

# El Cerrito Historical Society

## Accomplishments in 2018

**Programs.** The society put on eight successful programs during 2018. These included:

Our annual meeting, which featured a talk by Gary Prost on **El Cerrito's deep history – its rocks and geological dramas**. Among its virtues, the talk focused on our city, showing its position during the many ages of geological time, and showed images of the city today as affected by the Hayward Fault.

In March, anthropologist and author Bev Ortiz gave a riveting talk on “**Native People of El Cerrito: Past, Present, and Future.**” Each of these programs pulled in crowds of 60 people.

In May, the Historical Society took part in several talks and walks that were part of the annual Hillside Festival, including a walk led by Dave Weinstein on the **history of the Hillside**, and a talk by Richard Schwartz on **Early California Indian Life in the El Cerrito area**. The historical society will take part again in the festival in 2019, from May 3 to 5.

Our most popular event of 2018 was our July walk, **Sunset View Cemetery** tour, led by board member Tom Panas, which attracted 120 people who enjoyed a thorough and lively tour that included a visit to the grave of TV actor Robert Culp.

In early August, Dave led an **architectural walking tour of the Hills** that attracted about 70 people; and in October the society sponsored an rsvp-required open house in two mid-century modern homes in the hills, “**The International Style in El Cerrito.**”

In November, Chris Horn led our ever popular tour of **El Cerrito's Gambling Past**. Attendance was low because of air quality caused by the Camp Fire. Chris will repeat this tour in 2019.

**Other community outreach.** The historical society hosted a booth during the popular **July 4 WorldOne Festival**, featuring information about local history, our annual historical quiz, and more. Board members Pat Shaw and Barbara Hill represented the society at the annual 4th Annual **El Cerrito Resource Fair in October**, an event aimed largely at seniors. Dave gave a brief history of El Cerrito to a meeting of the Pinole Rotary Club in July. We also displayed our **photo exhibit about the Japanese-American flower growers** of El Cerrito and Richmond at Korematsu Middle School in El Cerrito, thanks to Chris Sterba.

**Archiving and collecting.** Among several important additions to our archive during 2018 were an immense trove of old **El Cerrito Journals**. This is important because many issues of this long running newspaper are not available in any form. Tom Panas, who made this acquisition, is working to digitize it, which will be a boon to historians and the curious public alike.

Other 2018 acquisitions included: The well organized **archive of the El Cerrito Democratic Club. Circus material from the late Dan Marcks**, El Cerrito's remarkable circus scholar and impresario and publisher of Circus World magazine. This was a donation from Playland-not-at-the-Beach, which most unfortunately ceased operations and sold its collection this year.

In an important step, Tom Panas oversaw the **digitalization of the Chung Mei Chronicles**, a publication of the old Chung Mei orphanage, which operated in town from the late 1920s to the 1950s. These are documents that are very important to Asian-American history. Making them available online will be an important contribution.

We also received a truly historic document, a **resolution from the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors in favor of El Cerrito's incorporation**, dated August 20, 1917. Another unusual item that came to the society is an attractive banner from an early 20<sup>th</sup> century lodge in town, the **Order of the Owls**.

**Filmmaker Dan Holzner** donated several of his films to the society, including two about the **history of the city's recycling center**. **Christian Wimmer of KCRT TV** donated a DVD of El Cerrito's **Centennial parade** to the society. **Frankie Fischer** donated a **video recording of Chris Strachwitz** and others reminiscing about Down Home Music, Arhoolie records, and artist and cover illustrator wayne Pope, at Wayne Pope Day earlier this year at City hall Plaza.

**Friends of the Cerrito Theater** donated several items from the early days of preserving the Cerrito Theater, including news clips and display boards.

**Preservation.** Tom Panas has been working closely with historic preservation consultants as they study potentially historic sites throughout town. Tom has prepared a thorough "context statement," to provide the **historical context behind city buildings**.

The society brought to the city's attention that one of the oldest houses in town, **the Rodini house** at 1715 Elm Street, is suffering damage through neglect, with broken windows failing to protect interiors. The city has said there is little they can do.

The society applauded the great job Eden Housing and the city did in restoring the **former Mabuchi florist** and installing historical panels about the Japanese-American community in El Cerrito.

**Research:** **Barbara Hill** researched the **history of a home** at 6332 Barrett Avenue on behalf of someone doing a house history, and also of a **home on Don Carol Drive** – discovering along the way how that street got its name. "Don" and "Carol" were the children of builder Hans Peter Christiansen. Barbara also began researching the history of El Cerrito's city hall, through all its several permutations. **Joanne Rubio** has continued her research into the history of the **Castro family** and early life in what later became El Cerrito. This has involved much outreach to members of the Castro family.

**Publications:** Much of our own research appeared in our two publications, the hard copy Forge, and the online Sparks from the Anvil. (Both titles refer to blacksmith William Rust, an early resident of our town.)

In 2018, we published two editions of Forge and three of Sparks. Topics included an early stagecoach that passed through town, El Cerrito and the Civil War, early El Cerrito resident and World War I casualty Louis Hagen, tributes to the late society members Lucille Irish and Paul Grunland, and upcoming historical tours, talks and other events.

Throughout the year, our **webmaster Debbie Weeks** kept the public informed of society events and provided much historical information about our city on our lively website.

### **Also in 2018:**

Throughout the year, **Pat Shaw**, our treasurer, handled the unheralded but all important task of overseeing the society's **finances** and paying our bills.

**New board member.** In January 2018, **Chris Horn** joined the board and became our vice president. He has been leading tours and writing for our publications, among other activities. The society also wished well its departing board member, historian **Chris Sterba**. Chris has played an important role in researching local history and promoting cultural events in our city.

**At its 2018 annual meeting, the society honored Dan Holzner** for the many videos of our historic events he has produced for the society, primarily Historical Society programs.

## Goals for 2019

**Preservation ordinance.** The society will work with city planners and historical consultants to develop a survey of historic places in El Cerrito and consider establishing a preservation ordinance.

**Programs:** We plan two program on **Creedence Clearwater Revival**, the great rock band from El Cerrito, to honor John Fogerty and band members on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the year that saw them established as an important band, more than single-hit wonders. Other program will focus on **gambling in El Cerrito**, the rise and fall of **local journalism**, a tribute to **El Cerrito pioneers**, and more.

**Space for our collections.** The society has a wonderful office and archive room in city hall, the Shadi Room. But as our collections expand we need more space. We continue to investigate possibilities.

**Digitize El Cerrito Journals.** We intend to create searchable, digital versions of the El Cerrito Journal that will be available to professional historians and lay persons alike..

**Oral histories.** The society has been working to do oral histories with people important in our town, including video oral histories, with the goal of making these available online.

**Outreach to young people.** We are working to increase our outreach to schools, youth groups, and other younger people.

**Expand and widen participation in the society including on the board.** The society is working to recruit people from a variety of cultures and ages to take part in our work, from leading tours and doing research to providing input and serving on the board. Interested? Let us know!