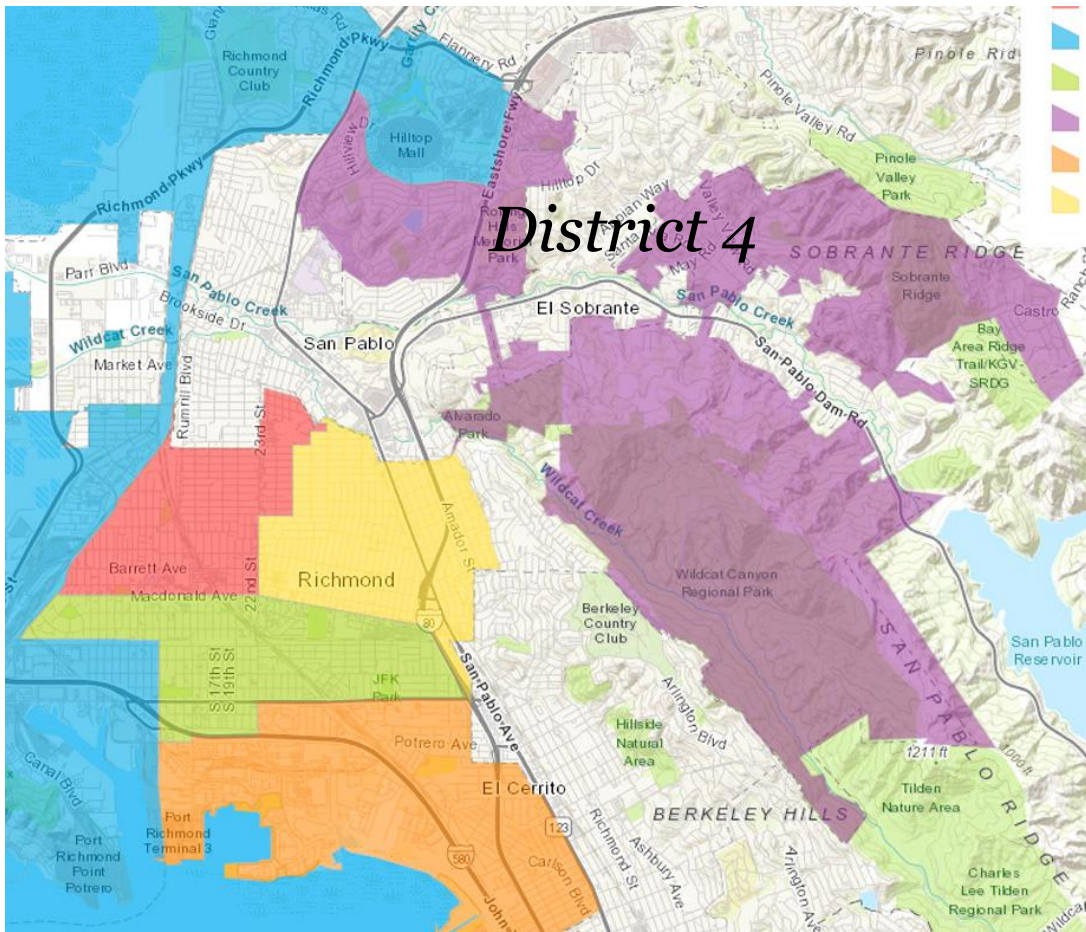


The map above, published in 1950, shows the boundaries of the El Sobrante Fire Protection District, which was created in 1944. At the time of publication, no annexations had yet taken place. This map represented not only a fire protection district, but the actual boundaries of the El Sobrante community as it then existed. For the most part, this map represents the boundaries and extent of the El Sobrante community as it exists today, regardless of the overlapping jurisdictions of the County and the city of Richmond. So welcome to El Sobrante!



# An Historic Change: El Sobrante Residents (some anyway) now have a say in Richmond politics

Donald Bastin



The city of Richmond recently changed its system of electing city council members, moving from an “at large” system to one in which separate districts elect a single council member. In the past, the council members represented the city at large, so even if a council member lived in the Richmond area of El Sobrante, there was no definite expectation that he or she would represent our area. The new system is generally seen as a more democratic approach, as no one

area of the city is able to dominate the city’s politics.

Above is a map of the newly created districts. There are six in all, each with a population of between 19,000 and 20,000 residents. The district that includes the Richmond area of El Sobrante, District 4, is colored in purple; in order to meet the population requirement, the district includes areas outside of the El Sobrante community. Nonetheless, with a population well over half the total, Richmond residents of El Sobrante now have the opportunity to elect a Richmond City Council member who can represent the interests of our community. The election takes place in November of this year and, at present, we appear to have two local citizens competing to represent us: Sohella Bana, and Jamin Pursell. It is up to the Richmond residents among us to educate themselves as to the suitability of these individuals and make the best choice for our community. Find out more about the candidates at the following links: **Soheila Bana:** [www.soheilabana4richmond.org](http://www.soheilabana4richmond.org); **Jamin Pursell:** [www.jaminforrichmond.com](http://www.jaminforrichmond.com).

This is an historic event, and represents a turning point in our relationship to the city of Richmond.

## So please vote this fall!

## Rancho Elementary: Gone But Not Forgotten

*Roxy Miraválle*

El Sobrante had several schools during its growing pains as a city, the first and the oldest being Sheldon. However, the school that most reminisce about and miss the most is Rancho Elementary. In 1954, there were more than 4,000 children in the San Pablo School District, so Rancho school, no doubt helped alleviate overcrowding. Not too much is known about its history, so perhaps I can shed some light, as well as bring back some long-forgotten memories.



*Rancho Elementary School, c. 1956*

Rancho school was constructed between 1949-1950.

Overview: Berkeley architectural firm Dragon, Schmidts and Hardman designed the Rancho Elementary School in 1949 and it was completed in 1950. Marvin E. Collins worked with Dragon, Schmidts and Hardman as the general contractor. The school operated for 30 years before being razed.

**NEW RANCHO GRAMMAR SCHOOL, San Pablo, Contra Costa County: San Pablo Elementary School District, owner; 8 classrooms, kindergarten, office & toilet rooms. ARCHITECT: Dragon, Schmidts & Hardman, Berkeley. Frame & stucco construction. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Marvin E. Collins, El Cerrito.**

Building Notes: A construction notice (left) in the Architect and Engineer of 12/1949, announced: "New Rancho Grammar School, San Pablo, Contra Costa County, San Pablo Elementary School District, owner; 8 classrooms, kindergarten, office & toilet rooms. Architect: Dragon, Schmidts & Hardman, Berkeley. Frame & stucco construction.

General Contractor: Marvin E. Collins, El Cerrito."

An article in the SF Examiner of September 1949 announced that the San Pablo School Board was opening bids for the construction of a new school, Rancho Elementary, to be built at Dam Road and Road 20 (El Portal). The article also mentioned the cost to be \$150,000 with eight classrooms, a kindergarten and administration offices.

However, when the building was completed, residents were subject to an annoyance coming from the new school. The Contra Costa Gazette reported in an article on Monday, September 11, 1950, that over



the weekend "Handsome School Keeps Residents Up" through a constant clattering of the newly installed bell-alarm system. The alarm had been ringing at a quarter of the hour for three minutes of each day since the previous Friday, including Saturday and Sunday. Although neighbors attempted to call teachers of the school, and even members of the San Pablo School District, no one could be reached because it was a Labor Day weekend. Luckily, the situation was expected to be relieved as school was to start that Monday for the first time.

In 1953, bids went out for construction of a \$236,100 addition to the school, contingent on the approval of the State Department of Finance. The contract was awarded to Marvin E. Collins and called for construction of five new classrooms, a kindergarten room and a multi-purpose room. It was estimated the new rooms would be available for the 1953 fall semester.

According to an Oakland Tribune article, one of the major events for April 1955, was the track meet held at the school athletic field sponsored by the Rancho Athletic Club in cooperation with San Pablo's Recreation Dept. More than 160 contestants from 12 schools in the surrounding communities participated in the event. It mentions Erma Jean Gipson as Rancho Athletic Club's star, winning the 50, the broad and high jumps and jumps in the 14-15 age class. Other Rancho Athletic Club members participating were Bob Savage, Jesse Smith and Sandra Davis.

Unfortunately, by the 1980s the school was targeted for closure. A 1982 article in the Berkeley Gazette reported PTA President Norma Jolly said, "the fact that Rollingwood children must cross freeway ramps to get to Rancho school" was given as a reason for the school being on the closure list. . . "We're concerned about safety, too but (if Rancho is closed) the children will have to walk twice as far." Rancho Elementary closed after the 1982-1983 school year "as an economy movement in light of decreased enrollment."

The property was rezoned from a single-family residential to a general commercial zone in 1985.

## ***School may be turned to shops***

**RICHMOND —** A businessman who bought the closed Rancho elementary school wants to convert it to a shopping center.

Nubert "Babe" Dias submitted a proposal to the city yesterday to create stores, offices and at least one restaurant in Rancho's six buildings on El Portal Drive, just north of San Pablo Dam Road.

Dias said he envisions 28,974 square feet of leasable space and 119 parking stalls in the first phase of the project and an additional 12,000 square

feet of leasable space and 163 parking stalls in the second phase.

Dias needs approval from the city to rezone the site from elementary school to commercial use.

He bought the 6.7-acre site in October from the Richmond Unified School District for \$1,440,000, outbidding the Mechanics Bank and another business interests. The school district closed Rancho and several other elementary schools after the 1982-83 school year as an economy move and because of declining enrollment.

The January 1985 Oakland Tribune article (left) reported Al Dias, a local businessman (and future County Supervisor) purchased the school property for \$1.4 million. His plan was to turn the property into a shopping center.

The February 1985 Oakland Tribune article (right) also mentions that Mr. Dias planned a shopping center for the property to be known as "El Portal 80."

After Rancho school was torn down, in its place, Creek View, a large apartment complex, was built at 3535 El Portal Drive.

## ***West County projects are keeping him young***

**By Ed Levitt  
The Tribune**

**SAN PABLO —** It came as a shock to his wife June when Al Dias came home one day and announced, "I just bought a school."

He wasn't kidding, either.

It happened when Dias, along with his brother, Babe, got word that the Richmond Unified School District had decided to sell Rancho Elementary School. "They put it up for bids," Al Dias says. "We offered the highest amount."

The price was around \$2.5 million.

But what does one do with an old school?

"We're going to convert it into a shopping center," Dias says.

He plans to call it, "El Portal 80."

Construction on the property, located at the corner of San Pablo Dam Road and El Portal Drive, will start this summer.

It's just another chapter in Al Dias' ever-expanding success story.

## New Acquisition: GE “Monitor Top” Refrigerator, c. 1927

Editor

As many of you know, the Banducci family recently sold off their property at the corner of the San Pablo Dam Road and Valley View. The property includes the old tavern, the gas station, and the little mall. As a result, your historical society has received many unique items as donations, such as an



antique wheeled fire extinguisher and a 1942 bar tab, which have been covered in recent issues of the *Leftovers*. Included in this collection of artifacts is a GE “Monitor Top” refrigerator, which has just recently been included in our display at our History Center.

The name “Monitor Top” apparently came about because of the resemblance of the cooling coil unit, on top of the fridge, to the turret of the Civil War ironclad warship *Monitor*. In any case, this device was an instant hit and has been described as the first “affordable” refrigerator in the country, if not the world. Introduced in 1927, it was manufactured, with mainly cosmetic changes, until 1936. Thousands were made, and so robust was the design that many are still in use.

When first introduced, the price may have been as high as \$500 (though sources differ on this point), which, while not at all cheap, was still half the cost of prior machines, which could cost more than \$1000. However, the price quickly dropped to below \$300, or about half the cost of a new Model A Ford. Through the 1930s the price continued to drop as manufacturing numbers increased and the design was improved. By the end of the decade of the 1930s, the old ice box was rapidly disappearing as was the job of the ice man.

We don’t know a lot about the history of our particular machine. John Banducci, son of John Banducci, who was the brother of Ed Banducci, jr, could not tell us how the machine came into their possession, but it could have been owned by the original owners of the Banducci property, Ed and Teresa Banducci. They could have brought the machine with them when the property was purchased in 1938, used for awhile, and then retired it to storage after a newer (and larger) refrigerator was purchased. So it sat for years, if not decades, until it was donated to the historical society.

Our machine is in pretty good shape, and all the parts seem to be there. It is possible that it could run if we plugged it in, but that has not been attempted, and will not be until inspected by someone knowledgeable about these things. The coolant may have leaked away years ago, but there is a chance that it is still charged; everything about this unit is extremely robust and durable (and heavy). They really don't make them like they used to.



*GE Manual, covering operation and maintenance of DR (Domestic Refrigeration) units from 1927 to 1932*

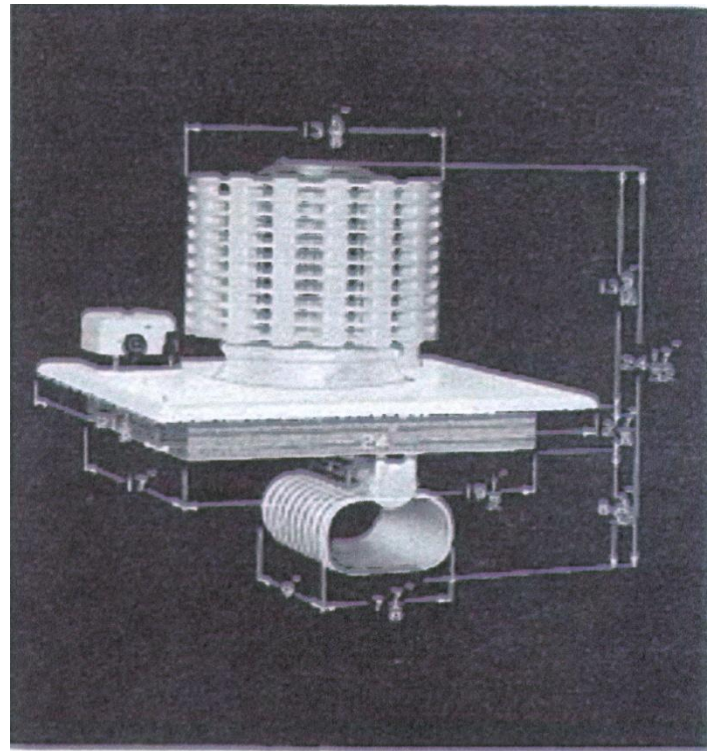


Fig. 13 DR-1-A DR-1-118 DR-1-616

our unit as a very early one, perhaps dating to 1927. While a serial number is legible, this has not been helpful in dating the unit, so we have focused on the appearance and dimensions of the various components. From the information gleaned from the product manual above, we have been able to narrow down the possibilities to the model DR-1-A, whose operating components are shown above, right. These components are those of one of the very earliest models and by comparing the dimensions to those of our unit, we feel confident that our machine was one of the first off the assembly line, and probably dates to 1927 or 1928 at the latest.

It is interesting to note that all of the working components of this refrigerator are attached to the top of the machine, which fits snugly into the refrigerator body without the aid of screws or bolts (which we learned to our surprise when, moving the unit on its side, the entire top came off). The big top piece is the compressor, surrounded by condenser coils. Hanging underneath is the evaporator unit, which is basically where the cold comes from, and in which frozen food is placed and ice is made. The refrigerant used was sulfur dioxide, which was replaced by Freon in the 1940s. Sulfur dioxide is still in use today as a food and wine preservative, and in the production of sulfuric acid.

*So drop by any Saturday and see our new display!*



## Upcoming Event



### **The Stroll is back!**

Join us at our booth, next to **SPAWNERS** (San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society) and the **El Sobrante GREEN TEAM**



**Date:** Sunday, September 18, 2022

*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 [elsobranthehistoricalsociety.com](http://elsobranthehistoricalsociety.com).*

Visit us on **Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ElSobranteHistoricalSociety/>

### **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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