

SHADI HISTORY ROOM RIBBON CUTTING: Over sixty people attended the grand opening of the Dorothy and Sundar Shadi History Room in City Hall on August 22nd, including reporters, city staff Karen Pinkos and Suzanne Iarla, current and former mayors Janet Abelson, Bill Jones, Jane Bartke, Letitia Moore, Mae Ritz, Norm La Force and Rich Bartke. Our Society president related the story of three junior high school girls sitting atop Rust Summit over thirty five years ago and coming up with the idea of a place to store and display historic archives and artifacts. They put their ideas on paper and gave them to then mayor, Rich Bartke. That spark led to the founding of the El Cerrito Historical Society the following Spring, 1974. Significant donations made by Society member Sundar Shadi made the young girls' vision come true.

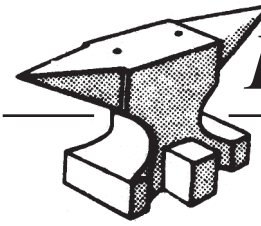
The ribbon was jointly cut by the Mayor and the Society president, symbolic of the partnership in the History Room in City Hall. Karen and Suzanne from the City served beverages and hors d'oeuvres. The History Room's glass display case contains an adobe brick from the Castro Adobe (where the Plaza now stands), folk art made by Sundar Shadi (on loan from the El Cerrito Community Foundation) and a beautiful display of TEPCO china (on loan from Society members Lynn Maack and Sandi Genser-Maack).

HISTORIC JAPANESE FLOWER GROWERS PHOTO DISPLAY: The Historical Society's exhibit of photos depicting Japanese flower growing industry in El Cerrito and Richmond is on display at City Hall in the upstairs gallery. The Society developed this exhibit to recognize the contributions the Japanese nursery community made to our heritage for more than 100 years. The exhibit will be on display through October 7.

EL CERRITO PRESCHOOL CO-OP ANNIVERSARY: The Historical Society has been contacted by the leadership of the preschool about its 70th anniversary in October. Of course the Society agreed to take part. The school, started in 1940, is said to be the second-oldest co-op preschool west of the Mississippi (one in Berkeley is a few months older).

DONATIONS: Thank you to local resident, Esther Sargeant for donating three scrap books. One is about Sundar Shadi's flower gardens; a second is about Sargeant's work to establish a Blue Star memorial at City Hall; and the third is about El Cerrito's renowned "Heritage Rose Queen", Miriam Wilkins.

JANUARY MEETING: Gregg Cook, a former mayor, has agreed to recount for us the history of EColgy and the founding of the El Cerrito Recycling Center, reputed to be the first one west of the Rockies and still one of the most successful in the area. We hope to get a tour scheduled before the City razes and then rebuilds the Recycling Center.



El Cerrito Historical Society

P O Box 304, El Cerrito, CA 94530
elcerritohistoricalsociety@yahoo.com
www.elcerritowire.com/history

Vol. 26
No. 4

The Forge

September 2010

The Official Publication of the El Cerrito Historical Society, Copyright © 2010

**OUR NEXT MEETING - 12 NOON ON SATURDAY,
SEPTEMBER 25TH AT EL CERRITO HIGH SCHOOL**

The Historical Society and the El Cerrito High School Archiving Project will be co-hosting tours of twenty historical displays at the new El Cerrito High School. The one-hour tours of the new school buildings will focus on the history of the school and its relationship with the city. A number of former and current faculty members will be on hand to explain some of the interesting things accomplished by El Cerrito High students over the years. You may join a tour led by a student or you may pick up a map and visit the displays on your own. Refreshments will be available and items from both organizations will be for sale. For more details contact Joann Steck-Bayat at jsbayat1@comcast.net or call Joann at (510) 524-9464.

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a volunteer, non-political, non-profit organization with one agenda: to locate and preserve our local history. Anyone may join; dues are \$20 (Household member), \$50 (Sponsoring member), and \$250 (Life member).

Longtime Scout tells the story of Camp Herms

In the 1920s, people knew how to get things done. Consider George Friend, a developer who built himself a rambling, Spanish Revival home on Arlington Boulevard in 1929 – directly across the street from the Bates and Borland Quarry.

Sounds like it would be a noisy spot. But not so, Friend noticed. In fact, he concluded, the quarry might be ready to close.

If so, he thought, “We can buy it and make a Boy Scout camp out of it,” George Fosselius told a crowd of seventy people at the Historical Society’s May meeting, which was held at Camp Herms and included a tour of the Camp.



George Fosselius speaks to ECHS members in the recently-restored lodge

lovingly removed so we could insulate behind it and put back,” Fosselius said. “They did a very good job restoring its look and feeling.”

Adding to the lodge’s resemblance to a hunting lodge are the mounted animal heads that stare down at visitors. During the renovation, someone suggested removing them to make the room more appealing for weddings. But true scouts would have none of it.

Today, the most prominent resident of the main hall is the head of a moose that was mounted in 1892, it was discovered during the renovation.

Fosselius, like many boys in the area, owes much to Camp Herms, which was named in 1939 for William Herms, a UC Berkeley scientist who led the Boy Scout Council during the camp’s founding.

Fosselius started coming to the camp in the 1950s. “I never stopped coming,” he said. A retired teacher, he’s become the camp’s leading historian.

The camp quickly proved useful, hosting a rodeo and barbecue for 1,000 scouts in 1931. That year also saw the scouts build what they insisted was “the world’s tallest totem pole.” By 1932, they were studying the stars through their own observatory.

During the Depression, many boys who couldn’t afford to go to the Boy Scout Camp in the Sierra enjoyed camping in El Cerrito instead. “Boys could grab their gear and walk here from Berkeley,” Fosselius

The price would be ten thousand dollars, Friend and his fellow Boy Scout backers (“good old boys in Berkeley, men who wanted to stay boys”) were told in early 1930. How about \$7,000, they countered. They ended up striking a deal with Bates and Borland for \$8,500.

A few months later, on June 7, 1930, Camp Berkeley, as it was originally called, was in business as a Scout camp. The approximately 25-acre camp is celebrating its 80th birthday in high style, having recently spent \$1.7 million to rebuild and restore its rustic lodge, a marvelous building that’s used for scout functions, can be rented for events, and hosted the society’s meeting.

“Every board in this room was

said. The cost was \$3 a week, with free food supplied by Charles Wolfe, a supporter from Richmond.

Much work was done during the Depression by the federal Works Progress Administration, whose masons built the now-historic rock walls and the camp’s most impressive feature, a stone swimming pool that’s fronted by a bath house based on a Mayan water temple.

“I brought a theology professor here one time,” Fosselius said. “He looks at it and goes, ‘Chac Mool, the cereal goddess!’”

Although the wooden roof is long gone and the pool hasn’t been used since the drought of 1977 and high heating bills convinced the Scouts to close it, the pool remains perhaps the most awesome structure in El Cerrito. It was never a great place to swim, however, several former scouts who attended the talk recalled. The El Cerrito Hills are cold, they said, and about the pool’s heating mechanism, one said, “That’s news to me.”

Plans call for filling in the pool, and perhaps creating an arena for campfires and other events. The walls of the pool and the bath house will be preserved, Fosselius vowed. “If I have to chain myself to the building when the bulldozers come, I’ll do it.”

Other buildings at Camp Herms include six open-air shelters on the hillside called Dogpatch, the former Sea Scout storage house, and several buildings used for crafts and other programs.

The only time Camp Herms ceased serving scouts was during World War II, when the Army occupied the site in 1942. The scouts were back in 1943, though, filling every flat parcel with victory gardens.

A rim trail circles the camp, offering fine views into Wildcat Canyon Regional Park. Scouts have often hiked from the camp into Wildcat Canyon Park and the adjacent Tilden Park, though they have to take to city streets for part of the trek. Fosselius hopes to blaze a trail directly from the camp into the park one day.

Other projects he’s hoping to accomplish include reducing fire danger by eradicating eucalyptus trees and removing invasive scotch broom.

Fosselius also has another project: collecting oral histories from scouts who visited Camp Herms since 1958. “If you have any scouting stories I want to know them,” he said. “I’ll help you get them down. Otherwise, we’re going to lose them.” To share your stories of local Scouting and Camp Herms please send a note to George Fosselius. His e-mail address is george@mdsc-ic.org. *by Dave Weinstein, Vice President*

#

The Historical Society offers its hearty thanks to the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council of Boy Scouts of America for facilitating our May meetings and for preserving and caring for historic Camp Herms.

Camp Herms is on James Place, just above El Cerrito’s Arlington Park.



Stone walls built by the WPA enclose the old swimming pool