

Published by the El Sobrante Historical Society

THE LEFTOVERS

Issue #45

Winter 2023

70 Years Ago: Recreation District Proposed for El Sobrante *Donald Bastin*

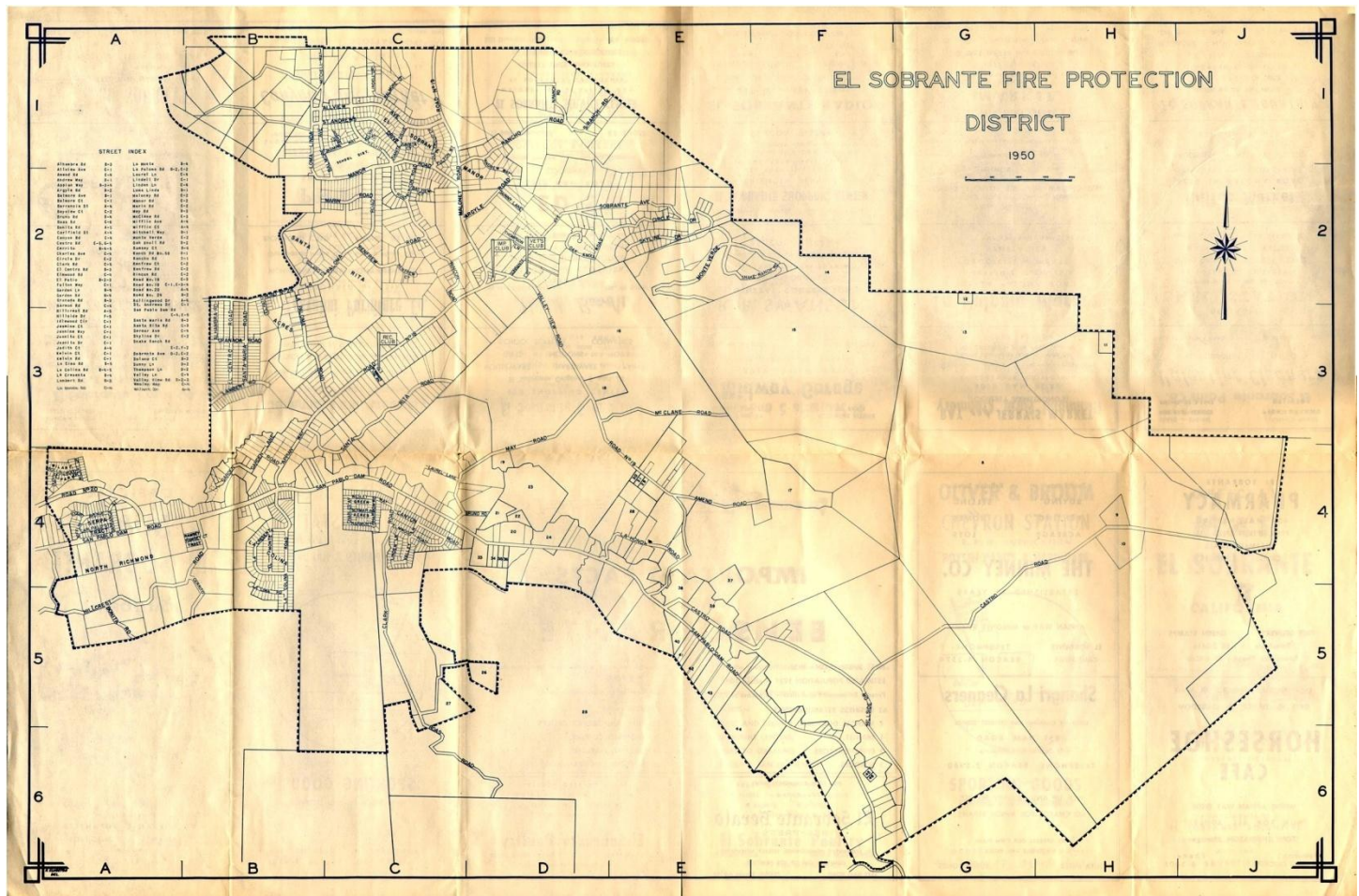
On the first of January, 1953, the El Sobrante Herald featured this article on the proposed creation of a recreation district for our rapidly growing community. Then, as now, the need for park and

recreation facilities was clear. The solution was to create “special district” which would be funded through property taxes. This is the story, as told in our local newspaper, of the fate of that effort.

Cost of the program will be approximately \$6,250 a year according to a revised budget offered by the fact-finding committee.	
Full-time supervisor	\$3600
Athletic equipment	\$500
Insurance	\$100
Operating expenses	\$500
Playground equipment	\$1550
Total	\$6250

The idea of a Parks and Recreation district was generated by local citizens, who submitted petitions to the Board of Supervisors, containing over 700 signatures. As outlined in the El Sobrante Herald, the plan would provide for a “paid program director for El Sobrante schools” and also contained plans for a “large recreation park with facilities to benefit the entire family.” Yearly program costs were estimated to be \$6250 (see left). An elected “council” would be set up to “promote the development

of an all year program of recreation for all ages within the El Sobrante Park, Recreation and Parkway district.” It was estimated that the yearly cost to the homeowner would average \$5, based upon property values at the time. The district would encompass the entire El Sobrante Fire Protection District, which is shown here.



The El Sobrante Fire Protection District was formed in 1944, and this map was published in 1950. So the boundaries of the district would have been essentially the same in 1953, when the Recreation District was considered. And, as can be seen, the boundaries of the old fire district are largely the same as the boundaries, then and now, of the community of El Sobrante, including those parts now within the Richmond city limits. This is not a small park district, and the plan for its creation was visionary and bold; but would it survive?

Before the Board of Supervisors would consider approving the creation of this new district, the level of community support had to be gauged. And it soon became apparent that the plan was not universally popular. At a “public protest” meeting in Martinez on January 6, three “sections” of El Sobrante submitted petitions, containing around 300 signatures, opposing their inclusion in the new district. The protesting “sections” included the Rancho Vista (Serpa) tract, a large area proposed for development along May Road, and a group of six separate households. At a subsequent meeting on January 13, an additional 50 signatures and a petition were submitted from property owners along Appian Way. In light of these mounting protests, a decision on the project, by the Board of Supervisors, was postponed for an additional two weeks. The requests by substantial portions of the community to be excluded from the proposed district was most concerning, and could prove fatal to its final approval. At the heart of the matter was the fact that the district would serve all the residents of the community of El Sobrante, even those residents not contributing to its support. On the one hand, this would lessen the funds available for park construction and maintenance, while at the same time leading to resentment among potential supporters. Finally, there were many who simply felt that other issues were more important (see notice, above-right, appearing in Herald 3/5 and 3/12, ‘53). In spite of the problems created, the board allowed the exclusion of the Rancho Vista housing project (near Rancho School) and the area along May Road where 1500 new homes were planned. The project was submitted to the El Sobrante voters on March 13. Ominously, this was a Friday.

6 Reasons Why!!

VOTE “NO” ON RECREATION

Our Immediate District Needs:

Schools:	Improved Sewer Facilities:
Police Protection:	Lighting Districts:
Sidewalks for Safety:	Roads Repaired:

Which Is More Important . . .

A RECREATION DISTRICT FOR A LIMITED GROUP OR THE SIX REASONS SHOWN ABOVE FOR THE WELFARE OF OUR COMMUNITY.

VOTE “NO” ON RECREATION . . . MARCH 13

This Ad Sponsored by El Sobrante Voters Committee

"Rec" District Defeated At Polls Friday

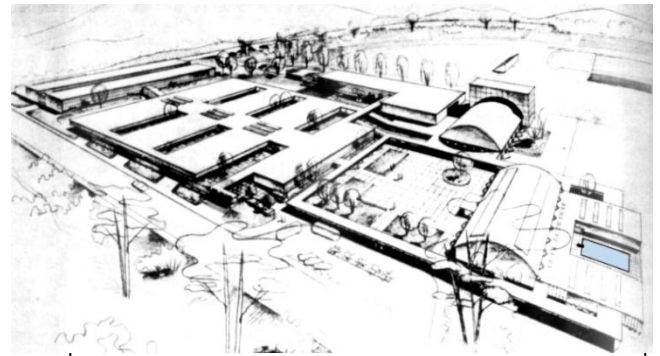
Over 60% of the voters voted “no” on the recreation district. But the turnout was surprisingly low, considering how much effort the supporters had put into the project. Part of the problem was confusion over the proper voting sites. As the Herald reported, “. . . many voters living in the neighborhood of their original polling places discovered, after standing in line to vote, that they had to travel to a distant point in the community to cast their ballots.” Interviews with voters showed that many, as expected, would not vote for the project unless the entire fire district was included. Others felt that the community was just “not ready” for a recreation district. One mother of a “sizeable brood for these modern times” stated that she voted no and asked her friends to vote no because, even though “. . . the district would certainly benefit her, she couldn’t afford it.”

70 years ago the community of El Sobrante made a valiant effort to establish control over the creation and control of recreational opportunities for its citizens. That effort failed. Even though the cost, at the time (\$5/yr) was very modest, it is always difficult to gain support for a tax increase. Unfortunately, however, this left the community entirely dependent for such resources upon the County, whose own park district was always short of cash; in fact, in 1964, the park district was dissolved and responsibility for park creation and maintenance was passed to the East Bay Regional Park District. Today, there are a limited number of parks in El Sobrante which are maintained by the County Public Works Department, but none, formally, are in El Sobrante.

One wonders what might have happened had the El Sobrante Park District been approved in 1953.

De Anza –An Incomplete Design *Roxy Miravalle*

In September 1955, DeAnza High School opened its doors to students of the El Sobrante community. Newspapers and magazine were proclaiming that DeAnza was the most beautiful and functional school in the Richmond school district. San Francisco architect John Carl Warnecke won international acclaim for the school's design. "Because of his vitality and variety, his architecture which is regional in scope, has in the space of a few years received both local and national honors and aroused interest in general and professional publications abroad as well as in this country." Warnecke won a design award for De Anza for its use of glass and steel, which was innovative at the time.



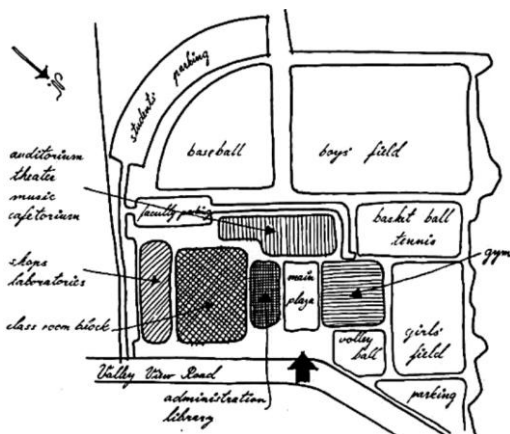
"Master Plan for the De Anza High School, El Sobrante, California. The school will be located in the Richmond Union High School District." *American School and University, 1954-55*

Pool Committee Meets Tomorrow

7 Nov 1956
EL SOBRANTE, Nov. 7.—Chairmen and sub-committee members are asked to attend a meeting of the Citizens' De-Anza Swimming Pool Committee at 8 p.m. tomorrow at DeAnza High School.
Charles Matteson, general chairman, said a report will be given on last Saturday night's Mardi Gras benefit for the pool fund.
Matteson said the event attracted a large attendance.

In January 1952, a cross section of citizens themselves, many of them teachers, as well as the administrative staff of the district formed a steering committee. They all had a hand in developing De Anza's specifications and the way they were translated into the building plans. The total cost to build the school would be \$2,571,182. In 1956 a 'Pool Committee' was formed which held events to raise funds.

However, by 1960 DeAnza became overcrowded needing the addition of two wings. The community, with faculty and students alike began to realize that the school was incomplete. The school still remained unfinished and lacked the many facilities that were proposed in the original design for the school. The swimming pool, as noted on the master plan still had not been built, or the Auditorium-Theater or the music and industrial buildings as originally proposed by the acclaimed architect. Although the school was never completed as per design, the cost rose to over three million dollars.



Main elements of the De Anza design include areas for shops, laboratories, classrooms, gymnasium, administration and cafeteria. There are separate outdoor fields for the boys' and girls' athletics and a baseball diamond." *El Vaquero, Feb8, 1974*

A 1974 article in De Anza's newsletter, *El Vaquero*, titled 'Functional High School Incomplete after 18 Years' reported on the need to make the award-winning school more functional: larger art facilities in the area of lab sciences, fine arts, drama and music; larger art rooms with adequate storage as well as better athletic facilities. The Drama and Music instructors also expressed their specific needs to better serve the students.

The newsletter article ended on a somber note. "A cruise down Valley View Road reveals something other than the concept

envisioned by John Carl Warnecke. De Anza, alas, has become an aging group of rectangles squatting low."



El Sobrante Represented on Richmond City Council

Since the mid-1950s, a considerable portion of the community of El Sobrante has been annexed by the city of Richmond. Currently, in fact, roughly half of our residents “technically” reside within the Richmond city limits. As far as the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce is concerned, as well as this society and the citizens themselves, this makes not one whit of difference as to our identity: we are residents of El Sobrante. However, until now, those living within the city limits of Richmond have not been adequately represented on the city council. Until the most recent council election, members were elected “at large” and were not expected to represent a particular area. As Richmond is a large city, with widely differing demographics, this situation has come to be seen as inherently undemocratic. Thus, as of the last election, Richmond has gone to a “District” system, with voters from each district selecting their own representative. District 4 encompasses the Richmond area of El Sobrante, and as of January 10 of this year, that district is represented on the City Council by Soheila Bana.

Ms. Bana has been very energetic in addressing issues in the El Sobrante community. In particular, she has been passionate about addressing the issue of wildfires, as much of our valley is in a high fire zone. She has been active in many other issues, and has become well known to her constituents, which no doubt helped her to win her seat on the Richmond City Council with close to a 2 to 1 margin. For those of you who live in District 4, you may contact your new representative at:

soheila_bana@ci.richmond.ca.us Follow her on Facebook: [Soheila Bana for Richmond](#).



Bill and Karlyn Barker visit ESHS

Steve James

We offer weekday tours of our El Sobrante Historical Society Museum, which Bill Barker asked to show his sister Karlyn Barker. Karlyn lives on the East Coast and was visiting over the holidays. Bill, who lives in the Grass Valley area, had previously donated items to our museum and knew Karlyn would love to see it. Both Bill and Karlyn are graduates of De Anza, Bill in '77 and Karlyn in '64. Their family has quite a link to ES history. Their father Ed was instrumental in founding the ES Boys Club. My father, Ernie James, and Duncan Gordon partnered with Ed to start the Boys Club. Starting in a small room under the De Anza cafeteria, the club grew to a large club on Appian Way by the Fire House.

Needless to say, we had a lot of memories to share as Emil Munkres and I showed them around. Karlyn was quite taken with our exhibits. Her memories as the editor of the El Vaquero school paper, which prepared her for a career at the Washington Post in DC, were vivid. Photos were taken, and stories shared. It's these kinds of visits that make worthwhile all the hard work over the years to display our treasures.

New Accessions:



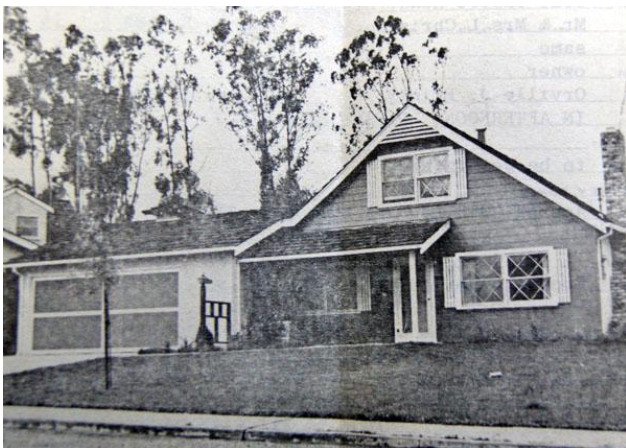
Treasure Trove of Local Home Sales Documents

The archives of the El Sobrante Historical Society have been enriched by the donation of over 800 home sales listings in El Sobrante, dating from 1946 to the late 1970s. In addition to data on home sales, the collection includes sales information on land parcels, apartments, and businesses.

The donor, Betty Marvin, at left, works for the city of Oakland, in the Bureau of Planning, as an Historic Preservation Planner. She also has a strong connection to El Sobrante, graduating from De Anza High School in 1962.

The collection was determined to be not relevant to the city of Oakland, and may well have been trashed. But when Betty learned that El Sobrante has its own Historical Society and History Center, she made it a point to give it a new home. Thanks to Betty and to all our donors; without you, we would not exist.

If you are interested in the history of your property, drop by any Saturday and check out our new records. The cards are arranged by address (be aware that some street names have changed). Most are accompanied by a photograph, which though usually printed on plain letter paper, still show details that have changed over the years. A few of the records contain higher quality images, such as this picture of a home in the Serpa Tract (Rancho Vista) in 1949. The address is 3542 Carlfield. These homes were designed, built, and sold by Earl "Flat Top" Smith, who also built the Canyon Park development a few years later. Many, if not most, of these homes have changed a lot over the years, often now sporting a peaked roof. If this is your home, you are welcome to come by and pick up a copy of this print, on us.



At the left is the paper image for a home in Sherwood Forest (5620 Castro Rd –now Olinda Rd) selling for just under \$21,000 in 1958. Again, the image is not first-rate, but there should be enough detail to interest the current owner. If you are the current owner, come by and get more information about your home.

We are more than a museum, we are a History Center.

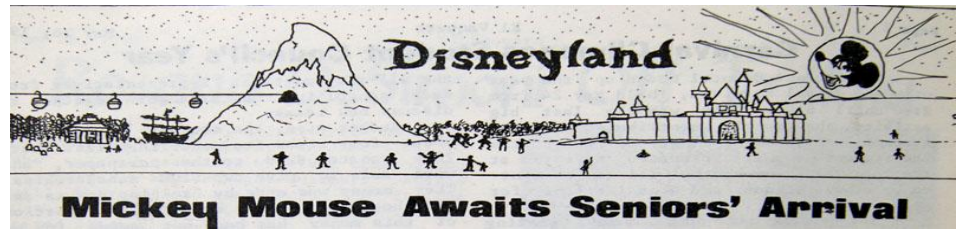


De Anza High School:

We are indebted to ex-De Anza High School teacher **Mel Otten** for a varied collection of artifacts from the 1950s until early in this century. Mel donated the following:

Yearbooks: 1994 thru 1997; 1999 thru 2001.

El Vaquero Newsletters: 1957 (2); 1970 (1); 1971 (9); 1972 (17); 1973 (11); 1974 (11); 1975 (8); 1978 (4); 1979 (7); 1984 (1); Christmas editions for 1971, 1972, and 1973.



The *El Vaquero* newsletters are a surprising and rich source of information concerning life at the old De Anza High School. The above masthead dates to May of 1972, and the article covers in some detail the Disneyland trip of 8 seniors to Disneyland, departing a non-specified local airport at 10 pm. Apparently, the plan was to enter the park at midnight, and leave by 5 am! All the amusements would be free (except shooting galleries, for some reason). A special graduate meal was offered for \$1.00. A strict dress code was in force: "Boys must wear shirt and tie, slacks and sport coat. Girls must wear dressy dresses or coordinated pant suits . . . no hot pants, pedal pushers, or hip huggers are allowed." Two boys were detailed to be at the boarding ramp, to turn back anyone who was ". . . improperly dressed, drunk, or loaded." Who knew.

Creative Arts Publication: 1974.

Handbook for Incoming Students: 1970s

Don Quixote Club Awards Night Program: 1974

Program: Bye Bye Birdie Production: 1974

Powder Puff Jerseys, 1990s; Powder Puff Program: "Our Time Has Come" 1987.

Misc: Pennants; Robotics Team Pin, 1990s; Megaphone, Beanie

Thank you Mel Otten!

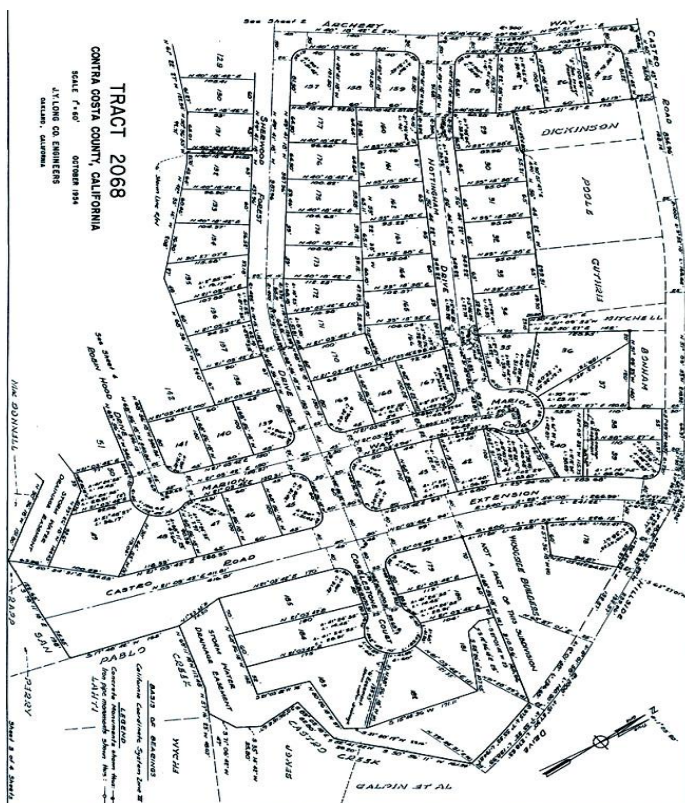


Rotary Phone line Detection Device:

Used by linemen to check phone connection. Bell System, made by Western Electric. Dates to 1950s or



1960s. Used by donor, Brent Thiry, while working as a telephone lineman for Bell Telephone. Worked in El Sobrante, which has been his home for decades.



Tract 2068: Sherwood Forest Development and surrounding Area, 1954.

Consisting of 3 detailed maps and one sheet of descriptive data, this document contains details regarding lot dimensions, some ownership details, and other information of interest to local historians and residents of the Sherwood Forest development. Donated by El Sobrante resident, Robert Brower.

St. Callistus Church Celebrates 70th

On October 16, 2022, Bishop Michael Barber conducted a celebration of the 70th birthday of the St. Callistus Church in El Sobrante.

According to our records, the first mass of the proposed church was held in the Park Theatre on March 8, 1952, conducted by Rev. Michael Ryan. Ceremonial ground-breaking for construction occurred on October 25 of the same year, and the first mass held in the new church occurred on Palm Sunday, March 29, 1953, with Michael Ryan continuing as Pastor. Take your pick for the actual birthday.

Best wishes from the ESHS.

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.

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 Miravalle: Vice-President; Historian and Writer; Genealogist.

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

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

Emil Munkres: Director; Historian.

Visit us on-line at:

www.elsobranthehistoricalsociety.com

Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:

ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM