

ESHS



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THE LEFTOVERS

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RING IN THE NEW!



75 Years Ago

Donald Bastin

Volunteers Asked For By County Defense Council

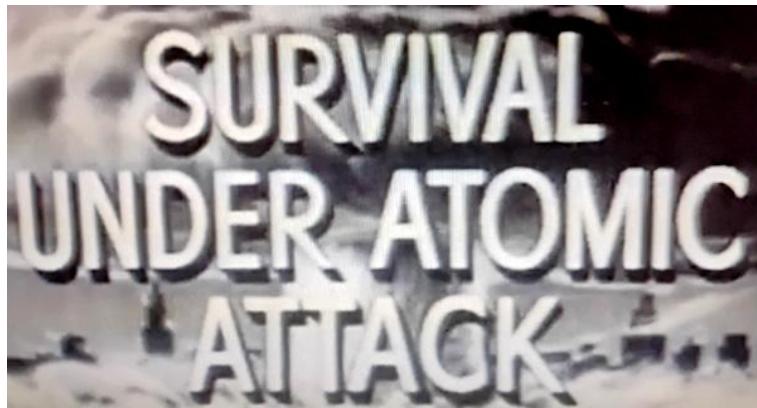
This image appeared in the El Sobrante Herald in the issue dated December 28, 1950. The baby 1951 strides confidently forward, belying any concerns for the near future. But just below this image was an article describing the pressing need for volunteers in a Civil Defense program. Volunteers were needed from the unincorporated areas of the County "... to serve in a block warden setup that will blanket every region of the county outside of the incorporated cities". Duties

would be "similar to those performed during World War II," calling for a chief warden, district wardens, zone wardens, and block wardens. "We need volunteers now," stated Sheriff Long, Chairman of the County organization. Instruction manuals were expected to be received within 3-4 months, and "We must be in complete readiness when the government is prepared to distribute instruction booklets."

The fear, of course, was atomic attack by the Soviet Union. The Second World War had hardly come to an end when the threat of a new, and even more destructive war became apparent. The Cold War, and the attendant threat of nuclear annihilation would dominate global politics for decades to come. El Sobrante, despite being a small, semi-rural community, unfamiliar to most people in the Bay Area, would not be immune to this nagging worry.

SECOND MILLION SURVIVAL BOOKS ARE DISTRIBUTED

In the very next issue of the Herald, this article appeared very prominently on the front page, noting that the second printing of the Civil Defense book, "Survival Under Atomic Attack," had already taken place, and that the books would be shipped "immediately to Sheriffs and Mayors throughout the state." The first printing had gone out the previous October, and a third printing was anticipated "so that there will be one in every household." Major General Walter Robinson, director of Civil Defense, was quoted as saying "The booklet is one that should be read by every family and every individual so all the people will be prepared if attack comes. The state is doing its part in making the books available to the communities. The communities can do no less for their citizens."



Shortly after the book was distributed, a movie, based on the book, was created, showing a "typical" American family following the instructions in the book, and graphically depicting what should be done in case a warning siren was heard.



rather than the lingering effects of radiation. The animal chosen to represent the clear-headed child was, appropriately enough, the turtle. The message being, find a shelter of some kind and get under it.

Most people of a "certain age" remember the movie "Duck and Cover," which was released in 1952, and was aimed at elementary school children. As is typical of such films made in this period, the emphasis was on ensuring survival from the effects of an atomic bomb blast,

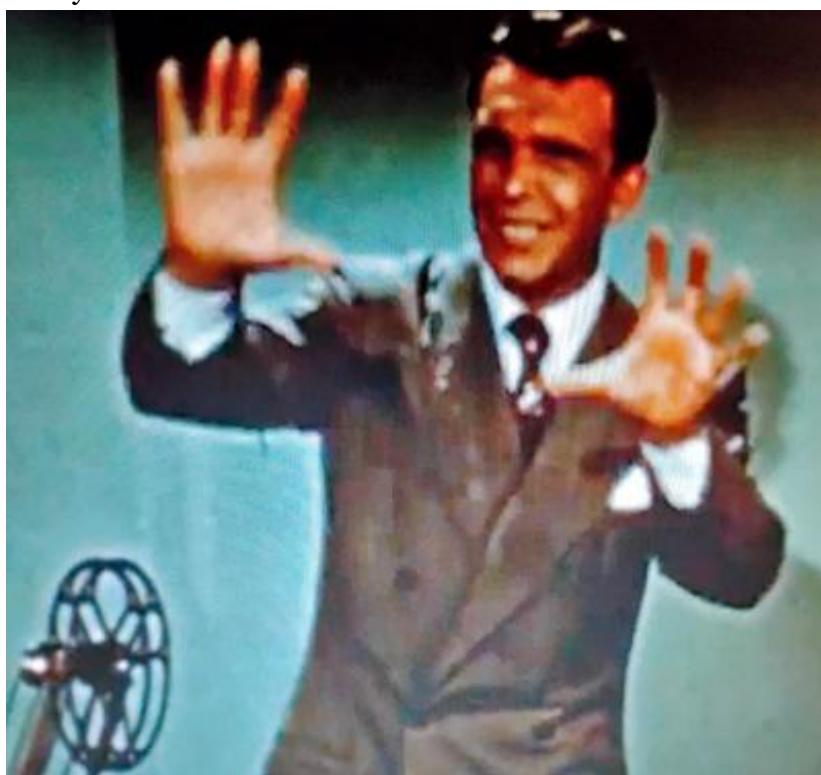


ATOMIC MOVIE AVAILABLE TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS

It was announced today by Dr. George D. Miner, Richmond city superintendent of schools, that in the interests of public information and education the school department has purchased a copy of the film "Pattern for Survival", which it is making available to any clubs, organizations, or other groups which might be interested in showing it to their membership.

This is a screen shot of Chet demonstrating what to do in a situation where no warning is given of attack, and you have 3 seconds to react (the correct response is to cover your eyes and lie down).

This 20-minute film apparently won "national acclaim in 1950 for being the most comprehensive film on atomic bombs and the best ways for a civilian population to survive any such bombings."

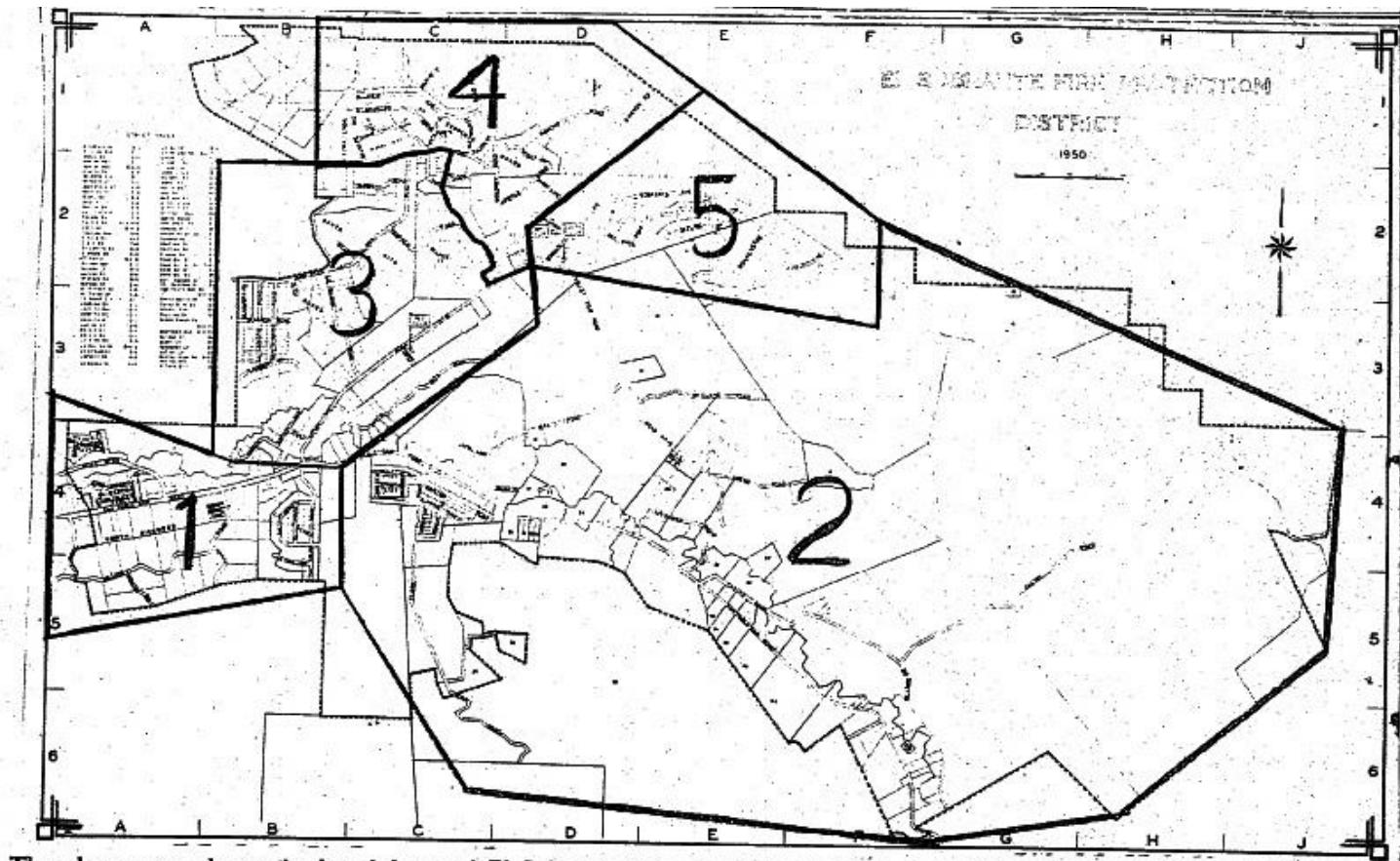


CIVIL DEFENSE NEEDS BLOCK WARDENS NOW

February, 1951, was a busy month in El Sobrante, regarding urgent plans to set up and organize neighborhood zones, overseen by various levels of wardens. Block wardens were the ground-level personnel in this arrangement, and volunteers had yet to come forward in sufficient numbers. "Anyone wishing to volunteer for one of these posts is asked to contact John Kenney at the El Sobrante Pharmacy or Fire Chief Charlie Matteson at the firehouse."

Each community was responsible for raising its own funds to pay for "needed equipment and medical supplies." The Block Warden would be responsible for raising funds in his territory. New sirens were also badly needed. Donated funds would be tax deductible.

It was noted that "A firm foundation for a successful Civilian Defense and Disaster Council is being laid by council member who met at the Improvement Clubhouse Wednesday evening to discuss further plans for its completion."



The above map shows the breakdown of El Sobrante into five zones for the purpose of simplifying the tasks assigned to members of the Civilian Defense and Disaster Council. Each zone will be under the direction of a zone warden in an emergency. John Kenny is the district warden who has charge of the complete area. For information on who your zone warden is, see story in adjoining column.

February, 1951, also saw the posting of this map in the Herald, showing how the entire community was broken up into 5 zones "for emergency purposes." By this time, the zone wardens had already been chosen. The article associated with this map stressed that most block wardens were yet to be appointed, and that "before accepting such posts, prospective wardens must understand that first aid courses are compulsory for them." Block wardens were also expected to "impress upon home owners the need of a good garden hose in case of fire, and the advisability of keeping a shovel and buckets of sand on hand." It was also stressed that, in the event of a "direct blast" in an area out of the El Sobrante community, the fire department would likely be called out of town, and that local citizens should have "necessary equipment" on hand for their own use.

It was noted that, during a recent practice alert, many people could not hear the siren. It was therefore determined that additional sirens, at \$50 apiece, should be purchased. A committee was set up to determine how many new sirens should be purchased. The new firehouse, opened less than 2 years previously, was designated as the "main center of communication."

CIVIL DEFENSE NEEDS STURDY BOMB SHELTERS

In the Herald edition for March 29, 1951, it was noted that there was a need for bomb shelters, and that several businesses had offered their "garages and basements" as potential shelters. It was also suggested that women wardens were also needed in the event of an attack during the day, apparently as it was assumed that most women were not working.

In late 1952 the United States developed and successfully tested the first thermonuclear device (H-bomb). In 1955, the Soviet Union followed suit. As noted earlier, most Civil Defense activity up to this time had focused on protection from bomb blast. Beginning in the mid-late 1950s, it began to sink in that it had become nearly impossible to protect against the blast of the much more powerful H-bomb, and the emphasis shifted to protection from fallout. That change in

thinking was reflected here in El Sobrante. In late October, 1961, the Herald ran this article highlighting the new approach. The Director of the County Disaster Office noted that, "because of the current world situation, requests for basic defense classes are greater than his office can handle." (It should be remembered that international tensions were indeed high at this time, and would lead to the Cuban Missile Crisis in the following year). Courses would be taught under the County's Adult Education Program. Only ten qualified instructors were then available, and that number had to be increased. In addition to basic defense training, additional training would be offered in radiological monitoring and individual and family survival.

SURVIVAL METHODS DEPICTED IN FILM AT LOCAL ROTARY

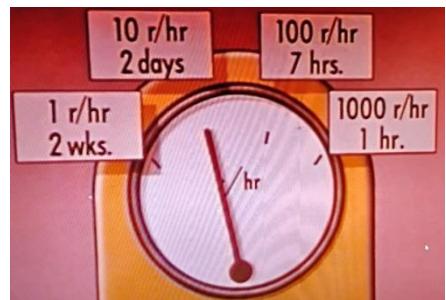
A year later, with the Cuban Missile Crisis approaching a crisis, the El Sobrante Rotary Club recorded a record attendance at one of its meetings, where the movie **"Seconds For Survival"** was shown. The movie focused on the development of the "DEW Line" (Defense early warning system) which was designed to provide early warning of attack, principally by intercontinental missiles.

It was actually during this time that personal fallout shelters became more common, as a properly designed and supplied shelter could allow families the time necessary, in theory, for radiation levels to



return to a "safe" zone. The images shown here were taken from the film **"Radiological Defense,"** produced in late 1961. The image at right displays how radiation levels, following an attack, were expected to decline. Radiation was measured

in units called roentgens, generally measured per hour. So, looking from right to left, we see that the initial reading, measured one hour after a bomb blast, is 1000



roentgens per hour (an exceedingly high level). After 2 weeks, the level had reduced to only 1 roentgen per hour (still high, but manageable).

It was also during this time that schools began to be supplied with detection devices to enable local citizens to determine when it might be feasible to emerge from whatever structure might be serving as a shelter. We have in our collection, on display, radiation detection devices that were retrieved from a local school, by one of our local teachers, and a graduate from De Anza High



School, David Stelle. David was helping to clean out the school and was allowed to acquire these devices, which he was able to use in his classes. Now retired, Dave generously gifted them to our History Center.



Both meters measure radiation activity in roentgens. The unit on the left measures roentgens per hour, while the other unit is much more sensitive, measuring in milliroentgens per hour (one-thousandth of a roentgen). This more sensitive meter is subject to false readings in situations of high levels of radiation; this is the chief reason why two meters were supplied in the kit.

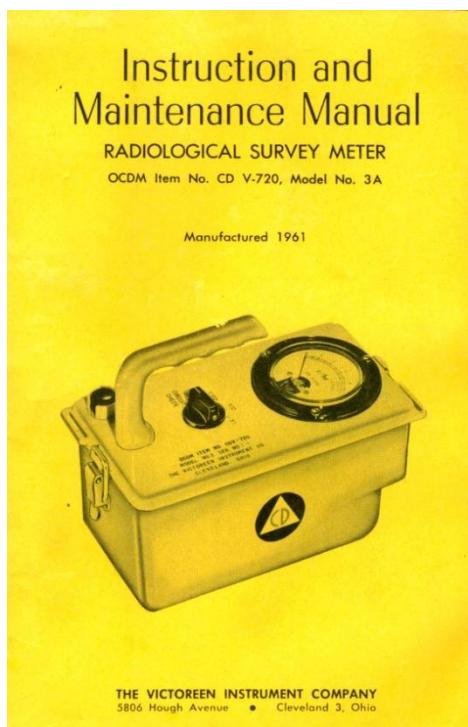
Two of these little "shirtpocket" devices were also included in Dave's donation. They are simple to use and measure low levels of radiation (0-200 mr).



They were apparently meant to be used in a fallout situation, and as a practice tool for high school students.



At left is one of the two instruction manuals which accompanied the meters. Since the meters were intended to be used by inexperienced school employees, teachers, and students, the instructions are fairly simple and straightforward. The meters break down easily in order for the battery to be installed and for maintenance. Operation is equally easy to understand. Though probably never operated, even for practice, after decades in storage, these rugged devices would likely perform their job today.



The Soviet Union is no more. But, if anything, the nuclear threat is even greater than in the past, with unstable regimes threatening to acquire the technology. But dealing with the threat of actual attack has come to seem unworkable and delusional. The challenge now is to forestall the use of nuclear weapons at all cost.

The civil defense activity of the residents of El Sobrante and other communities may today seem to us hard to believe, but it is nonetheless part of our past.

The El Sobrante Historical occasionally receives an email requesting information about someone or something related to our local history. One email came in early December asking about homes built by Louis Mirante of Mirante Brothers Construction. I have to admit; this is one company I had never heard of. So, I too, wanted to know more and went to my online resources to see what I could find.

Mirante Construction was started by Joseph Mirante (born Giuseppe Anthony, 1890-1974). At the time, the Mirante family lived in the El Cerrito area. He had five sons, John, Vincent, Tony, Louis and Frank. After the war (c1945) he established the Mirante Brothers building firm with three sons, Vincent, Tony, and Louis. However, John and Frank entered into a partnership and opened a butcher shop/meat market in El Cerrito. One of the most advertised and promoted developments of Mirante Construction that I found was the El Dorado Gardens in the "Whitecliff" area during 1963-1964. Although the Mirante Brothers built homes in El Sobrante, Joseph first built a Mirante Subdivision in El Cerrito in 1953. When Joseph Mirante retired in 1967, his sons continued the business.

The Independent
Mon, Oct 02, 1967 ·Page 21

An article from Oakland Tribune, 12 Jan 1964, describes it as follows: "El Dorado Gardens, a 67-home executive residential development, is under construction by Mirante Construction Co. in the Whitecliff Park area of Richmond. Price range of the homes will be from \$28,500 to \$33,000. Each home offers from 1,515 to 2,100 square feet of space. Each home also has an appealing view of the El Sobrante Valley. Shopping facilities are nearby in the Whitecliff Shopping Center, Seven Oaks Shopping Center and the community shopping area in El Sobrante. An elementary school is located a few blocks from El Dorado Gardens, and the DeAnza High School is immediately adjacent to the tract."

The Independent
Tue, Apr 26, 1977 ·Page 1

Developer Vincent Mirante plans to build 20 single family homes on an extension of Santa Rita Road and along a new street, Mirante Court.

off of Santa Rita Road, it's part of the development built by Vincent Mirante (the Salvino name is from his mother's side of the family).

If you've ever wondered about Mirante or Salvino Court

400—HOMES FOR SALE
El Sobrante

MIRANTE BROTHERS are again offering custom-built quality homes adjacent to De Anza High School. One home is well under construction and can be seen by appointment. Purchaser has many options for flooring, kitchen tiles, bathroom finishing and fixtures, paintings and wallpapering, fireplace stone, etc. Other homes may be contracted for on the lots available. Contact Elwood Rounds for more details and appointment to see the locations. 235-3529
EYRING REALTY CO. 223-4000

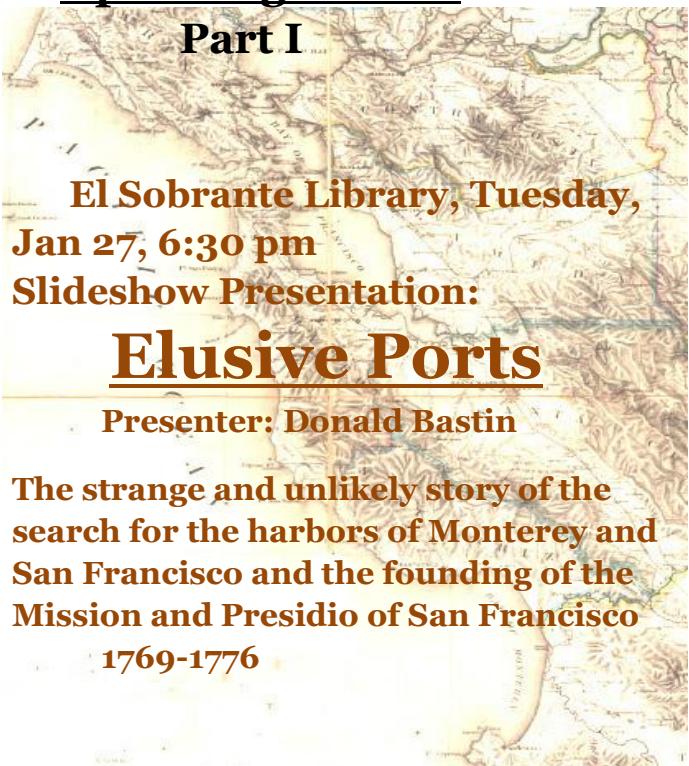


The following are permits issued to Mirante Construction for developments from the early 1960s.

- Aug 1960: Kay Ann Court, El Sobrante; Dec 1960: 5166 and 5180 Valley View Road
- Sep 1962: 73-home tract, El Dorado Gardens (south of De Anza HS at Santa Rita Rd and Cindy Ct)
- May 1964: 40-home subdivision (El Dorado Gardens No. 2) SE of May Road near Bruno Rd and Diane Drive
- Apr 1977: Vincent Mirante plans development of 20 single-family homes on Santa Rita Rd and Mirante Court

Upcoming Events:

Part I

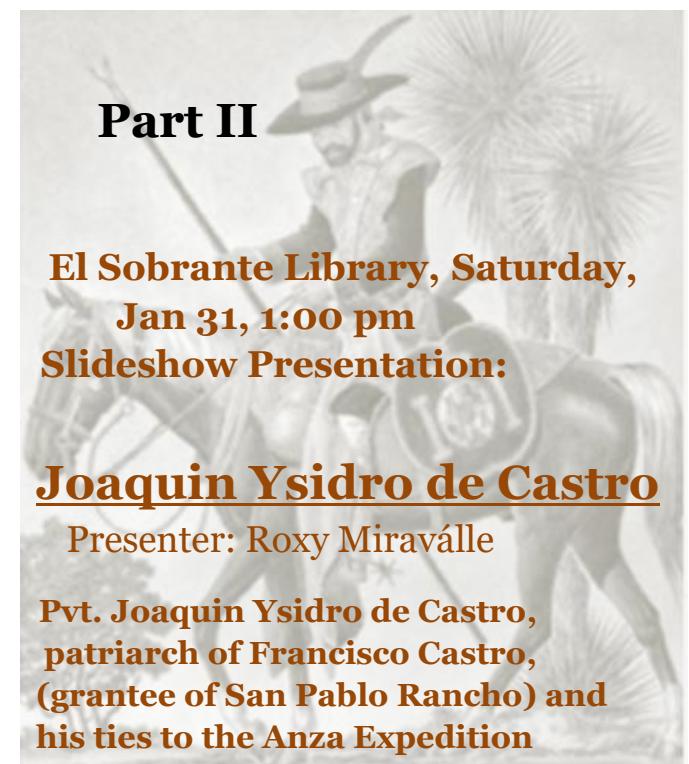


Presenter: Donald Bastin

The strange and unlikely story of the search for the harbors of Monterey and San Francisco and the founding of the Mission and Presidio of San Francisco

1769-1776

Part II



Joaquin Ysidro de Castro

Presenter: Roxy Miravalle

Pvt. Joaquin Ysidro de Castro, patriarch of Francisco Castro, (grantee of San Pablo Rancho) and his ties to the Anza Expedition

These presentations are in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the Juan Bautista de Anza colonizing expedition into Alta California in 1776.

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 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.

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www.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com

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