ESHS

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THE LEFTOVERS

Issue #60 Fall 2026

InMemoriam: Steven James, 1948 – 2026

Donald Bastin



It is with sadness and regret that we report the passing of our founding member and society treasurer, Steven James. Steve was much more than our treasurer: he loved history, and as a lifetime resident of El Sobrante, he had an intimate knowledge of our town and its unique culture. He shared that knowledge freely and contributed much to our knowledge of our town and to an understanding of the artifacts and documents that make up our collection and exhibits. He will be missed.

In this issue, we attempt to show something of Steve's life here in El Sobrante, which, we hope, will illuminate not only his history, but the history of the community as it was and, in some ways, still is.



In 1953, at the age of five years , Steve and his family moved from San Pablo to an older development in El Sobrante, called El Sobrante Manor. The family lived on Idlewood Circle, just off Manor Road. The home was close to El Sobrante Elementary School #1, which he attended. In the picture at left, Steve was just seven years old, so would have been in the 2nd grade.



The photo at right is taken from the 1st grade class picture of 1954.

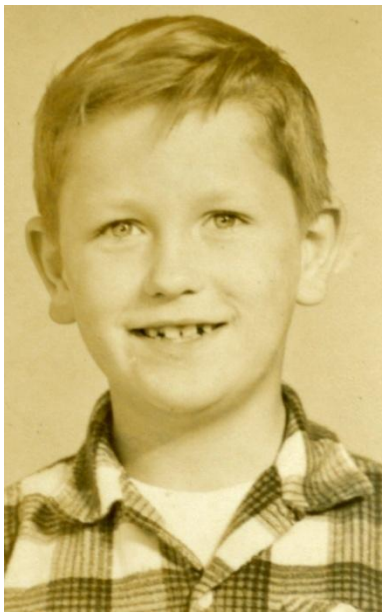
Steve remembered fondly his life in El Sobrante Manor. There was always some kind of ball game going on in the street, and kids ran around freely.



The Manor Market, close to his home, and run by the Chan family, was a favorite place to go for candy. One of the Chan kids, Kenyon, was a favorite buddy of Steve's and he and Steve remained life-long friends.



As Steve grew older, he became active in Scouting, which was an interest he shared with his friend Kenyon Chan. Kenyon's mother, Martha, was very prominent in the local scouting program. Here we see Kenyon and Steve in their Cub Scout group, visiting with local television personality, King Norman, who was popular in the 1950s.

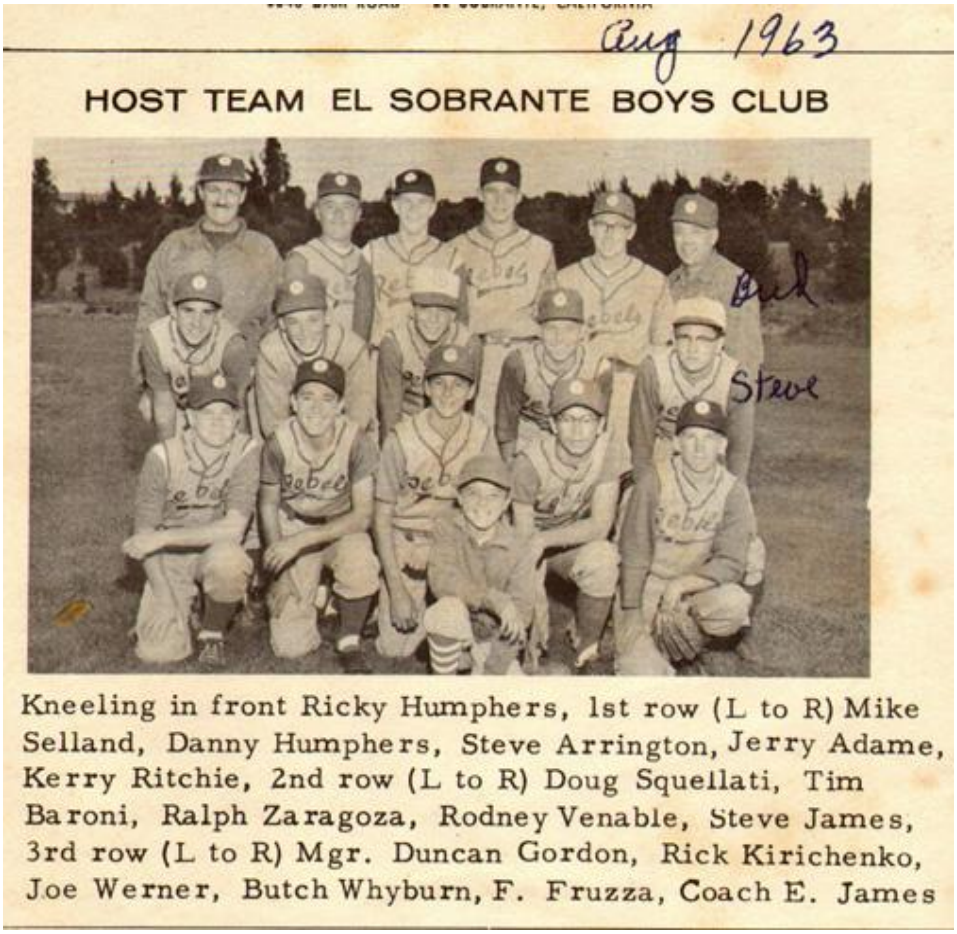


This portrait was taken of Steve when he was in 4th grade at Marie A. Murphy Elementary School, where he had transferred after completing third grade at El Sobrante Elementary #1.

In 1960, after completing 6th grade at Marie Murphy, Steve entered 7th grade at the still-new De Anza High School. At that time, De Anza was still enrolling students from 7th through 12th grade. This is Steve's photo as it appears in the 1961 De Anza yearbook, in the 7th grade graduating class.



Steve has always loved sports, and while at De Anza High School, became increasingly involved with baseball. In the news clipping shown here, Steve is associated with the El Sobrante Boys Club, and is playing in the Pony League. The Pony League is a level of youth baseball, for boys above Little League age. For boys somewhat older, the Colt League offers a more challenging experience, limited to boys 15 and 16 years of age.

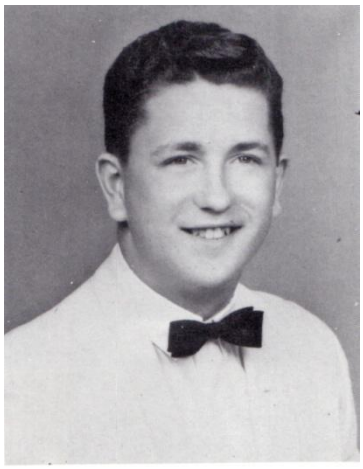

Aug 1963

HOST TEAM EL SOBRANTE BOYS CLUB

Kneeling in front Ricky Humphers, 1st row (L to R) Mike Selland, Danny Humphers, Steve Arrington, Jerry Adame, Kerry Ritchie, 2nd row (L to R) Doug Squellati, Tim Baroni, Ralph Zaragoza, Rodney Venable, Steve James, 3rd row (L to R) Mgr. Duncan Gordon, Rick Kirichenko, Joe Werner, Butch Whyburn, F. Fruzza, Coach E. James

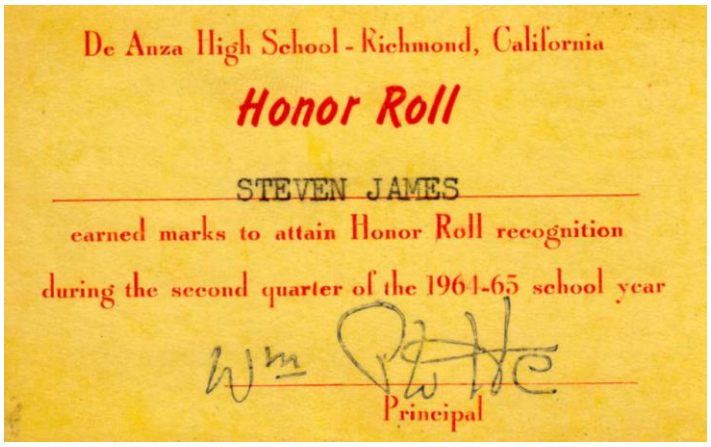

S. James

In this photo, Steve is on the far right, middle row, and is wearing glasses. Steve's father, Ernie James ("Bud") was a team coach. He is just above Steve. The picture at the far right was taken in 1966, when Steve was a member of the De Anza Varsity team.



James Steven

Steve graduated from De Anza High School in 1966 (along with his friend, Kenyon Chan). While he was not necessarily a high-scholastic achiever, he was very proud of the fact that he did attain honor roll status for both the second and third quarters of the 1964-65 school year.


De Anza High School - Richmond, California

Honor Roll

STEVEN JAMES

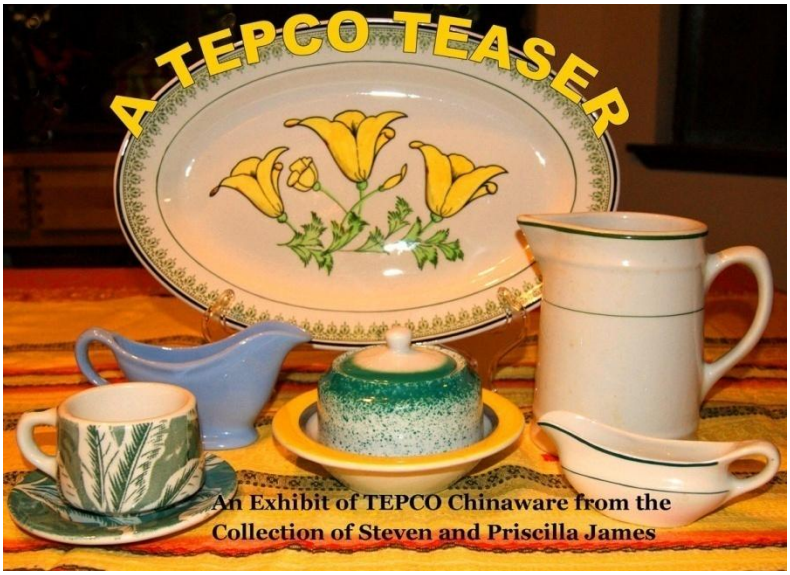
earned marks to attain Honor Roll recognition

during the second quarter of the 1964-65 school year

Principal

After graduation from High School, Steve served a stint in the Army, followed by a return to college, earning a Bachelor's Degree from Golden Gate University. In 1977 he married Priscilla Medina, and in time became the father of two children, Kathlene and Joseph. Not long after his marriage, Steve went to work for Chevron, in Richmond, in the finance department. After 31 years, he retired in 2010. At this time he indulged his passion for history by joining the board of the Contra Costa County Historical Society, and, soon after, helped to establish the fledgling El Sobrante Historical Society. His skills in managing money have helped to maintain the relatively healthy status of our group and the much larger and more complicated County society.

Steve's passion for history, and for historical objects, has always been a key element of his personality. He loved to spend his weekends haunting estate sales. Most often, he saw little to capture his attention, but the chance of finding that rare gem kept him going. Just a few days before his death, Steve, while walking through an estate sale in San Pablo, came across a collection of artifacts connected to one of El Sobrante's long-time business owners, John Koepke, who ran a furniture business in town for years. Mr. Koepke also served as president of both the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and the El Sobrante Rotary Club. Steve was able to secure awards and tokens related to this activity, which would otherwise have been surely trashed. He was proud and tickled.



Steve loved American Indian artifacts, particularly baskets, of which he had a small collection. He also sought out pieces of pottery, made by a local (El Cerrito) firm named TEPCO (Technical Porcelain and China Ware Company) which operated between 1918 and 1966. Pieces of TEPCO pottery are quite collectable, and Steve had accumulated a very respectable collection of pieces made by this, in many ways, unique business. Late in 2018, we managed to put on an exhibit of Steve's collection at the CCCHS site, which proved to be very popular.



Here we see Steve standing alongside just a part of the TEPCO collection display.

TEPCO pieces can still be found locally, in thrift shops, estate sales, or flea market sales. The company was oriented to the supply of table ware to restaurants and other businesses, and even to the U.S. Navy (there are pieces of TEPCO in use aboard the museum ship S.S. Red Oak Victory, in Richmond). The pieces are extremely robust, and often can be found in undamaged condition. Though the shape of each plate, bowl, cup, or pitcher tended to be standard, the designs were unique, as they were made on order by each business.



Steve loved the El Sobrante Stroll, spending all day chatting up visitors and telling stories of his experiences growing up in El Sobrante.
Steve is to my right and Maurice Abraham is on my left.

Steve James was a man of strong passions and fierce loyalties. He loved following professional sports and remained loyal to his chosen teams no matter their performance. He loved this country and he loved the town of El Sobrante, where he spent his life, and, I suspect, never considered living anywhere else. He will be missed.

The following is from Leigh Ann Davis, Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. It has been abridged to avoid repetition

Dear Friends,
It is with a very heavy heart and a profound sense of loss that I share with you that Steve James, long-time Board Member and Treasurer of the Contra Costa County Historical Society, passed away last month.

Anyone who has been associated with the Contra Costa County Historical Society, even tangentially, knows that Steve was the Society's biggest cheerleader, most popular tour guide, and it's extremely talented and forward-thinking Treasurer.

Steve loved history, and more than that, he loved to share his love of history with anyone within earshot. Steve always took the time to provide tours of the CCCHS offices and their archives. He treated everyone he interacted with as if they were an old high school buddy and he related his detailed knowledge of local history with the skill and tone of your favorite uncle.

Steve is survived by his wife Priscilla, their two children, and three grandchildren, and innumerable friends. He will be missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him, and there were many.
Yours,

LeighAnn Davis
Executive Director
Contra Costa County Historical Society

El Sobrante S troll, 2026



It was overcast and cool, and not too windy. Unusual for this time of year. Typically, we have hot weather and afternoon winds that try the stoutest canopy tie-downs. Not this year. Luckily, it seems that the cool air encouraged a robust turnout, as can be seen from this photo. It was like that all day. Everything seemed to click into place. The opening parade was full of energy, well-practiced school bands, beautiful and

beautifully trained horses, and really cute kids.



The Sheldon Elementary School is perhaps the oldest school in town, founded in 1880. The Mt. Pleasant school, founded in 1869, is older, but no longer exists and was situated nearer the town of Orinda, at a site now under water at the eastern end of the San Pablo Reservoir. Go Sharks!



It was a busy and satisfying day for the Historical Society. The visitors to our booth were non-stop, including many long-time residents. Here we see, at left, Walter Wheat, member of the oldest black family in El Sobrante, and to my left, Richard Oliver, owner of Oliver's Hardware, one of the oldest continuously operating businesses in town.

To Richard's left is our newest Historical Society board member, Clementina Diaz. Clementina, who most of you know is my wife, has been in the background of our society since its founding in 2011. "Clem," as she is generally known, enjoyed a long

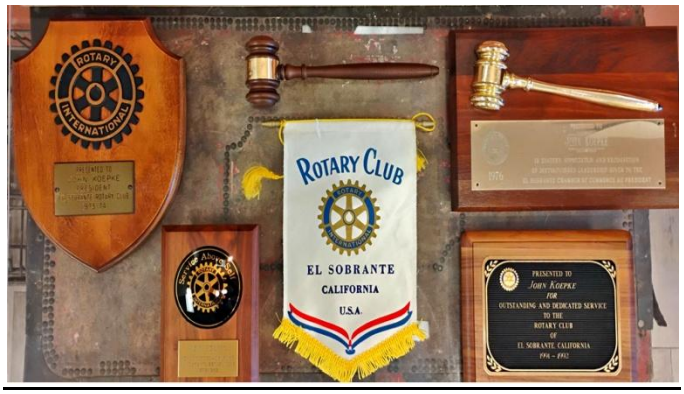
career in garment design and pattern-making, developing skills which she has put to use in the layout of our History Center, and the display of our exhibits and artifacts. Her sense of color, design, and balance have allowed us to create exhibits which are not only instructive but attractive, a rare skill in the world of historical societies of any size. Her addition to our board was long overdue.

Anza Expedition: Part 2

Due to the untimely passing of our friend and treasurer, Steve James, the second part of the colonizing expedition of Juan Bautista De Anza into Upper California will appear in the next edition of The Leftovers.

New Acquisitions:

John Koepke Artifacts



The above items, as mentioned in the article on Steve James, were very recently donated to the El Sobrante Historical Society by Steve, having bought them at a local estate sale. They once belonged to John Koepke, who was for years an important local businessman and served as president of both the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and the El Sobrante Rotary Club. They now are part of the history of our town.

The Leftovers is published quarterly. Articles The 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. To become a member just visit the website, at elsobrantehistoricalsociety.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.

ESHS Board of Directors

Donald Bastin: President; Historical Researcher and writer. Newsletter editor.

Roxanne Miraválle: Vice-President; Historian and Writer; Genealogist.

Lyle Miller: Secretary; Community Liaison; Researcher/writer.

Emil Munkres: Director; Historian.

Sharon Miller: Director; Historian

Clementina Diaz: Director; Curator

Visit us on-line at:
www.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com

Questions? For now, please send to DonaldBastin@comcast.net