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THE LEFTOVERS

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Provenance: Determining the History and Origins of a new Acquisition.

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Many, if not most of the objects that are owned by an historical society, like ours, have only modest value in themselves. The value to the society comes from the connection to the history of the community which the society represents. The donor of an artifact may know a lot, a little, or nothing about the thing donated. That's where investigation comes in; and with increased knowledge comes increased value to the society.

Here we see a fine new addition to our collection of artifacts; specifically, it is a produce scale, used for many years in the Manor Market, owned and operated by Gene and Martha Chan. The donor is Kenyon Chan, son of Gene and Martha, who spent his entire young life in the market, as the living quarters were right upstairs.





Kenyon was just an infant when the market first opened in 1951 (or 1952), so while he remembered that the scale had been in use for many years, until the store was sold in 1986, he could not say with certainty that it had been in use for the entire 35 years or so that the market was operated by the Chans. So, did we have any information that could help us pinpoint the date of its acquisition?

Luckily, on the face of the scale, were two stickers: one from the “Sealer of Weights and Measures” of Contra Costa County, and the other from a

business in Oakland, called “The Pitchers.” Our ace investigator, Roxy Miravalle, was able to determine that Arthur Leroy Seeney was Sealer of Weights and Measures for CC County from 1948 until sometime in the early 1980s. So this established an early date for our investigation. Further investigation revealed the following about the business known as “The Pitchers”:

Originally DBA "Toledo Scale Company" and, as of 1940 "The Pitchers"

1930s: 320-324 12th St., Oakland

From 1940 to 1951: 300 12th St., Oakland

After 1951 to 1956: 651 20th St., Oakland

1957 on: 3220 Telegraph Ave., Oakland (with new phone number)

Notice that the sticker on the face of the scale shows the address of “The Pitchers” as 300 Twelfth Street, Oakland. Roxy’s information shows that this business was at this address from 1940 until 1951. As Mr. Seeley was with the County starting in 1948, we now know that the scale could not have been purchased before that date. And since we also know that the operation of the Manor Market began no earlier than 1951, we can be confident that this scale was purchased sometime in that year. That being the case, we can be confident that the scale was in use for the entire time that the market was owned and operated by the Chan family.

These investigations always provide us with information that illuminates our new acquisition. For instance, we learned something about produce scales, and that this company, Detecto, was originally founded in 1900 in New York by three immigrant brothers, and was initially known as the Jacobs Brothers Scale Company. The Detecto brand is still very much in business today, serving many markets. This particular example is in excellent condition, and still operates perfectly. It is a fine addition to our collection.

Located behind the El Sobrante Library at 4300 Garden Road.

History Center Virtual Tour!



Our beautiful new History Center opened for tours on November 23rd, 2019. Since that time, we have been setting up our historic exhibits and preparing the site for visitors. This work is now basically complete and we are anxious to welcome visitors.

However, until such time that we can open, and once County Health Department restrictions are lifted, we invite you

to view a virtual tour. Check the [History Center](#) page.

We hope you enjoy the tour. While not ideal, it will have to do until we can physically open our Center. Please let us know what you think by contacting us at: eshistory@gmail.com. Or just hop over to our Facebook page. : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ElSobranteHistoricalSociety/>

Thank You!



Driving through El Sobrante, you have probably noticed that the Shell station on the corner of El Portal and the San Pablo Dam Road is undergoing a complete remodel. Other than all the construction going on, most of us have probably paid little attention to this business, and are unaware that it has sat in the same place for well over 70 years. It is, in fact, one of the oldest businesses in our town, in operation since at least 1949, and probably earlier.

The ad at right was found in the earliest copy of the El Sobrante Herald that we have, from July, 1949. Frank Beninger (Robert Francis “Frank” Beninger) apparently ran the station, which was also the address (3621 Dam Road) of the Beninger Bus Company, which was operated by Frank’s brother, Russell Lawrence Beninger. Apparently, by 1958, the business had changed hands, as we can see from this ad from that date:



El Sobrante

SERVICE STATION

Frank Beninger
Shell Station
Cor. Rd. 20 & Dam Rd.

Good Gas - Good Service

Complete line of Gas, Oil
Tires and Batteries also
Lube and car repairing.

Competitive Low Prices



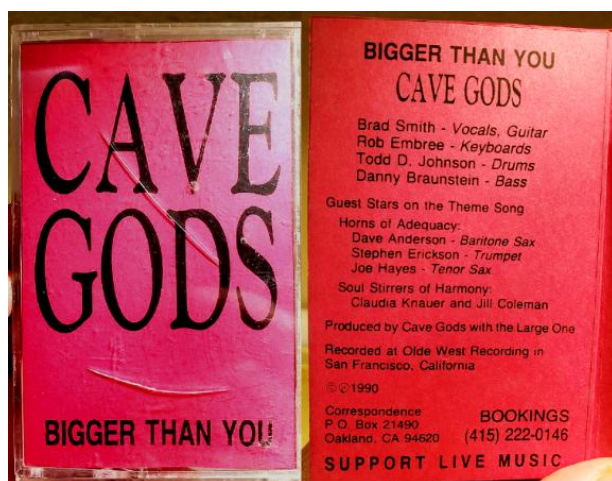
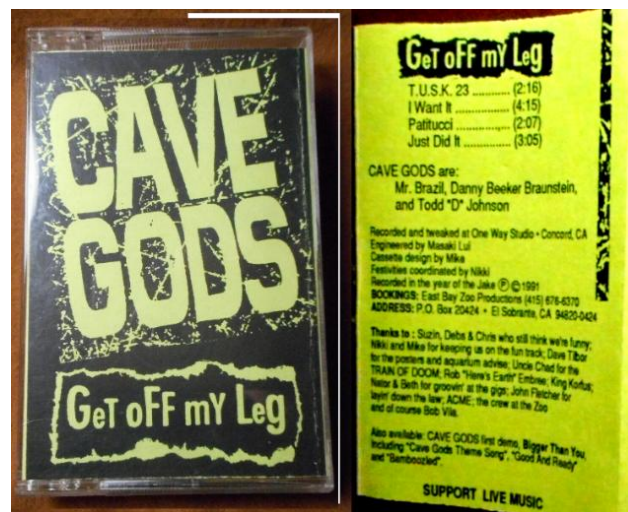
This image dates to the early 1970s and shows the Shell station as it looked then—not much different than it did before the current remodel. At the time (according to an ad in the Berkeley Gazette from 1973), attendants were eligible to overtime

pay, a uniform, and partially paid medical benefits. Not too bad for a job that required no experience. In the background can be seen the old Rancho Elementary School, which was torn down in 1980.

Our Shell station has never garnered much attention; it has just operated quietly, but, apparently, efficiently, for well over 70 years. And, with a major remodel in the works, it may just be around for another 70 years. *Thanks to Roxy Miravalle for much of the detail in this article.*

It all started with a cassette I found for sale on ebay in 2019 described as "1991 Demo Tape Cave Gods El Sobrante, Ca.- Infectious Grooves type funk metal." I saved the photos because it referenced El Sobrante and I pooled all my resources trying to find some information about this funk metal band without success. I had forgotten all about the photos, until recently, and decided to post the cassette photos on our Facebook group to see if anyone else knew this group or had any clues as to who they were.

Unfortunately, no one remembered them or even heard of them (cue chirping crickets).



That is, until a member of the ESHS Facebook group, Bob Carpenter, posted a sleeve of a cassette he owned, which he mentioned was given to him by Brad Smith (brother of Chad Smith of the Red Hot Chili Peppers). Bob also noted that back then, he and Chad lived across the street from each other on Utah Drive in El Sobrante. This cassette was an earlier version to mine and had more names listed. I then attempted another search to find these band members. I found some ads for gigs they performed in nightclubs around the Bay Area; The Starry Plough in Berkeley; Paradise Lounge and Covered Wagon in San Francisco; and the Studio KAFE, a Santa

Rosa nightclub and FM radio station. They must have had a very short career because their name only appears in those entertainment ads from 1990 to 1991; and no mention of them playing anywhere after that. I eventually found one of the vocalists listed, Claudia Knauer and sent a message to her via FB. She responded, but unfortunately, didn't remember the Cave Gods. She did, however, remember going to a gig somewhere in the Bay Area that Brad invited her to, but not much else about them. She joined our [FB group](#) and [posted a little bio](#) about her long career in the music industry. I then searched for Brad Smith and found an email for him which I used to reach out to him. Not knowing if it was still a current, working email, I waited for either a response or a bounce-back error message. Two hours later I got a response with a single line: "You found me." I was so excited to find the founder of this group, I immediately responded asking him all kinds of questions. Here is the response from Brad.

Hi Roxy:

"We performed all over the Bay Area. We played mostly original songs but also did some covers. We made two recordings. We all are now all scattered around the US. I live in Milwaukee. Todd lives in Lincoln, NE. Danny is in Boston. I've lost touch with Rob. Jill Coleman, now lives in Portugal. One claim of fame is that my younger brother is Chad Smith, drummer for the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Chad sat in with us a few times that was always a circus. I lived in El Sobrante from 1987-1993 at 4419 Utah St. I have video and more audio if you need it. We'd be honored to be part of your musical history." -Brad

Brad was also kind enough to send me a photo of the band members from the early years. He mentioned: "I formed the group by putting want ads in [BAM](#) (a local music industry publication). I am still in the music business as an executive for Hal Leonard. HL is the world's largest songbook and instrument method publisher. So now I help make more musicians."

Brad gave me an email for Jill Coleman, and I reached out to her as well. She responded: "I do remember the Cave Gods. I sang with them and Claudia in the studio and subsequently at a couple of gigs. It was so much fun! I'm sorry I don't remember much more about the details." Jill moved to Europe in 1996 and is now a private English Teacher in Portugal.

Now, everyone knows a little something about this small group and its members that started out in El Sobrante and faded from our memory banks.



L-R: Brad Smith: Guitar & Vocals; Todd Johnson: Drummer; Rob Embree: Keyboard; Danny Braunstein: Bassist.

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.

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