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THE LEFTOVERS

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El Sobrante Manor: Early Community Development Project in El Sobrante

Donald Bastin; Roxy Miraválle; Steve James; Emil Munkres



In the Fall 2024 edition of our newsletter, Roxy Miraválle authored an article about local housing developments, one of the earliest being the El Sobrante Manor project, approved by the County in late 1940. With this development (see map at right) consisting of over 150 homes, the roots of the idea of El Sobrante as a viable, unique community began to strengthen and encompass an ever-widening area.



Editor's Note: For an in-depth analysis of the evolution of this concept, please see newsletter #41, Winter 2022, "What's in a Name" by Emil Munkres. Available at our website: elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com.

El Sobrante Manor

LIVE CLOSE TO YOUR WORK And Be Independent

Only one place in the East Bay can give you BOTH these advantages. EL SOBRANTE MANOR is within 25 minutes drive of every business and industrial section of the East Bay from San Francisco on the south to Vallejo on the north.

If you are now renting a home in any part of this district, it will pay to find out how much you can get for LESS than you are now paying when your rent dollars are put into YOUR OWN HOME in EL SOBRANTE MANOR.

Beautiful, complete, 5-room, country homes. City water, gas, lights, fixtures, furnace, automatic water heater, EVERYTHING for less than \$25 a month.

Take the Orinda-Dam Road at the "Light-house"—go one mile and turn left at the first corner.

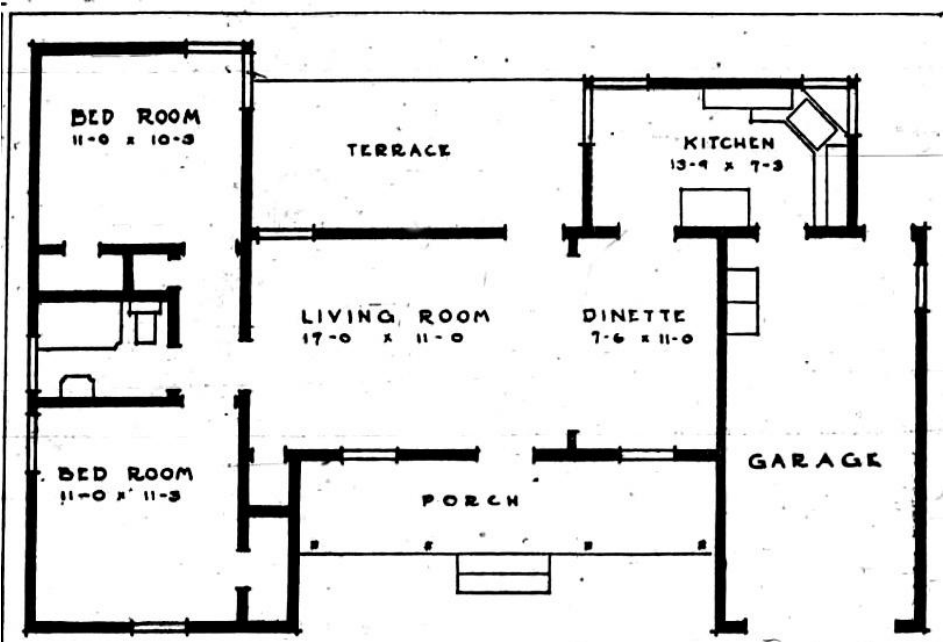
EL SOBRANTE LAND COMPANY

Phone Richmond 3910

As late as the mid-1930s, home-builders generally built fewer than ten homes per year, and typically no more than four. This was largely due to low demand, caused by the difficulty in securing financing and, of course, the Depression. In addition, lending institutions seldom made loans for longer than 5 years, and only for 60 to 70% of the total price. Thus, even many middle-class families could not afford a home and were forced to rent. This state of affairs began to change in 1934, when the Roosevelt administration created the Federal Housing Administration. The FHA initiated a program of loan guarantees that was designed to stimulate home construction. Though large home-building projects only really took off toward the end of the Second World War, it was during the pre-war period of the late 1930s and early 1940s that the ideas of the "model community" and "tract" development came into being.

This ad for the El Sobrante Manor, dated April 4, 1941, appeals to the renter and family looking to buy an affordable turn-key home. The location, too, is touted as being ideal, situated "within 25 minutes of every business and industrial section of the East Bay from San Francisco on the south to Vallejo on the north."

At right is a typical floor-plan of the El Sobrante Manor development. There are two bedrooms, one bathroom, a living room, kitchen, and dining room. Attached is a one-car garage. Total price of this unit is \$4400, with monthly payments of \$27.50 (which includes taxes and insurance). "Plenty of closet space" is claimed. The frontage of the lot is a fairly generous 65 feet, which keeps the homes well separated. While these offerings may seem modest by today's standards, judged by the standards of the time, they are revolutionary, having all the major components of the thousands of planned communities that blossomed at the end of the Second World War, when millions of ex-servicemen and their families suddenly entered the housing market. Indeed, an examination of the projects constructed by David Bohannon, one of the most influential proponents of "mass production" techniques, shows a remarkable similarity between our modest "Sobrante Manor" project, and the larger, more well-known projects being built elsewhere, and later.



Bohannon, for instance, was responsible for the construction of the Rollingwood development, which is situated on unincorporated land just to the west of El Sobrante. Begun in 1942, and completed in 1943, this 700-home project was significantly helped with federal loan guarantees, and was conceived as a site for shipyard workers. The homes were modest, like the Sobrante Manor homes, but did differ somewhat in that many included a separate 3rd bedroom, for a shipyard worker's rental space. Interestingly, Bohannon chose to place his developments in unincorporated areas, to allow more freedom in tract design and layout. It is not unlikely that the El Sobrante Land Company made a similar judgment in its placement of the Manor project.

Perhaps Bohannon's most well-known development (also on unincorporated land) was the San Lorenzo Village, a 1500+ tract begun in 1944. Significantly, many of the homes built in the initial stage of construction are being considered for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, as examples of typical war-time housing. Though begun before America's entry into the War, the Sobrante Manor tract did see construction continuing after the conflict had begun. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to see our local project as an early example of the type of housing development which had roots in the Depression era and also grew out of the war effort, and at least eligible for recognition by our community historical society.

The important element to consider is that the El Sobrante Manor development was not just a collection of houses, but deliberately laid out to assist in creating a community spirit, with streets laid out to slow traffic, close to schools, and with all utilities in place. Our treasurer, and one of the founding members of our society, Steve James, lived in the Manor for many years. Here are some of his recollections of this community:

Yes, I grew up in the Manor, 935 Idlewood Circle. They were built in 1942. I'm sure construction started in 1941. My family moved there in 1953. Our house had already been remodeled with the garage turned into a living room. They were all 2-bedroom, 1 bath. There are at least 2 houses today that have not been remodeled.



It was baby boomer time. Lots of kids. So many in fact you didn't have to leave your street to have kids to play with. It seemed like every house had 2-5 kids ranging from toddlers to teenagers. Our house on Idlewood Circle was on one of the few flat streets in our hilly area. So, it seemed all the kids would play in front of our house. There was always some sort of ball game or a kick-the-can game going on.

We went to ES #1 on Manor from K-3. Everyone walked to school. You had to walk past Manor Market. Everyone would buy penny candy from Martha and Gene Chan the owners of the store. Editor's note: Gene Chan is the man at the "candy window." WC Times photo, 1981

We had sports teams. The Manor area was called the Red Socks. These teams eventually became part of the ES Boys Club.

Allview was the last street bordering the area on the north side. Past those houses was open area going to Pinole. No freeway or houses until you were close to San Pablo Avenue. As a kid Pinole seemed far away. We knew little of the other areas of ES, like Sherwood Forest.

We did go to Marie A. Murphy from 4-6 grades then to De Anze 7-12. Our world was getting a little larger as we grew older.

Just a lot of great memories of growing up there. Post-war families with 2 to 5 kids in a house. The streets were always full of kids playing. Walking to Manor Market (Genes store) owned by the Chan family. Those days are gone.



Do you recognize this home? This is a nice example of a typical Sobrante Manor home in late 1942. While the floor plans were similar, the outsides were altered, or simply switched around, to avoid a feeling of dull conformity.

*In the following article, Roxy Mirav lle explores another, less attractive but all too common element of home construction and sales during the wartime and post-war era: **Restriction**.*



El Sobrante Manor
\$21 A MONTH

In well-restricted district; city lights, water and gas all in. Living room; breakfast room; 2 bedrooms, corner windows; linoleum in kitchen, corner tile sink and drainboard. Hardwood floors; gas furnace; 2 tray laundry; inside stairway to garage, overhead door. Large view lot; F.H.A. terms; \$3250 full price.
Drive out Orinda Dam road one mile; turn left at sign to
EL SOBRANTE MANOR
—or phone Rich. 4533 for further details.

El Sobrante Manor, Independent, 1941

even realize that the home they purchased may contain this restrictive language within the deeds and contracts of their humble abode.

Even as El Sobrante’s housing development began progressing in the early 1940s, as hard it is to believe, even El Sobrante had several “R” neighborhoods. Although these restrictions do not hold up today since outlawed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, nevertheless, it’s still there in black and “white” and these

covenants remain embedded in property records, silently shaping patterns of inequality and segregation today.



Ranchitos DeMoraga
Orinda's Newest and Most Beautiful Residential Development in the Moraga Valley

VETS... NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME—Quality Homes
in a Highly-Restricted, Desirable Development at LOW, LOW DOWN PAYMENTS TO VETERANS!

Beautiful 16 Acre and Larger, Level and View Home Sites Await Your Selection — These Lovely Sites are Completely Improved Including Front Lawns.

Featuring Exciting New Plans and Ranch Style Designs...

**3 BEDROOMS - 2 BATHS
2 CAR GARAGE**

A wide variety of plans, ideas, color schemes, etc., available for your selection — just like having your own custom built home! Choose now — Be ready for Fall school term.

Located near existing elementary school and directly across the street from new Model High School which is scheduled for completion for 1955 school year.

Priced At \$16,850
5% DOWN TO VETS—Plus Closing

CENTRAL HEAT • SHINGLE ROOFS • RIGID RESTRICTIONS • NATURAL WOOD CABINETS • HARDWOOD FLOORS • STALL SHOWERS • ALL UTILITIES IN AND PAID • MANY OTHER FEATURES

Priced at \$17,950
10% Down to Vets (including closing)
Extra features include choice of shingles or shingle roofs, planter boxes, tile or Formica counters, all purpose room, plank floors and beam ceilings.

\$19,500 TO \$23,500
As Low as 10% Down to Vets (plus closing cost)
These deluxe homes must be seen to be appreciated

ALSO LIBERAL FINANCING TO NON-VETERANS

NOTE: These homes were featured in American Builders Home Magazine

ORINDA HOMES, Inc., Developers
Crosley & Wilhoit, Realtors
PHONE DRAKE 6-3550 — EVENINGS, BEACON 3-3127 OR LANDSCAPE 4-4035

Ranchitos DeMoraga, Oakland Tribune, 1954

In the early years of tract home construction, developers and real estate agents alike, advertised new homes in beautiful surroundings, with lovely views of the San Francisco Bay or conveniently located near recently built parks and other enticing amenities. The sad thing about all this is that many were to be found in “restricted” neighborhoods which meant only “whites” could purchase homes in these developments. These racial covenants were once commonly inserted into property deeds to exclude minority groups from owning or occupying certain properties or living in certain communities unless they were employed as servants. What’s worse is that even after all these years, home owners may not



**NEW RESTRICTED SUBDIVISION
GOES ON SALE**
SUNDAY, AUGUST 4
• • •

Business and Residential Lots

50 FOOT FRONTAGE
AS LOW AS **\$1000**

Turn right off San Pablo Avenue at sign 1 block west of the Lucky Market, Rollingwood, San Pablo.

See Salesmen on Property

EL CERRITO REALTY
PHONE LANDSCAPE 5-9900
352 San Pablo Avenue El Cerrito

Rollingwood, Independent, 1946

Seen here are some examples of these real estate ads from local newspapers of the 1940s and 1950s that openly advertised their exclusive and restricted neighborhoods. There were also specific words used in these ads for the various levels of restrictions; well-restricted, highly restricted, fully restricted and high-class fully restricted. My favorite is from a 1936 ad, “nice restricted district, government approved.” Government approved? Yes!! Government approved and never questioned.

A few tracts of restricted housing were government-sanctioned developments, like the homes in Rollingwood. Yet, these restricted limitations were not put on housing during this era alone. It dates as far back as the 1900s and earlier when the well-known local real estate agents, the Burg Brothers

advertised their beautiful new development of Grand View Terrace homes in 1912 as “the only high-class fully restricted tract in Richmond.” Today, Grand View Terrace homes can be found along San Pablo Avenue with an entrance at Garvin Avenue where a lone stone pillar remains at the south-west corner as a reminder of this once “high-class fully restricted” neighborhood.

GRAND VIEW TERRACE

A few minutes' walk from Richmond's business center in the finest located tract of land in or near Richmond.

It is the One-and-Only Strictly High-Class, Fully Improved, Restricted Residence Tract in Richmond.

NO Interest Taxes for 2 years	LOTS \$300 AND UP	A small payment down and \$6 or more per month.
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Price includes Sewers, Concrete Curbs and Gutters, Oil Macadam Paved Streets, wide Cement Sidewalks, Water Mains, Shade Trees and Parking Between the Walks

We have sold over two million dollars worth of lots in the best Richmond and Pullman Tracts. More money has been made by purchasers of lots than in other tracts combined.	BURG BROS. INC. (The Richmond Pioneer Real Estate Dealers) 660 MARKET ST. SAN FRANCISCO	We will pay your fare from anywhere within 200 miles of San Francisco in order that you may see for yourself that Grand View Terrace is the best place to buy.
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Currently, LeighAnn Davis, executive director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society has reached out to volunteers of the *Big Rancho Project* to assist the Contra Costa County Record's Clerk office (who is spearheading the 'Mapping Prejudice Project') to identify and map racially restrictive covenants in local property records. The county is working in partnership with [Mapping Prejudice](#), a national research project based at the University of Minnesota. The Mapping Prejudice Project is an opportunity for the county to meet the requirements of the [California Assembly Bill \(AB\) 1466](#) chaptered in

[2021](#), which mandates that county recorders identify and redact racially discriminatory covenants from all property records across the state. To date, 9 million records have been initially reviewed, and thousands have been flagged for potentially restrictive language. Kristin B. Connelly, Clerk-Recorder and Registrar of Voters said that "[Mapping Prejudice in Contra Costa County](#)" is about more than finding discriminatory language in old documents—it's about education, engagement, and community healing. By confronting this hidden history, we can better understand its lasting impact on our neighborhoods." If you'd like to assist and be a part of this project, contact LeighAnn at director@cocohistory.org or Kristin at volunteers@cr.cccounty.us in the County Clerk-Recorder's office.

Below is an example of a racially restrictive covenant and its language. At left is the Supreme Court ruling from 1948, and at right is an excerpt of a brochure that lists its racial restrictions which were common for some housing tract developments. Now, do you know what's in your covenant?

Shelly V Kraemer
334057

SUPREME COURT RULING

The United States Supreme Court ruling on racial restrictive covenants on May 3, 1948 has been hailed as one of the most important developments since the Emancipation Proclamation!

The Supreme Court ruled 6 to 0 that agreements to bar racial minorities from residential areas are discriminatory and cannot be enforced by the courts. *

No person, the decision said, can be barred from occupying property he has purchased.

Chief Justice Vinson wrote the majority opinion against restrictive residential covenants, declaring they violate basic civil rights.

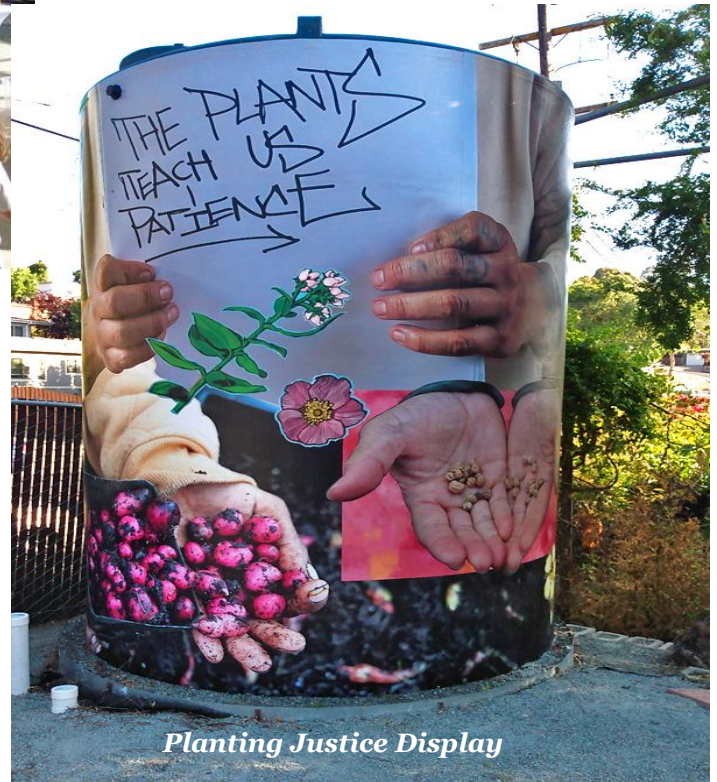
Justice Vinson said the 14th Amendment clearly was designed to protect citizens from "discriminatory action on the part of the states based on considerations of race and color".

16. RACIAL RESTRICTIONS. No property in said Addition shall at any time be sold, conveyed, rented or leased in whole or in part to any person or persons not of the White or Caucasian race. No person other than one of the White or Caucasian race shall be permitted to occupy any property in said Addition or portion thereof or building thereon except a domestic servant actually employed by a person of the White or Caucasian race where the latter is an occupant of such property.

The Good Table Café and Planting Justice Begin Long-awaited Opening!



The first service at the Good Table UCC occurred on Sunday, June 8. This was followed by a Juneteenth celebration on June 19, from 4-7 pm, which featured food, live music, and “neighborly joy.” According to the newsletter, “Good Table News,” nearly everything is in readiness for a complete opening, of both the Good Table Café and the Planting Justice nursery late this month (July).



It has been a long wait, but worth it to see the old Adachi Nursery transformed from a shuttered but much-loved business, which was threatened to become just another mini-mart with an attached gas station, to a café, spiritual center, and nursery run by two non-profits who have become securely bedded into the unique and welcoming fabric of our community.

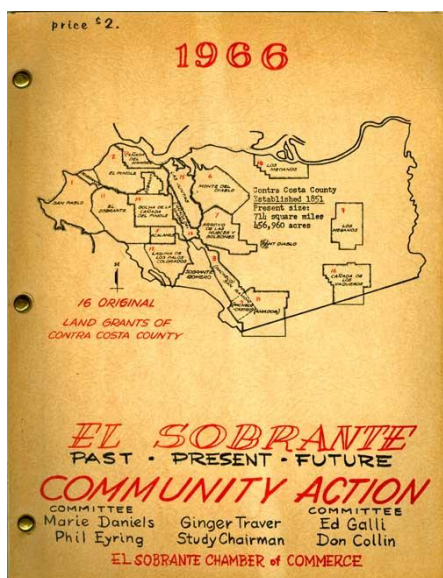
The El Sobrante Historical Society heartily welcomes this new entity, and is grateful for its preservation of and adaptive-re-use of the historic Adachi Nursery site.

New Exhibit: 1912 Singer Sewing Machine



This fully functional treadle machine was owned and used by local resident Clementina Diaz. It originally belonged to her mother, Guadalupe Gonzalez, who was born and raised in Mexico. Clementina learned how to sew on this machine, designing and sewing her own outfit for her junior prom. She subsequently went on to have a successful career in garment design and pattern-making.

New Acquisition:



Donated by Emil Munkres, this "Community Action" report constituted the final attempt to craft a viable plan to achieve incorporation for our community. While we already had a poor copy of this report, this is the real

article, which, apparently, was being sold for \$2.00 apiece.

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.

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.elsobrantehistoricalsociety.com

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