

Published by the El Sobrante Historical Society

# THE LEFTOVERS

Issue #49

Winter 2024



## El Sobrante Herald BEE-PRESS

EL SOBRANTE EMERGENCY CALLS	
FIRE CALLS.....	BEacon 2-1641
BUSINESS CALLS.....	BEacon 3-0667
SHERIFF.....	Martinez 1690
HERALD.....	BEacon 4-0864

A Progressive Legal Newspaper For The County of Contra Costa Covering El Sobrante, Rollingwood, The Veterans Village, The Dam Road and Sheldon District  
 Number 17 EL SOBRANTE (Richmond) CONTRA COSTA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA Thursday, December 31, 1953 Number 118 ADVERTISER 7th YR.

### 70 Years Ago

Donald Bastin

Ten years ago we published the 9<sup>th</sup> issue of our newsletter, looking back 60 years. Our source was the local newspaper, the El Sobrante Herald, published on December 31, 1953. In this issue of the leftovers, we will re-visit that paper, issued now 70 years ago. We will cover some of the events and issues that we overlooked a decade ago, and recall those things which still resonate today.

The first thing that strikes our eye on the front page is a very controversial move by the city of Richmond to annex a huge area within El Sobrante and bordering neighboring cities, including San Pablo, Pinole, and El Cerrito.

This was in fact the opening salvo in a decades-long effort by Richmond to acquire more territory and which permanently affected our community's ability to incorporate. For a scholarly and detailed account of this effort, written by our late president and founder, Maurice Abraham, please click [here](#). You will be directed to an article in our "Leftovers" collection, #13, Winter, 2015. The article is titled: "Those Perplexing City Boundaries – Sorting Out the Whys." Article begins on page 4.

**6600 ACRES  
ARE PETITIONED  
FOR ANNEXATION**

**4-LANES REQUESTED  
FOR ENTIRE LENGTH  
OF THE DAM ROAD**

Before the construction of the San Pablo Dam, around 1920, the road which ran through our town and along the San Pablo Creek was called, appropriately enough, the San Pablo **Creek** Road. It had long been an important highway, but by the early 1950s, with rapid post-war growth all along its length, from San Pablo to



Orinda, it was apparent that the road was in need of extra lanes. The need had become so great that the Board of Supervisors was asked to “beg, borrow, transfer, or earmark” money from the upcoming county budget. Planning for the road widening had already begun by the middle of 1953. At right we see a county road worker standing in the middle of the Dam Road, taking measurements. At the left is the Louis Store, built in 1950; it is now the home of the Dollar Store. At the right is Pete’s Shoe Shop.



Road widening was largely completed in the downtown area during 1954, which was a mixed blessing; businesses saw more traffic, but the road began to assume the busy, noisy, and somewhat dangerous aspect with which we are now familiar.

**LAST FAMILY VACATES**  
 The last of nearly 3,000 families to move from the Harbor Gate project will be new residents of El Sobrante. They are Mr. and Mrs. Victor Kirichenko and their two small children, Victoria and Richard. They are waiting for present residents to vacate. Their new home will be at 2015 Rancho Road. The project was ordered closed down to make way for the erection of a huge distributing center for Safeway Stores.

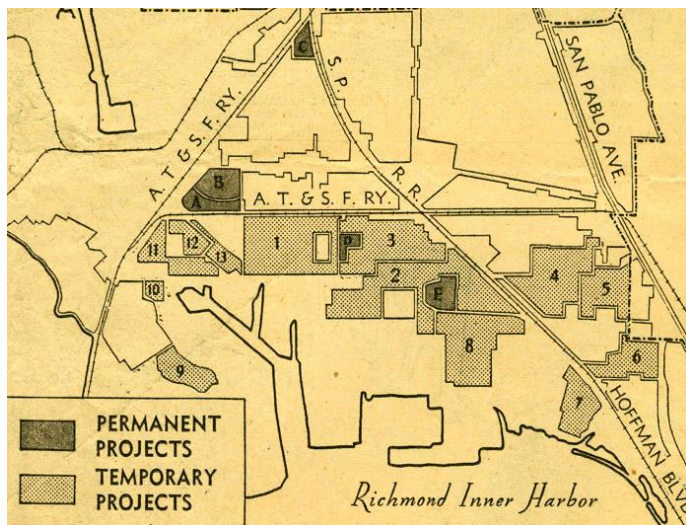
It should come as no surprise that many of our citizens worked in the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond during the war. Drawn largely from the Midwest and South, many lived in war housing, which was quickly constructed and never intended to be permanent. The Harbor Gate housing was located within walking distance of the shipyards. Below is a photo of a portion of the units shortly before they were torn down, in mid-1953.

The Harbor Gate housing



Photo courtesy of Richmond Museum of History

project was just one of 13 such temporary housing developments that were built during the



war for the shipyard workers. On the map at left, it is #8, just on the northeast corner of Kaiser shipyard No. 2 (now the site of the Richmond Marina). Four permanent projects were built, to provide low-cost housing to residents following the war, including the well-known Atchison Village. Harbor Gate was one of the last of the temporary projects to be torn down.

According to local records, Victor Kirichenko was still living in El Sobrante at the time of his death in 1984. One wonders if members of the Kirichenko family still reside in El Sobrante.

**SAN PABLO AUTO MOVIE**  
 HIGHWAY 40 and SAN PABLO DAM ROAD BE. 3-4300

**\$1 BUCK NITE \$1**  
 CARLOAD EVERY NITE CARLOAD  
 CAR HEATER—FOR YOUR COMFORT

CHILDREN UNDER 12 ADMITTED FREE  
 THURS., - FRI., - SAT. DEC. 31 JAN. 1 - 2

GARY COOPER **"BLOWING WILD"**  
**"SON OF BELLE STAR"**

MIDNITE SHOW **"PHANTOM OF THE OPERA"**  
 SUNDAY—MONDAY—TUESDAY

JOHN WAYNE **"ISLAND IN THE SKY"**  
**"PERILOUS JOURNEY"**  
 WED.—THURS.—FRI.—SAT.

DORIS DAY **"CALAMITY JANE"**  
 HOWARD KEEL  
**"AFFAIR WITH A STRANGER"**

SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE EL SOBRANTE HERALD

## Do You Remember the San Pablo Auto Movie?

This ad appeared in the Herald dated December 31, 1953. As of this date the auto movie had been open for only 5 months. Located on Riverside Drive, near the intersection of old Hwy 40 (San Pablo Avenue) and the Dam Road, it was, for the time, a state-of-the-art drive-in, offering a wide cinemascope screen and the ability to show 3-D movies. Capacity was 750 automobiles, with an additional 100 seats available for customers in the snack bar. There were also train and pony rides available for the kids.

The movie "Blowing Wild" was a western, starring Gary Cooper, with Anthony Quinn and Ward Bond. "Island in the Sky" starred John Wayne in an airplane adventure, based loosely on actual events. The "Midnite Show," *Phantom of the Opera*, is hard to date. It may be the 1943 version starring Nelson Eddy and Claude Rains. There does not seem to be a version that dates to any time around 1953.

In any case, the SP Auto Movie was popular enough (and close enough to El Sobrante) to rate notice in the Herald. The theater was in operation for a little over 11 years, closing in the mid 1960s.

The notice at right, highlighting the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> birthday of a little girl, is noted simply to impress upon our readers the intensely **local** focus of our newspaper. The birthday of one of our citizens, the names of the attendees, the nature of the food provided, and the fact that "games were played" was deemed to be sufficient information to include in the paper's sheets. Such a thing is hard to imagine today. It is a reminder that newspapers, particularly for smaller towns, once served the purpose not only of disseminating news, but also of creating a sense of community among its readers, something that we are in need of today.

### LINDA RICHMOND HAS FIFTH BIRTHDAY PARTY AT HOME

Little Linda Richmond celebrated her fifth birthday with a party at her home, 944 Manor Road, Tuesday afternoon.

Present were Frank Bickner, Paul Herman, Frank Fruzza, Susan Vodicka, Sherry and Harold Richmond, and Alice, Howard and Billy Richmond.

Ice cream and cookies were served and games played.

Linda is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Richmond.

We include this ad of The Mechanics Bank, which opened its first outlet on Macdonald Avenue in Richmond in 1905. Though advertising in the Herald, as of 1953 there were no banks at all in El Sobrante. The Mechanics Bank opened a branch here in May of 1955. In 1976, a new building was constructed just to the east. The old building now serves as the home of the Pedaler bike shop.

For a regular bank, the savings rate of 2% is quite high by today's standards. Brick and mortar banks today typically pay well below 1% on savings.

**Savings add up fast...**



You'll have a nest egg in no time at all with a Mechanics Bank Savings Account. Deposits made by January 11 earn 2% SAVINGS INTEREST from January 1. Open your account today at any Mechanics Bank Office.

**The Mechanics Bank**

MEMBER FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

RICHMOND EL CERRITO ALBANY SAN PABLO



# HAPPY NEW YEAR

from the Friends & Merchants of El Sobrante

<b>EL SOBRANTE PHARMACY</b> 435 Maloney Road Phone BEacon 2-0416 Prescription Specialists	<b>EL SOBRANTE LUMBER</b> 3916 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-3732 Gordon Sperry-Fere Woodcock	<b>HORSE SHOE CAFE</b> Applian Way & Sobrante Ave. Phone BEacon 4-9939 TOM and VIC	<b>MINNEY'S REAL ESTATE</b> 451 Applian Way Phone BEacon 4-2574	<b>PETE'S SHOE REPAIR SHOP</b> 3737 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-8516 PETE KRIZEVICH	<b>BENINGER BUS SERVICE</b> Dam Road & Road 20 Phone BEacon 2-0597 RUSSELL BENINGER
<b>TOM'S LIQUOR</b> 3812 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-0397 PETE and MINERVA	<b>EL SOBRANTE FEED</b> 4036 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-2902	<b>PARK THEATRE</b> Hillcrest & Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-7747 DICK JEHA, Manager	<b>CARRINGTON'S GARAGE</b> 5025 Applian Way Phone BEacon 5-0303 BUD CARRINGTON	<b>TRIO CLUB</b> 3976 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-8770 IRA and DOROTHY	<b>HILLTOP SERVICE</b> 462 Applian Way NORM DEAN
<b>MODEL LAUNDRY</b> 4020 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-0320 MR. and MRS. MORGAN	<b>MANOR MARKET</b> 959 Manor Road Phone BEacon 2-7982 FEE'S and GENE'S	<b>BENNETT'S PHARMACY</b> 4100 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-6132 We Give S&H Green Stamps	<b>PETE'S CLUB</b> 4081 Dam Road Phone BEacon 5-2982	<b>FRIEND BARBER SHOP</b> 3857 Dam Road ALBERT and AL OLIVA	<b>HILLTOP MARKET</b> 4600 La Paloma Phone BEacon 3-1053 DICK LUTZ
<b>EL SOBRANTE POULTRY</b> 3575 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-8353 ANGELO RIGGIO	<b>EL SOBRANTE CHEVROLET SERVICE</b> 4040 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-1376 Jim Swanson - Ken Hembree	<b>OLIVER'S SERVICE</b> 4071 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-4302 BILL OLIVER	<b>FERRELL'S SERVICE STATION</b> 4080 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-2036 CARL FERRELL	<b>RAY'S MARKET</b> 4078 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-9931	<b>LEE'S VARIETY</b> 3905 Dam Road Phone BEacon 3-0281
<b>LAUNDROMAT</b> 4158 Applian Way Phone BEacon 3-2255	<b>SHANGRI-LA CLEANERS</b> 3851 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-5880 'BURGE' JONES	<b>GRISSE MARKET</b> Applian Way & Sobrante Ave. Phone BEacon 4-9646 ERNIE FRENCH, Mgr.	<b>EL SOBRANTE SERVICE CENTER</b> Applian Way & Sobrante Ave. Phone BEacon 4-6736	<b>FOSTER FREEZE</b> 3716 Dam Road Phone BEacon 3-1778 MR. and MRS. CORYELL	<b>ADA'S WHITE HOUSE FOUNTAIN</b> 3750 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-9563 ADA and PAT HOWARD
<b>RICHMOND FARM CREAMERY</b> 4500 Dam Road	<b>IVANART PAINT LOCKE HARDWARE</b> 3817 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-0664	<b>EL SOBRANTE FOUNTAIN</b> 4154 Applian Way Phone BEacon 4-2571 JOHN MACHETTA	<b>LOUIS STORE</b> 3730 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-9796	<b>WILLIAMS BROS MEAT</b> 3730 Dam Road (Louis Store) Phone BEacon 2-9796	<b>STAR LIQUOR</b> 3730 Dam Road (Louis Store) Phone BEacon 2-9796
<b>LOVE'S VARIETY STORE</b> 3730 Dam Road (Adjoining Louis Store) MR. & MRS. LOVE	<b>MOORE'S AVIARIES</b> 620-22nd St.—Richmond BE. 4-6576 BE. 3-4533	<b>G &amp; G PET SHOP</b> 4081 Dam Road Phone BEacon 3-4533	<b>RANCHO FEED</b> 4955 Applian Way BEacon 4-9474 Mr. and Mrs. Bazell	<b>JOHN J. PIERCE</b> 907 Macdonald Ave. Richmond, California	<b>GREENDALE'S GARAGE &amp; ASSOCIATED SERVICE</b> 3551 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-5347 ED & KEITH GREENDALE
<b>RALPH'S BODY &amp; PAINT SHOP</b> 3551 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-7708 RALPH FARRAR	<b>CLAAR'S CHEVROLET</b> 480 - 23rd Street BEacon 4-0422 Richmond, California	<b>BERT'S TEXACO SERVICE</b> 3800 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-9986 BERT POTTS	<b>SAN PABLO MOTOR MOVIE</b> Highway 40 & Dam Road BEacon 3-4300	<b>IVAN GOYAK</b> Supervisor 2560 Macdonald Avenue Richmond, California	<b>GARDEN CRAFT</b> 4999 Applian Way BEacon 3-1100
<b>POOR NELSON</b> Builder of Better 24c Burgers 3635 Dam Road	<b>OVA'S BEAUTY SALON</b> 3873 Dam Road OVA BISHOP	<b>HOWARD BIELE CONSTABLE</b> Castro Ranch Road BEacon 3-0185	<b>EL SOBRANTE HARDWARE</b> 4038 Dam Road ELMER SAWUSCH	<b>RALPH'S SHOE CORRAL</b> 4160 Applian Way BEacon 5-2645 Ralph White	<b>EARL &amp; JIM'S SHELL SERVICE</b> 3621 San Pablo Dam Road BEacon 4-9771 El Sobrante
<b>EL SOBRANTE HERALD BEE PRESS</b> 3575 Dam Road Phone BEacon 4-0864 ED GALLI	<b>TRAVALINI FURNITURE COMPANY</b> Macdonald at 15th St. RICHMOND	<b>ACME TRANSFER &amp; STORAGE</b> 3803 Dam Road Phone BEacon 5-3295	<b>ED'S PLACE</b> 5329 Dam Road Phone BEacon 2-6267 EDDIE, JOHNNY, ED	<b>J &amp; A HARDWARE</b> 2420 Dam Road Phone BEacon 5-5700	<b>JAY'S</b> 706 Macdonald Ave. Phone BEacon 2-7329

These are many of the businesses that were operating in, or near, El Sobrante at the end of 1953. In our Winter 2014 edition of the *Leftovers*, we noted that only 3 (Oliver's, Ed's, and Manor Market) were still in business. Remarkably, 10 years on, that was still the case.



**Do you remember Elmer Johnson of 2022 Thompson Lane, El Sobrante? Not too many still remember him and his "Little Horses" which he raised in El Sobrante in the 1960s.**

*Roxy Miravalle*

Who was Elmer? Elmer Irving Johnson [1921-2004] was a native of Sturgis, South Dakota and grew up on a cattle ranch. At 21, he enlisted in the US Navy in 1942, and during WWII served on the USS Brooklyn operating a 40 mm anti-aircraft gun. He was involved in the invasion of North Africa. When he was discharged in 1945, he settled in the San Pablo-Richmond area where he met and married his wife, Mayvis Jacobson in 1950. For 30 years Elmer worked in the Bay Area as an ironworker, helping build some of the tallest buildings in San Francisco and the surrounding area as well as the "Tunnel Under The Bay." Elmer also owned and trained Shetland ponies for show In-Halter (shown "in hand" meaning that they are led, not ridden), Roadster and Fine Harness classes throughout the western U.S. In 1954, he built a stable on his 3-acre Thompson Lane ranch.

The Shetland is only one of three of the most popular local pony breeds. The other two are POA's (Ponies of America) "baby Appaloosas" and the Welch Mountain ponies. The Shetlands are the smallest but collectively they're all ponies with much in common. One of the best things to happen to ponies was the all-breed show held at the Antioch Fairgrounds by the Northern California Shetland Pony Club in September 1965.

Elmer served as a Show Judge for Welsh, Shetland and Hackney ponies and was a member of the American Horse Shows Association. He was also a member and past president of the Northern California Shetland Pony Club and director of the National Shetland Pony Club. At the 1960 Alameda County Fair he came in first competing in the Trotting race with his Shetland pony "Silver Artistic Jay." In 1966 Elmer Johnson's Shetland mare "Society Flame" won the U.S. title of reserve champion for fine harness. At the Plumas County Fair in August 1970, Elmer Johnson's Shetland pony "Society Sunburst" was a winner in the chariot race category for 10.3 fine harness Shetland Ponies.

In 1972, he retired to own and operate a small ranch south of Dixon, California where he raised cattle, sheep and pigs, and for a few years worked at the Dixon Auction Yard. He passed away in August

2004,  
at his  
home in  
Dixon.  
He was  
83.



*Photos: Elmer and "Mindakota Challenger." Challenger was the Reserve Grand Champion at the California State Fair at 6 weeks old. Photo credit: Ancestry*

## Remembering Leonard Battaglia *Donald Bastin*

Another one of our El Sobrante originals, Leonard “Len” Battaglia, passed away several weeks ago. Len was a long-term resident of El Sobrante and was very much a part of the business life of the downtown area.

I did not know Len well, but the few times I have talked with him I became aware of a strong tendency to drift back to a much earlier time in his life, when he was a young man in the U.S. Air Force, piloting fighter aircraft in the skies over Korea.

It was the early 1950s and America was involved in what has become known as the “forgotten war.” Americans were fighting and dying in what was then the little-known country

of Korea. For many it was a brutal and thankless war, but for Len, it was the high point of his life.

Leonard graduated high school in 1951 and entered the Air Force. In early 1954 he began his flight training at Webb Air Force Base in Texas. Here he is standing by his T-28 trainer.

In the next few years, Leonard gained experience flying the F-86 Sabre jet and became a member of the F-86 Sabre Pilots Association (above, right). He also became the member of

another exclusive club when he broke the sound barrier in his Sabre, a small group in the 1950s. The F-86 was only capable of crossing that barrier in a steep dive. He then graduated to the more advanced F-100 Super Sabre (below). In 1957, he

received commendation for his “outstanding performance of duty which contributed significantly to the winning of the coveted Air Force’s Flying Safety Award.” The group to

which Leonard belonged “achieved a record of more than seven thousand flying hours without a major aircraft accident, despite numerous operational difficulties.”

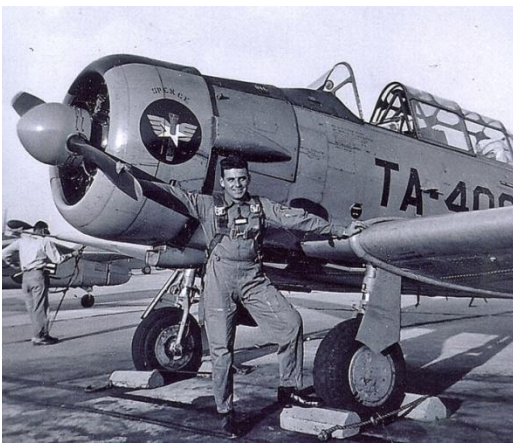
After leaving the Air Force, Len moved to El Sobrante and, in 1961,

acquired Tom’s Liquors, which had been owned by Paul (nicknamed “Pete”) and Minerva Ogle.

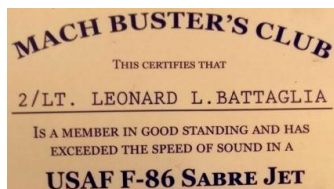
He changed the name to Rancho Liquors, which is still in business today (under new ownership) He later opened a travel agency, which he ran for over 30 years. He had other business interests as well. To the end of his life he held a strong belief that this area was a great place to live and to prosper.



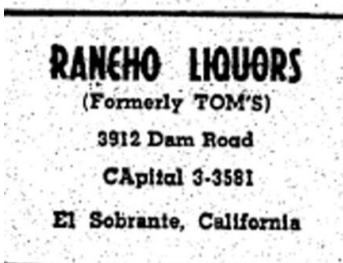
*Photo courtesy of Lyle Miller*



*Source: Dave Stelle*



*Source: Lyle Miller*







**New Acquisitions:**  
**The Horseshoe Club: Ashtray and Matchbook Cover**

*Donors: Ashtray-Lyle Miller*

*Matchbook: Frank Kelsey*

The Horseshoe Club occupied a prominent place in the “other” business area of El Sobrante, the “Y”, for many years. It began life in the mid-1940s and might still be in existence today, had it not been for widening of the intersection at Valley View Road and Sobrante Avenue, sometime in the 1990s.

According to Lester Marston, the building was constructed by his father, Victor. Originally, it was a café and not a bar. The photo at right

**HORSE SHOE CAFE**  
 Appian Way & Sobrante Ave.  
 Phone BEacon 4-9939  
 TOM and VIC

was probably taken in the late 1940s, and shows the café in the background. The girl is unidentified.



In this aerial photo dating from around 1947, we can see the bar at the top, left. The large building at the bottom of the photo is Vogel’s Market, which later transformed into Fowler’s Department Store.

It would be another 20 years before the Adachi Nursery would enter this picture.





This picture was taken after the construction of the Adachi Nursery in 1967, probably sometime in the 1970s. The café/bar is at the middle left, and at the top, center left, we see the Adachi Nursery sign.

According to Marston family history, the previous owners of Tom’s Liquors, Pete and Minerva Ogle, leased the building until the mid 1970s, whereupon they purchased the building outright. It was during their operation that a bar was added and, later on, a liquor store.



## El Sobrante Resident makes Movie

**Alex Zajicek** lives in El Sobrante and attended De Anza High. He has made a movie which includes many sites in our town. The movie will be premiered on Feb 10,

at the Roxie in SF. To learn more and to score tickets, click here:

[https://sfindie2024.eventive.org/schedule/658c881f71ec9f00475f0421?fbclid=IwAR2TYLrLvowOPriPW\\_i6MMdum6vWchJRhArokg3mieGfhe-k-7e60NotCA](https://sfindie2024.eventive.org/schedule/658c881f71ec9f00475f0421?fbclid=IwAR2TYLrLvowOPriPW_i6MMdum6vWchJRhArokg3mieGfhe-k-7e60NotCA)

*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.*

**A grateful thank you to all of you who in the last year contributed money and/or artifacts to help us in our mission!**

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.elsobranthehistoricalsociety.com](http://www.elsobranthehistoricalsociety.com)

**Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:**  
**ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM**