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# THE LEFTOVERS

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## We Are Opening!



**After over a year and a half of waiting and planning, the El Sobrante Historical Society History Center is preparing to open to the public!**

With the steadily declining numbers of new Covid cases in the County, we have moved into the less restrictive “Orange” tier, and, with any luck, may soon move into the even more open “Yellow” tier. Our local library plans to open its doors to the public (with restrictions, of course) on April 26. If all things go in a positive direction, we will open **Saturday, May 8.** The show starts at 10 am,

and we will not close until 4 pm. Please drop by and say hello and look around if you can. But don't worry if you can't make it that day—we plan to open each Saturday following our debut in May, assuming that the pandemic does not take a turn for the worse. Please keep in mind that our space is small, and even in the best of times we can only allow a limited number of people in our center at a time. And masks and social distancing will still be the order of the day. The Friends of the library will be there too, hosting a book sale, so while you are waiting you can pick up a bag of books for only \$5! And we will have local histories on sale outside as well.

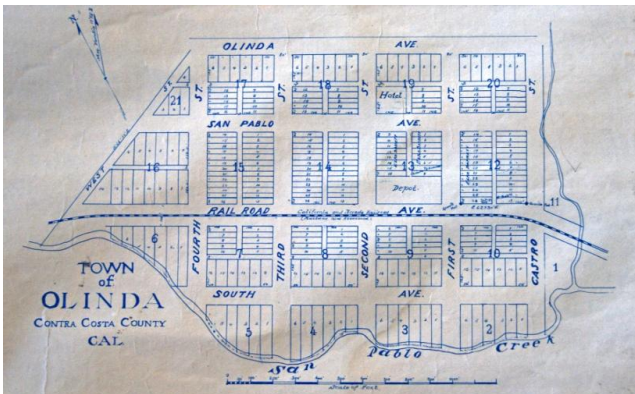


On this page are just some of the exhibits that you will see in our History Center:



**Native American Display:** We have a collection of stone objects recovered over 70 years ago, here in El Sobrante, along San Pablo Creek. Here we see a grouping of objects referred to as “charm stones,” which are thought to have religious or spiritual meaning (but no one really knows).

**The Rancho Period:** We have three adobe bricks which are known to have been part of the Victor Castro Adobe, constructed in the late 1830s. While the home was enlarged over the decades, these bricks likely date from this very early time, and may well have been formed by the hands of Native American workers on the Rancho.



This plan of the town of Olinda (where Olinda school is located today) is part of a 1909 El Sobrante Rancho map (the last in a series) which shows what the area looked like in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and includes the route of the old C&N railroad, San Pablo Creek, and the names of the landowners as of that date (many of whose names

are now part of our heritage).



We also have, on long-term loan, this wonderful matrimonial trunk, probably dating to the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century and which was likely made in Mexico or Mexican California.



### **Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries:**

At the left is a photo of the Skow family, dated 1912. Soren Skow, an immigrant from Denmark, set up a dairy operation in the late 1890s which lasted until 1955. It was during this time that the community of El Sobrante came into being. While we have images, artifacts, and documents from this period, it was not until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century that El Sobrante began to grow, especially during World War II.





## The 1950s and Beyond:

In 1949, El Sobrante opened a brand new fire station on Appian Way, which soon had its own fire dog, a Dalmation named Duke. At the left is the actual badge that Duke was assigned. It is the only badge that we have for the El Sobrante Fire Department, and it is proudly on display in our Center, along with other fire department memorabilia.

The old De Anza High School rates an entire wall in

our Center. The school served the community from 1955 until 2013, and we are proud of the many artifacts, photos, and documents that we have in our archive.



This is just a taste of what we have on display in our History Center. We look forward to seeing you there in the near future.



## The Irish of Rancho El Sobrante



~Roxy Miravalle

*(This story is a modified version of a Facebook posting made by Roxy in mid-March-Editor)*

With the coming of Saint Patrick's Day, we take a look back at some of the Irish pioneers that settled in the area. Among the Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German and other immigrant families that settled in the area, here are just a few of the prominent landowners of Irish descent that settled in



Rancho El Sobrante as shown on a [Britton & Rey map dated 1894](#), as well as in the 1900 United States Federal Census. Mary Lynch (wid. of John), Farmer; Charles Clark, Farmer; James Fox, Farmer; Mrs. Mary Curran (wid. of Patrick, Farmer); J. M. Canfield, Laborer; Mrs. Fallon (wid. of Patrick, Farmer); Daniel Clancy, Farmer; Henry O'Neill, Farmer; Mrs. Isabelle O'Neill (Castro), (wid. of John, Farmer); William J. McClane, Farmer; James McPeak, Farmer; John and James Mulholland, Farmers; Richard E. Rowland, Dairy Farmer; Mrs. Penelope Scanlon (wid. of Michael), Farmer, Stock Raising.

Although his name is not listed on the map, Thomas Maloney (at left, with his wife) who came to the U.S. via Canada is listed in the 1900 census. In the late 1800s, he settled in the El Sobrante area (near the present-day Post Office) and built a home. His large ranch extended over the hills down to San Pablo Avenue (old



Highway 40). Until 1953, the section of Appian Way from Valley View (known as the "Y") to San Pablo Avenue was originally known as Maloney Road. The current owners of the Maloney ranch made extensive changes to the structure over the years, but the home retains the "bones" of the original. Maloney Ranch today: 543 Appian Way, El Sobrante.

Another El Sobrante pioneer was Daniel Clancy [1822-1883] who purchased property adjacent to Castro's in the mid 1800s. The California & Nevada Railroad which ran through Rancho Sobrante, would frequently stop at the Laurel Glen Resort on

*Laurel Glen, 1890s*

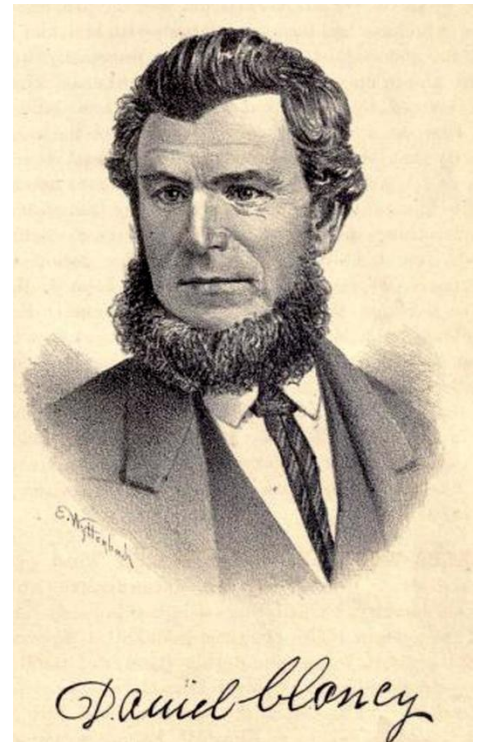


property belonging to Clancy, where the current Kennedy Grove Park is located.

Just short of Laurel Glen, the railroad

crew would build another bridge over a little stream called "Clancy's Creek," present-day

Kennedy Creek. It is a bit of a coincidence that both names for the creek are Irish.



John Francis O'Neill, Sr., was born in Ireland in 1842 and was a son of John Francis O'Neill, who brought his family to California in 1845. The family came to Contra Costa County and took up farming on the Sobrante grant of 18,000 acres owned by Victor Castro and his brother, Jose Castro. Mrs. I. O'Neill is Isabella Castro, the daughter of Victor and Louisa (Martinez) Castro who married John Francis O'Neill. Point Isabella (now Point Isabelle) was named after Mrs. O'Neill, which was where her father shipped his cattle.

At the left is part of a Sheldon School class photo, c. 1898, showing descendants of John O'Neill. At the left is Lillie O'Neill, in the middle is Victoria Castro, while on the right is Lillie's sister, Annie.

The Castro family included many members of Irish extraction, as can be seen in the following photo.





This photograph was probably taken around 1915 and shows the Castro family at their ranch. All are identified and Irish names abound: 1. Herb Brennan, 2. Patricio Castro (son of Victor), 3. Victoria Castro Brennan (a younger Victoria is seen in the previous photo), 4. Percy Castro (Patricio's son), 5. Harriett Fitzgerald Wahlender, 6. Eda O'Neill Blume, 7. T.J. Fitzgerald, 8. Jovita Fitzgerald, 9. Jovita Castro Fitzgerald, 10. Rose Cunningham Castro (Percy's wife). Not visible is Percy Castro Jr., who is in the buggy in front of Jovita Castro.

The Irish are an important part of American history, and form an important part of the history of El Sobrante.



### New Acquisition (sort of):

This may look like just a milk bottle, but it is a very special addition to our collection. The bottle is on loan from the Addiego family, who now live at the old Castro Ranch site just off Castro Ranch Road.

Pictures of the El Sobrante Dairy were donated to us a couple of years ago, (which we covered in our Summer 2018 newsletter) and we were able to place the business on Argyle Road, just off Appian Way, opposite the present-day post office. All the photos were dated 1939. As far as we know, this little dairy was the first business to use the name El Sobrante as part of its business name.





*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**:

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According to Society member and local historian Roxy Miravalle, the residents of the address listed for the dairy were Grover and Stella Dean. Stella may have been the actual operator of the business, as she is listed, in the 1940 census, as a "farmerette," while her husband has an unrelated occupation. The dairy consisted of one bull and 17 cows. The business is listed for sale in the 1941 edition of the Oakland Tribune. It is unknown whether someone else owned the dairy prior to or after the Deans.

This bottle is unusual for several reasons: First of all, this small dairy was only in business for a short time, and the likelihood of finding one of their bottles is small. The bottle is in excellent condition, with no nicks or cracks, only a faint opaque line about where the milk line would have been. Finally, the name of our community is misspelled (it has an "I" at the end, but only on the bottle, not on the truck). Whether this misspelling was deliberate or just a mistake that was either too costly or unimportant to correct is a mystery.

This unusual and precious (to us) artifact will be on display when we open on Saturday, May 8. Come by and take a look at this and other bits of our unique history.

## 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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