

Likely sham evidence provided by the City of Albany in a desperate attempt to win the debate over the proper name for "Albany Hill".



Albany Hill as it will appear when the reservoir and scenic observation plaza construction and landscaping are complete.

**AN ALL TIME  
SOLUTION  
to the  
ALBANY HILL  
PROBLEM**



EAST BAY MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT  
512 SIXTEENTH STREET  
OAKLAND 4, CALIFORNIA

Albany Hill after its proposed surgery; plus the old drive-in - courtesy EBMUD

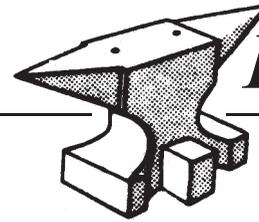
won the toss, with the help of a two-headed coin provided by "impartial moderator" Rich Bartke. Both sides traded charges and counter-charges and also presented a number of pieces of questionable evidence. Perhaps the best was the decree on the left, under which Albany claimed Albany Hill in any case because El Cerrito had never paid property taxes on it. After a "party line" vote, the debate ended in a tie and the parties moved on to more important things - the refreshments. (Other names used for the Hill have included *McKeever's Hill* (after an early landholder in the mid-late 1800's) - still in use by a few old-timers; and *Dupont Hill*, for the dynamite company once located there.)

The brochure pictured below illustrates an interesting near-miss in the history of Albany Hill. In 1953 EBMUD was trying to deal with potential problems of water storage and low water pressure. The District proposed some "minor surgery" to Albany Hill and the creation of a large reservoir. The cost of the excavation and disposal of the

excavated material were major challenges. A possible solution to this problem arrived in the form of the Santa Fe Railway. Santa Fe in those days ran a busy railroad along what is today the BART right of way and was very frustrated by the speed restrictions placed on its trains and by the large number of grade crossings between Richmond and Oakland. Coincidentally, Santa Fe owned the tidelands along San Francisco Bay, from Richmond to Emeryville.

This appeared to be a match made in heaven. The Santa Fe would purchase the excavated material from EBMUD and use it to fill in the tidelands, letting them create a direct, high-speed railroad with few or no grade crossings. EBMUD even successfully obtained options on the land it needed for the project. But the District seriously underestimated the vociferous opposition to the project that materialized almost immediately within Albany. It didn't take very long for the water district to realize this was a fight that they couldn't win.

~ *The Historical Society thanks Richard Schwartz, Marsha Skinner, and Karen Sorenson for their contributions to this article.*



# El Cerrito Historical Society

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## The Forge

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**OUR NEXT MEETING: ANNUAL MEETING & POT LUCK LUNCH,  
1 PM SUNDAY, JANUARY 13TH, AT THE SENIOR CENTER**

### President's Message

Karen Sorenson, author of the new Arcadia book about the City of Albany, will speak at our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 13th. 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. I have read Karen's book and I can say that it is full of informative and entertaining facts. 2008 being the centennial year for Albany makes the book even more topical! I highly recommend it for anyone with the slightest interest or curiosity about Albany. I am certain everyone will enjoy Karen's presentation. If you come to the meeting, try to bring a salad, a main dish, or a dessert. But even if you can't provide a dish, please feel free to attend and enjoy our lunch and program. Regarding the elections, I encourage anyone who is interested in holding office to speak to me or to any of the officers (Rich Bartke, Lucille Irish, Ruth Kibby, or Grace MacNeill), about their interest. Fresh thoughts and opinions are always welcome.

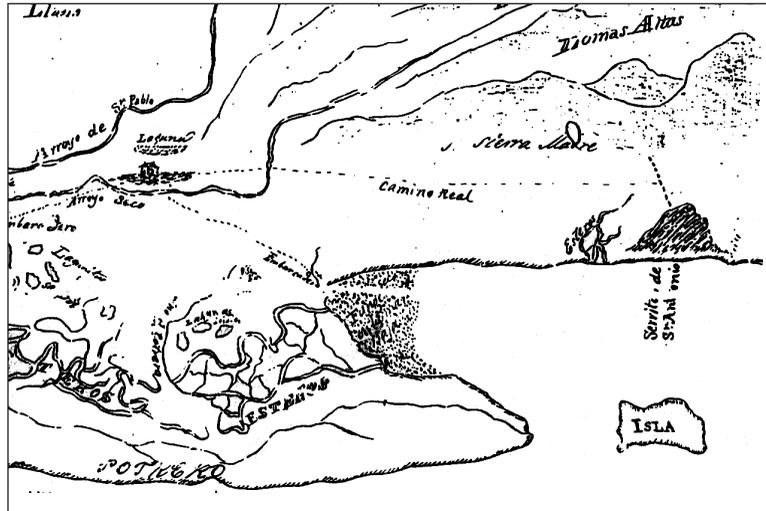
At our October meeting we discussed the City's proposed zoning ordinance and its effect on historic preservation. As the membership requested, a letter was sent to the City Council suggesting that residential structures be a part of our city's historic preservation effort. The letter also stated that the community as a whole needs to be closely involved in the process and that the Historical Society would provide whatever help it could.

Our speaker at the meeting was local Author Richard Schwartz. Richard outlined two stories from his new book "Eccentrics, Heroes, and Cutthroats of Old Berkeley". One was the story of the grudge that Lyle Sullivan had for the Hagens, early El Cerrito residents; the other was about the old Boswell Ranch. Richard accompanied his talk with some terrific slides, making for a show that was thoroughly enjoyed by the packed house. ~ *Tom Panas*

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).

# Serrito de San Antonio

What we call Albany Hill today was mapped and named by the Fages party in 1772. Records from the Fages party indicate that on March 27, 1772 they camped along a creek next to a hill



Part of an 1830 map of the area. Camino Real is now San Pablo Avenue. The road leading from the Castro home (between San Pablo and Wildcat Canyon Creeks) would roughly follow 28th Street today. Note that the map shows that almost of the land west of this road was wetlands. Courtesy L L Stein.

opposite what we now call the Golden Gate. As can be seen on the map above, they called the hill Serrito de San Antonio, or “Little Hill of Saint Anthony”.



An 1861 picture of Albany Hill taken by Carlton Watkins. Courtesy L L Stein.

Of course the local Huchiun Indian bands had known the hill for thousands of years, but as their traditions foreclosed the keeping of any kind of historical records (oral or written), we know little of what they thought of Albany Hill or how it figured into their lives. But there is ample evidence that the Huchiuns spent plenty of time near the hill.

Local lore says that the Fages party was not overly impressed with the Huchiuns they encountered near Albany Hill and that the Spaniards described the natives as having a very odd smell due to all the wild onions the natives ate and that the natives lived in smoke-filled huts. What the Indians thought of how the Spaniards smelled (after marching and riding their horses in leather clothes for hundreds of miles and who likely had not bathed for a long time) is unfortunately not recorded. But we do know that the local Indians were very friendly and caring towards their Spanish visitors.

Cerrito Hill was a landmark for the Spanish as soon as they arrived here. It must also have been one for the Huchiuns who lived here for thousands of years before the Spaniards arrived. Albany Hill was not always covered with trees in the manner it is today. As with the Berkeley and El Cerrito Hills, it was an almost treeless, grass-covered promontory until the Americans began planting trees in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The picture at the bottom of the first column was taken in 1861. It was part of the new American government’s review of the Peralta family’s claim of the Rancho San Antonio land grant and shows how the hill looked in those days.

Back then there were few structures, no freeways, no bridges, no smog. There was nothing to interrupt the landscape or distract the eye except for Serrito de San Antonio. The hill was cited in the description of the Castro Land Grant and in many subsequent documents, as shown in the example at the top of the next column,

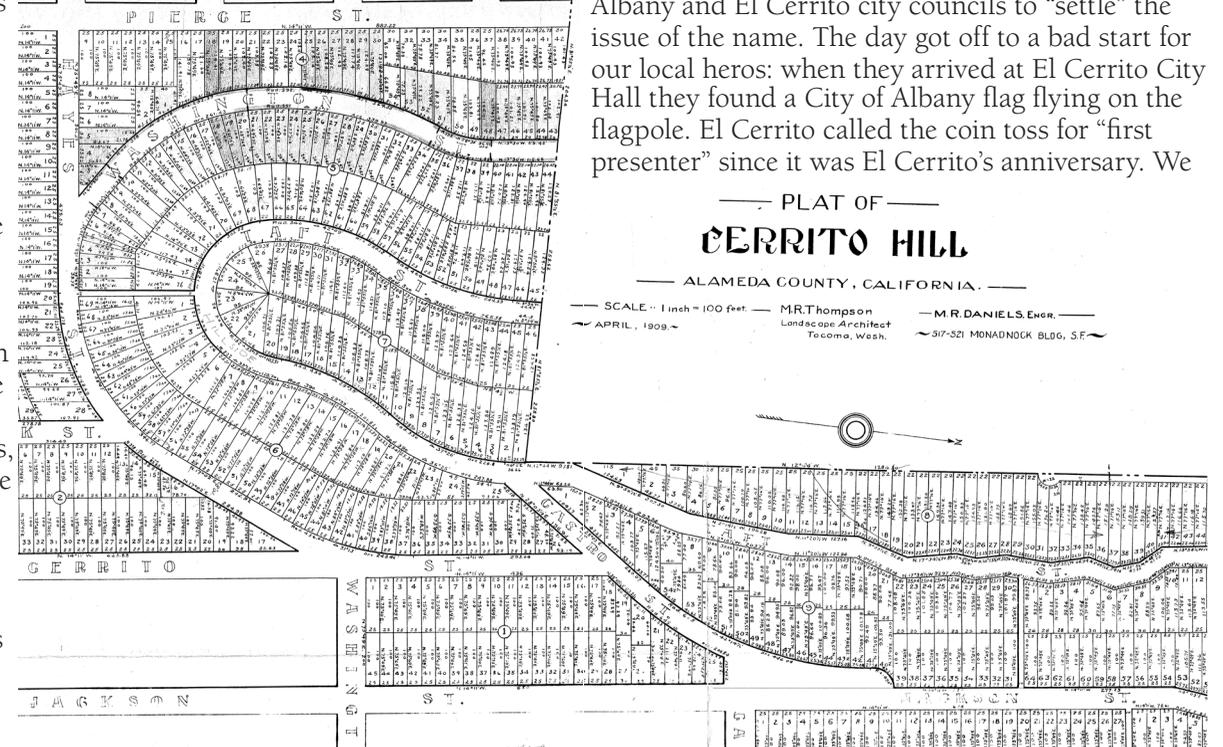
The name “Cerrito Hill” was used well into the 20th Century. The tract

*Overview or having rights and interest in or being upon the Rancho of San Pablo situated in the County of Contra Costa, State of California, containing just about leagues of land more or less, and bounded and described as follows. On the South by the Grants de San Antonio, on the North by the Rancho del Pineda and the Southern End by a high hill (Loma Alta) on the West by the Bay of San Pablo, in order to settle all disputes touching said Rancho, and make amicable partition thereof have agreed as follows:*

This illustrates the simple elegance the Spanish used to describe a 17,000 acre land grant. Note the reference to the “Loma Alta” (high hill), which is shown on the map in column 1.

map shown below of the “Cerrito Hill” tract clearly shows that the name “Albany Hill” was not in use in 1907. Similarly, a map of Albany’s Memorial Park from the early ’20s still shows the name as “Cerrito Hill”. Some time after this the name change must have been effected. Exactly when, if there is an exact date, is unknown. As part of the City of El Cerrito’s 70th anniversary celebration in 1987, a mock debate was held between the

Albany and El Cerrito city councils to “settle” the issue of the name. The day got off to a bad start for our local heroes: when they arrived at El Cerrito City Hall they found a City of Albany flag flying on the flagpole. El Cerrito called the coin toss for “first presenter” since it was El Cerrito’s anniversary. We



This 1907 tract map clearly shows that the Hill was called Cerrito Hill in those days. Courtesy of the City of Albany.