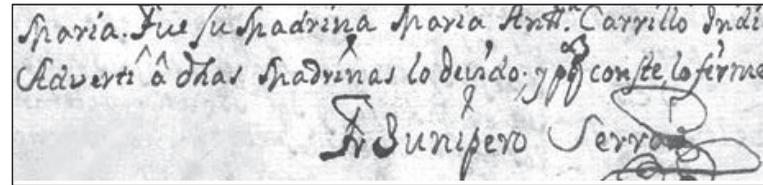


The Early California Population Project

Thanks to the Huntington Library, there is a terrific new web-based research tool now available to help researchers studying the original settlers of California. The Early California Population Project (ECP), a database developed by the Huntington Library, provides public access to all the information contained in the California mission registers from 1769 - 1850. Within the baptism, marriage, and burial records of each of the California missions sits an extraordinary wealth of unique information on the Indians, soldiers, and settlers of Alta California. But the vast potential of California's mission records has in many ways remained unexploited. The original registers are scattered across California and too old and too brittle to handle. Microfilm copies of the registers exist in archives but are of poor quality and often hard to locate. Understanding the registers--written as they are in eighteenth-century Spanish script--demands rare skills and effort. Lacking adequate staff and resources to facilitate genealogical and historical research, libraries, archives, missions, and dioceses each year turn away countless individuals who are eager to study early California's Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo-American inhabitants.

The construction of databases based on mission records has proven to be extremely time-consuming and challenging. And when databases have been created, their structure and design necessarily have been narrowed by specific research questions and, until recently, technological limitations on the amount of information that could be stored and managed in a computer file. Thus, out of the desire to establish a new resource for the study of California before 1850, the Early California Population Project was born.

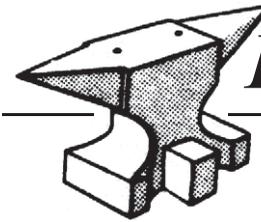


Father Junipero Serra's words and signature

The ECP now offers great opportunities for the study of the people and communities of early California. All basic data entry for the project was completed in June 2006. The project has records on more than 101,000 baptisms, 27,000 marriages, and 71,000 burials performed in California between 1769 and 1850. No other region of colonial America that became part of the United States has a database of such an extensive set of vital records. The database encompasses records from 21 of the California missions, in addition to the Los Angeles Plaza Church and the Santa Barbara Presidio. The ECP database currently has more than 85 fields related to baptism records, 93 covering the marriages of individuals, and 46 concerning burial information.

The ECP originated in 1998 when Steven W. Hackel, associate professor of history at Oregon State University, envisioned a comprehensive relational database for early California. As general editor of the database, Hackel has played a leading role in designing the database, outlining the rules governing data entry, monitoring data entry, and providing content for the web site. Anne M. Reid served as Lead Data Entry Assistant. Robert C. Ritchie, director of research at The Huntington, oversees the project.

This information is courtesy of The Huntington Library, Early California Population Project Database, 2006. The ECP data can be accessed on the web at <http://www.huntington.org/Information/ECPmain.htm>



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**OUR NEXT MEETING: POTLUCK AT
1 PM SUNDAY, JANUARY 14TH AT THE SENIOR CENTER**

President's Message

Wayne Westover, a retired Contra Costa County Superior Court judge, will speak at the Historical Society's Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 14th. This will be our regular January potluck get-together at the El Cerrito Senior Center. The meeting will start with lunch at 1 PM. After lunch we will have elections and a brief business meeting. Judge Westover, who will talk about the development of the court system in Contra Costa County from the Spanish times forward, will follow. He is an excellent speaker and I am sure everyone will enjoy his presentation. If you come, try to bring a salad, a main dish, or a dessert. But even if you can't bring something, please feel free to attend and enjoy our lunch and program. Regarding the elections, I encourage anyone who is interested in running for office to speak to me, to any of the officers (Verne Odlin, Lucille Irish, Ruth Kibby, or Grace MacNeill), or to Don Falconer, the head of the Nominating Committee, about their interest. Fresh thoughts and opinions are always welcome.

At our October meeting we discussed historic preservation in some depth. We reviewed two current redevelopment projects where historic preservation is an issue: the Oishi/Sakai nursery redevelopment project in Richmond and the Rodini property redevelopment project in El Cerrito. This topic generated some very interesting conversation and excellent comments by a number of those present. We also reviewed a document the Society has put together on identifying historic houses in El Cerrito. The Board has now decided to publish this document as well as a companion document that reviews the oldest houses in El Cerrito. These documents will initially be published on (and downloadable from) our web site, but the Board may also decide to have them printed and sell them in the future if the cost is justified. ~ Tom Panas

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

New Book about El Cerrito released!

Former El Cerrito resident Neva Carpenter, who is 78 years old, recently completed a book about El Cerrito. The book was released to retailers on November 3rd. There is a book signing and discussion at the El Cerrito Library on December 12th at 7 PM. Although Neva now lives near Fresno, she lived the first 13 of her 78 years in El Cerrito. In those days, El Cerrito was still of course all farms and fields. The title of the book is *Harem Scarem in El Cerrito*. The book is a very charming account of those first 13 years and in it Neva vividly brings her childhood back to life. Reading her memories makes one feel as if the events are happening for the first time to both Neva and to the reader.

From a historical perspective, Neva's recollections and words are accurate. But just as important, she has recorded on paper a number of things about early El Cerrito that were previously only oral history. Without this book they would have probably have been consigned to the dustbin of history when the last old-timer who knew about them passed on. For example: she and her siblings rafted on and fished for pollywogs in the creek that ran through the area that was filled in to build El Cerrito High's athletic fields. They candled eggs at the chicken and egg ranch on Ashbury Avenue. They brought home for the family table buckets of mushrooms from the vast fields that surrounded their house. They collected pinecones at Sunset View Cemetery to burn in their fireplace. They went to "Dish Night" at the Cerrito Theater. They marched around bonfires at their schools on Halloween night. It's hard to believe these things (and more) all happened right here in El Cerrito.

There is plenty everyone can learn about El Cerrito from this book. It is now available at the Arlington Pharmacy, the Contra Costa County History Center, the El Cerrito Community Center, the El Cerrito Natural Grocery store, the Glenn Custom Framing shop, and the JennyK gift shop. Both JennyK and The Glenn have agreed to make the book available by phone and by mail order as well. The book will also be available through the JennyK web site. Other merchants are expected to carry the book in the near future.

Harem Scarem in El Cerrito

Who would have thought that a certain sweet, elderly lady in the congregation of our church could actually be a latent John Steinbeck or William Saroyan? Not since reading Saroyan's *Collection of Short Stories* have I so enjoyed a 1920's and Depression years portrait of America as the one Neva Carpenter has so vividly brought to life in her written pictorial childhood memoirs, *Harem Scarem*. Reading Neva's memories makes one feel as if the events are happening for the first time to both the reader and the author. Neva didn't just write an autobiographical account of her life. She painted a picture to be imprinted in all of our memories, allowing each of us to actually own a little bit of her childhood experiences as if they were our own.

What makes the book exceptional is Neva's expansion of the narrative to include an omniscient account of all the book's prime characters, for example, the time her father lost his wallet. The reader experiences the events of Neva's life not only through Neva's eyes, but also through the eyes of her loved ones. This lets us gain an even more intimate understanding of the events that shaped her life. Neva's memories are pure genius; a testament to a family's struggles with life, hardship, and illness, all to be overcome by the great power of love that her family had for life and for each other.

- Christine Greaves



**Published by
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Harem Scarem in El Cerrito

Neva Carpenter

HAREM SCAREM IN EL CERRITO

**The Life of a Little Girl Growing up in
El Cerrito, California**



by
Neva Calvert Carpenter