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# THE LEFTOVERS

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## Library Re-Opens!

*Editor*

**Reconstruction of Nancy Fahden House Complete: Ready for ESHS Move-in.**

*Ribbon-cutting, above, from left: Donald Bastin, Acting President, ESHS; District 1 Supervisor, John Gioia; Deputy County Librarian, Gail McPartland; County Librarian Melinda Cervantes; President, Friends of El Sobrante Library, Martha Booz. Photo courtesy of Contra Costa Library Facebook*

Everything seemed to go just right. The weather cooperated, the crowd was large and enthusiastic, the speeches were appropriate and thankfully not too long; in short, everyone had a good time. The star of the show was the library itself. After more than a year and a half of waiting for its re-opening and all the anxiety over just what the end result would be, it seemed that everyone just couldn't have been more pleased. The main thing that everyone commented on was the light: there was just so





much of it. Not only was the electrical lighting done well, the ceilings had been opened up to the sky, allowing the natural sunlight to brighten the interior, even on a short late autumn day.

Historically speaking, the present version of the library is somewhat reminiscent of the original structure, opened in 1961. As we can see from the photo below, the

old building was open and airy, with large windows open on the Appian Way side, just like today. What is new about the current building is the addition of skylights. The library was expanded in 1975, and over the years the windows were covered over, leaving an interior much more reliant on artificial light.



The El Sobrante Library occupies a special and perhaps unique place in our community. Without a real city government, the library operates as our city hall, the place where important meetings take place and important decisions are made. In the time that the library has been closed, the lack of a community center has been keenly felt; but we have been fortunate to have organizations to step up and fill in the vacancy. In particular, the Elks Club has been of great help, offering its large meeting space for all kinds of meetings and events. Their selfless action is to be commended and not forgotten.

But the re-opening of the library was not the only event that was celebrated on the 23rd of November. The rebuilding of the library provided an opportunity to take advantage of the presence of the contractor to expand the work to include the refurbishing of the old Friends building, now re-named the Nancy Fahden House. Due entirely to the efforts of Supervisor John Gioia, money was found to

complete this work. While the cost was substantial, it would have been much higher had the work been done alone (and would probably not have been done at all). Piggy-backing on the library construction proved to be the golden opportunity that may not have come again. As a result, we now have a new community space which will house both the Friends of the Library and the El Sobrante Historical Society History Center.

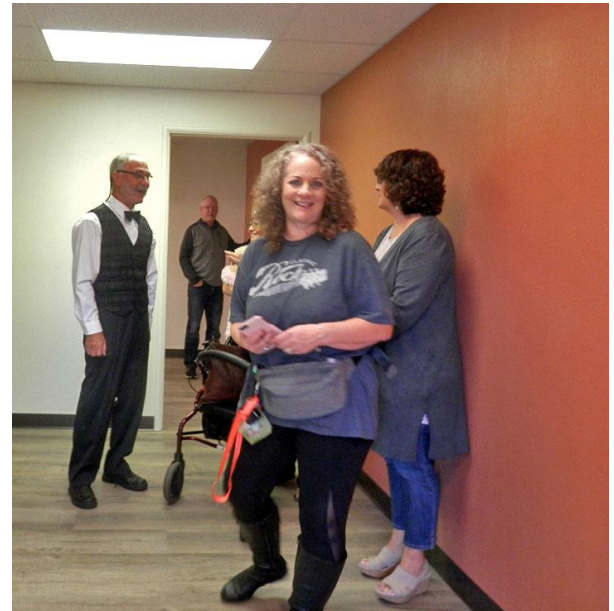
## NANCY FAHDEN HOUSE

Nancy Cardinalli Fahden made her mark on Contra Costa County, when in 1976, she won a seat on the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, becoming the first woman elected to the Board of Supervisors in the County's history. Nancy served on the Board of Supervisors from 1977 to her retirement in 1992, and during some of those years her local District Office was located in the building, formerly known as the Friends of the El Sobrante Library Building.





While the new space was complete and open to view, there was as yet no exhibit to display, save one hastily arranged (Left: Doña Miravalle, at our display table). There was simply no time to do more. The workers were literally finishing up the work only hours before the grand opening; society board members were as ignorant of the final result as everyone else. But we were not displeased. In addition to freshly-painted walls,



new wiring and electrical outlets, lighting and ceiling fixtures, a fully-functioning toilet, and a heating (and AC ) system, we had a brand-new faux-wood floor, identical to the flooring in the new library. This floor was far superior to the linoleum (or carpet squares) that we had been told would be installed.

In the days that followed, we began the work necessary to change empty rooms to a history museum we can all be proud of. Here we see the long hallway that is the first room that one enters from the doorway at the far end. The wall at the left had been painted by the construction crew, and actually is a good choice and works well with our color scheme. Two glass display cases stand in the center of the hallway.



The nature of our collections and the space constraints that we must deal with means that most of our other display cases will be custom built, using wood and other materials, including clear acrylic sheets. As a by-product, this is also a cost-saving approach, though it will take some time. But the actual construction is fairly straight-forward. It is also an approach with which we have some experience.





Here we see one of our exhibits which has been put up in the “Maurice Abraham Room,” which is the room with the large window just off the hallway in the photo above. We painted the wall opposite the window (to complement the “fire-brick red” wall in the hallway) and put up these scientific charts, which were rescued from the old De Anza High School in 2013 (had we waited one more day to scour the old school, these charts would have been gone

forever). In the photo at right, we see one of the charts, hanging open, just as we found it in one of the science rooms at the east end of the school, near the shops. As you can see, the chart that is visible in this photo is the same one at the right in the above display. Each hanging wooden display rack holds 16 charts, all around 7 feet in length. Each chart is actually separated into two distinct charts, so the total number of distinct charts would be 32, if both racks were complete.

However, it appears that, sometime in the past, one chart was torn off, and not replaced. So the actual number of separate and distinct charts is 30. These charts are quite old, and a real addition to our collection, and we are excited to be



able to display them for the first time since their acquisition. They undoubtedly have been in use at De Anza since the school opened in 1955. The drawings themselves are likely much older, possibly dating to the 1920s or 1930s. They are beautiful examples of the kind of artistic and loving detail that was once put into the otherwise cut-and-dry process of teaching science to easily-bored adolescents.

We are hoping to open our new History Center soon, but we want to display our collection in the best possible way, and that takes care and time. So, right now, we are shooting for some time in February. The actual date is a moving target, but as soon as we are ready, we will send out an email blast and invite you all to our grand opening. The day or days of the week that we will be open is also still up in the air, but Saturday look promising, as this is a weekend day, and more folks will not be at work. Also, we would like to coordinate our open times with the library, in order to be available to that customer group, many of whom might have a natural interest in our town’s history. The library’s hours are varied, but open hours on Saturday are 10 am to 5 pm. This would work well for us.

**Stay tuned.**



## Join Us to Celebrate the Installation of the Rancho Line Markers!

Sunday, January 26, 11 am

After months of waiting, the contractor working on the sidewalk construction between Appian Way and May Road has finally installed the pedestals for our interpretive exhibits. These exhibits, as you may recall, show the location of the boundary line between the San Pablo and El Sobrante Ranchos. As a result of research done by our late President, Maurice Abraham, it was determined that the boundary line was not where we thought it was. In fact it turned out to be located several blocks east of downtown El Sobrante, meaning that the entire

downtown is located well within the limits of the San Pablo Rancho! We are indebted to Supervisor John Gioia for encouraging the county public works department to work with the sidewalk contractor in preparing the sites for the exhibits. Another example of taking advantage of opportunities that, for a brief moment, allow for good things to happen that might otherwise be impossible.

The photo above shows one of the pedestals, wrapped in plastic, behind the orange cone. This is the north side of the Dam Road. As you can see, a generous platform has been created as a support for the exhibit pedestal, and the pedestrian walkway is in no way impeded.

It was a different story on the south side of the road. As you can see from this photo (both images face east) there is only a very small space available to support the exhibit pedestal. Therefore, the frame at the top (which holds the graphic panel) had to be customized so as not to intrude into the pedestrian walk space. The panel in the top photo (north side) is angled at the usual 45 degree angle, while the south side panel is angled at 60 degrees. It cost more but it had to be done to satisfy code requirements.





For our ceremony, we will be meeting on the south side of the Dam Road. The sidewalk on the north side is constricted by a cinder block wall of considerable length, and if we have a good turnout, we don't want people to be forced into the traffic. So the north side panel will be in place and in view when we unveil the panel on the south side. We gave a moment's thought to unveiling both panels at the same time, but we don't want anyone running back and forth across four lanes of traffic.

We plan to have a little talk, and explain in more detail just what the exhibit is about, and then unveil the graphic panel for all to view. There will be time for questions, of course. Afterwards, for those so inclined, we can meet at our new History Center (just behind the library) and take a little tour of the evolving space. The History Center will not yet be complete, but visitors can get a sense of what the space will become. But it is definitely a work in progress. **Hope to see you there!**

## New Acquisitions:



We are indebted to the El Cerrito Historical Society for the very generous donation of this adobe brick, which was once part of the Victor Castro Adobe in El Cerrito (where the El Cerrito Plaza is today). Construction of the Castro home was begun sometime in the late 1830s and continued well into the 1840s, or perhaps later.

Victor Castro (right) was the son of Francisco Castro, who, in 1823 applied for a grant of land in what is now west



Contra Costa County. This grant, named the San Pablo Rancho, was the site of the first non-native settlement in the East Bay. Next to Victor is a photo of his home, probably taken some time in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By this time the structure had been extensively modified and had a second floor added. However, the lower part of the home retained much of the original construction, with walls of adobe brick. The home



burned down in a fire in 1956, and this brick, as well as many more, were rescued from the rubble.

This brick is as basic and simple as it gets. It is just mud and straw, dried in the sun (not fired). It is quite large and heavy, being roughly 2 feet long by 1 foot wide, and close to 4 inches thick. It weighs about 50 pounds. It probably dates to the period of the construction of the earliest, lower level of the home, sometime between 1839 and 1850. This makes the brick well over 150 years old. This also brings up the question of just who made the brick.

At this early period, many of the workers, and horsemen on the Castro Rancho would have been Native American. And as the Californios (immigrant settlers from Mexico) tended to look down on manual labor, this brick was likely formed in the hands of one of the members of the Ohlone groups that occupied the area between the Carquinez Strait and what is now the Gilroy area. This cannot be known for certain, but it still makes one pause when looking at, and touching, this lump of dried mud.

But it turns out that this brick is not the only remnant of the Castro Adobe that we now possess. A few months after the El Cerrito Historical Society passed along the brick shown in the above photo, the San Pablo Historical Society granted to us, as a long-term loan, not one but two adobe bricks, also from the Victor Castro Adobe! Both are large, but smaller than the ECHS-donated brick, and thus appear to be fragments of bricks that were roughly the dimensions of the original donation. In all other respects, the bricks are very similar in shape and appearance. One of the San Pablo bricks has what appears to be a black scorch mark, possibly as a result of the fire that destroyed the Castro home in 1956 (see photo at right, above). We are now in the process of



creating display cases to show off our new acquisitions as part of the “Rancho” period in El

Sobranate and West County history. As far as the connection between Victor Castro and El Sobranate is concerned, it should be remembered that Victor was the father of Patricio Castro, who settled in El Sobranate, along what is now Castro Ranch Road, in 1868. His descendents lived on the ranch until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Our very heartfelt thanks goes out to the El Cerrito Historical Society and to the San Pablo Historical and Museum Society!**

### **Do You Remember Rancho Lumber?**

This little cardboard can with a metal lid was once purchased at the Rancho Lumber Company, 3510 San Pablo Dam Road. Incredibly, it still has its price sticker on the lid. The site was previously a trailer court, in the early 1940s, and until the 1950s the Thunder Bird Breakfast Club (formerly Trocadero Club). Around the late 1950s became Rancho Lumber and changed to Valley Lumber in the late 1960s. Thanks to Emil Munkres for this unusual and rare donation and to Roxy Miravalle for the Rancho Lumber history.





## Mandarin Restaurant Memories

The Mandarin (Chinese) Restaurant was



located at  
5047  
Appian  
Way  
(current  
home of  
the very  
popular

Pho Saigon 2 Vietnamese restaurant). We also have a menu from Mandarin Restaurant. We have two cups and two saucers, which, according to the donor, Dwayne Bressemer, probably date to the 1990s. The restaurant closed in 2014.

## Richmond Farm Creamery Milk Bottles

The quart  
and pint  
milk  
bottles  
(the 2  
larger  
ones) in  
this case  
were  
recently  
donated



to us by Glenna Nash, sister of Maurice Abraham. They are in perfect condition, and even have intact cardboard lids! The Richmond Farm Creamery was in operation in El Sobrante for 56 years (most of this time along Clark Road) and closed in 1955. Richmond Farm Creamery bottles are extremely hard to find and we are very indebted to Glenna Nash for this wonderful donation!

## Wonderful New Donation!

Just yesterday, January 16, we received what is one of the coolest donations we have ever received. Donated by JoAnn Ditton, it is truly a treasure, and will be featured in our lead article in our Spring edition of the *Leftovers*.

*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](http://elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com).*

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 Board of Directors

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

The position of Vice-President is currently unfilled.

**Steve James:** Treasurer; Membership and Communication Secretary; Researcher/writer.

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

**Roxanne Miravalle:** Director; Historian and Writer; Genealogist

**Emil Munkres:** Director; Historian.

Visit us on-line at:

[www.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com](http://www.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com)

Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:

[ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM)