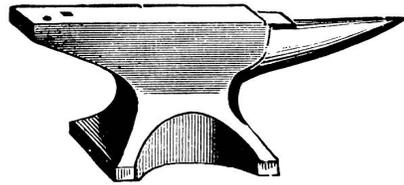


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AUGUST

Presentation on Lu Watters and
 Hambone Kelly's at annual
 meeting -- see Page 2



The Forge

DECEMBER 2020

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The El Cerrito Historical Society, P.O. Box 304, El Cerrito, CA 94530
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African American Pioneers

City's Earliest Black
 Residents Contributed
 to Wider Community

By Joanne Rubio

El Cerrito Historical Society

Between 1898 and 1930 four African American families came to live in the El Cerrito-Stege area. Some are considered "Black Pioneers" by historians, a term for people who moved to the state by the 1850s.

In 1900 the Black population of San Francisco was 1,654, out of a total population of about 343,000. Oakland had 1,026 Black residents out of about 67,000 in 1900. The El Cerrito-Stege area was sparsely populated, with about 600 people in 1900, and El Cerrito did not incorporate as a city until 1917. The northern section of what would become our city was known as Stege.

Some of these early residents were born in California to families who had arrived from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts and other



Walter and Mary Maddox were neighbors of Frank and Louisa Johnson in these homes on Potrero Avenue, pictured circa 1906. Mary and Louisa were sisters. Both houses are now gone. (Richmond Museum of History)

states. Others moved here from Texas, Delaware and New Orleans. One was born in France.

Also diverse were their occupations –nurses, a printer and pressman, a mason, a home builder, a worker at the Pullman railcar factory in Richmond, and a man who compiled timetables for the Southern Pacific Railroad, commuting to the firm's downtown San Francisco headquarters.

Walter George Maddox & Mary E. White Maddox, in El Cerrito 1898-1927

The Southern Pacific executive was Walter George Maddox, who with his wife Mary "Mamie" White Maddox became the earliest Black family to live in the area later called El Cerrito.

Walter and Mamie bought land from Edith (Dougherty) Stege, the

Continued on Page 3

Hambone Kelly's

Join us online for our annual meeting

The El Cerrito Historical Society presents: **A Co-Op Night Club???**
Lu Watters' Great Experiment, a presentation by **Chris Sterba**

Historical Society member Chris Sterba will give a free talk at 3 p.m. Jan. 31 on Hambone Kelly's, a cooperative night club created by jazz legend Lu Watters.

From 1947-1950, Watters and his band not only owned and managed the club, but also lived on the premises, played music and cooked meals for hundreds of patrons each week. Hear this exciting story and how El Cerrito was home to a very creative music scene after World War II.

Chris Sterba is a

lecturer in American Studies at San Francisco State University and a longtime El Cerrito resident.

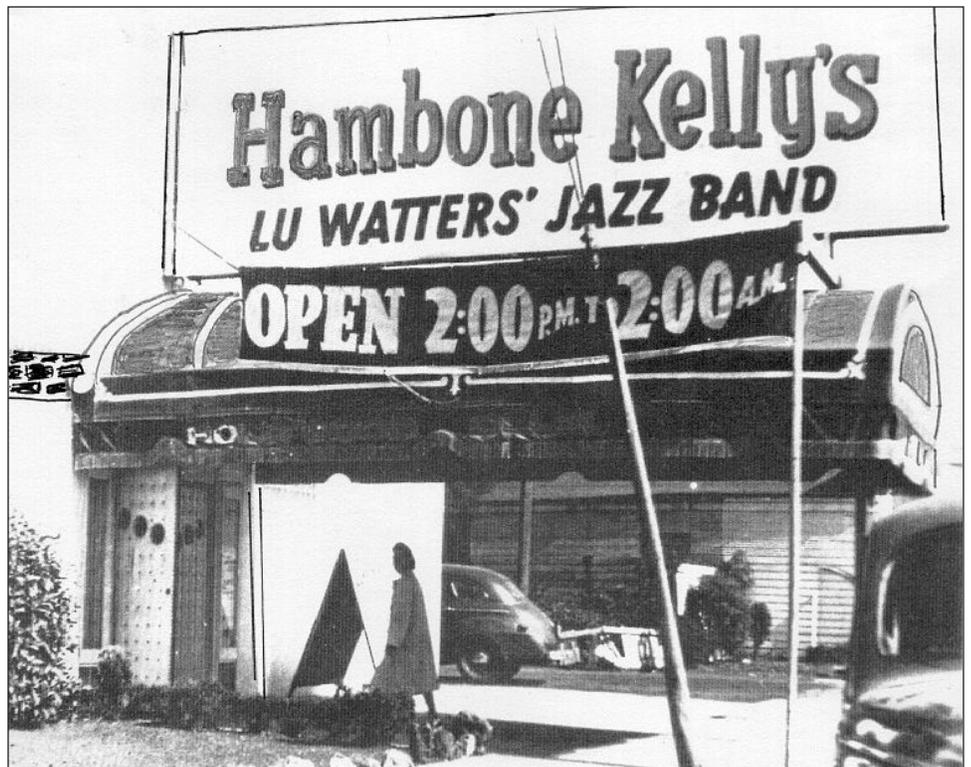
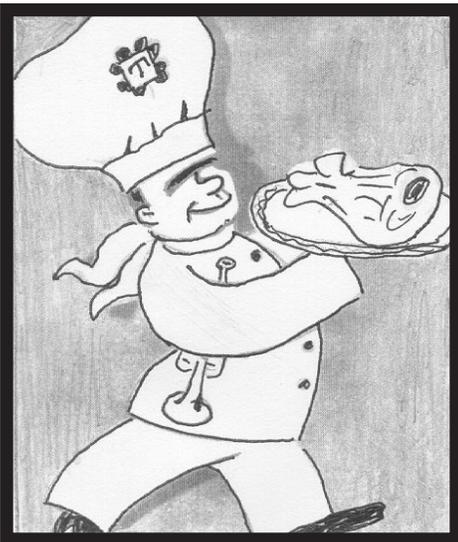
This is the society's annual meeting and will be held remotely via Zoom. We will conduct business for about 15 minutes before the presentation.

Go to our website, www.elcerritohistoricalsociety.org for a link to the presentation and login information.

For information, contact Dave Weinstein, 510-524-1737, or davidsw Weinstein@yahoo.com.



Above, Lu Watters plays trumpet as Turk Murphy watches at Hambone Kelly's. Below left, a menu illustration. Below right, the entrance to Hambone Kelly's, which opened as the Hollywood Club in the mid-1930s and later operated as Sally Rand's Club.





1875-1914 - Original Southern Pacific Depot with Administration building behind the passenger depot at 3rd and Townsend in San Francisco. Walter Maddox commuted from Stege to San Francisco. He continued to work here after the new depot was built in 1914 until his retirement in 1939. (Calisphere)

daughter of a large landowner in the area. This was 12 years before Edith Stege would subdivide the land, forming the East Shore Park tract. The Maddox family built a home at 3644 Potrero Ave. at 36th Street, where they raised a son, Raymond, and a daughter, Annette. The home no longer stands.

They lived in El Cerrito until 1927. For many years Mamie's sister and her husband also lived on Potrero next door to the Maddox family.

Walter (1868-1957) and Mamie (1873-1962) were both prominent members of their community, locally and beyond. When Walter died at the family ranch near Orland, a Central Valley agricultural area west of Chico, in 1957 at age 88, the Sacramento Bee called him "a retired Southern Pacific Company official and one time state and national figure in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"He started his career with the Southern Pacific company as a young man and worked up to one of its most responsible positions," the paper reported. "He was for many

years chief time table compiler, with headquarters in the company's main office in San Francisco."

Mamie and Walter were both born in California, Walter in Sacramento and Mamie in San Jose. Their parents were considered Black pioneers and were part of the small Black community in the Bay Area.

Mamie's family was living in San Jose as early as 1856, having moved to California from Massachusetts. Her father, Alfred J. White, was born in Pennsylvania, and her mother, Rebecca, was born in South Carolina 30 years before the Civil War. Mamie's dad owned a barbershop in San Jose and her mom was a private nurse.

Mamie's father was one of 49 delegates to the "First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California" in 1855. Mamie's mother was recognized by name at the end of the proceedings for her support along with others attending.

Walter's father was born in Wisconsin and his mother in Maryland. His parents were living in California in the 1860s. By 1868 they had married and settled in Sacramento. In

Editor's note

For much of the 20th century, covenants established by many real estate developers forbade sale to Blacks, Asians and sometimes other minorities. Other forms of discrimination including redlining by banks, also made it hard and at times impossible for Black people to buy or own homes. It is not known to what extent other forms of discrimination affected Black families in El Cerrito city during the early years of the 20th century.

1877 they moved to San Francisco, where Walter's father, like Mamie's, worked as a barber.

Walter grew up on Bryant Street in San Francisco. When he was out of high school, Walter moved to Powell Street and worked as a molder and then a messenger. About 1890, at age 22, he started working for Southern Pacific.

Walter worked his way up the organizational chart with the Southern Pacific. Walter's friendliness and his ambition seem to have contributed to his success.

As recounted in 'Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco,' by Douglas Henry Daniels, a professor of Black studies and history at UC Santa Barbara, "Walter G. Maddox won a position as timetable expert for the Southern Pacific Railroad because he befriended the elderly white man who held the job."

Daniels wrote, "Many Black workers depended upon their contacts with influential whites."

In 1894 Walter Maddox helped start an African American weekly news-

paper, the Western Outlook, whose banner proclaimed the publication to be “devoted to the interests and the betterment” of conditions for African Americans. He was secretary of the company in 1896.

Walter Maddox held some prominence in the Stege community. In May of 1912 he was among the speakers at a meeting of the Citizens’ Progressive League of the communities of Stege and Pullman, which was discussing whether to incorporate or accept annexation to Richmond. In October of 1912 he was elected treasurer of the league as members petitioned Richmond for civic improvements as part of the annexation.

When the NAACP opened a chapter in Northern California in 1915 Walter joined and ended up in leadership roles. The first president of this NAACP branch, Walter A. Butler, was related to Mamie through marriage.

Both Mamie and Walter Maddox were involved in several organizations in the Black community in San Francisco and Oakland.

Mamie was a woman with energy and verve, as seen in this report from The Western Outlook in December 1915:

“Raymond E. Maddox, accompanied by his mother, left by machine (i.e., automobile) on last Sunday for their ranch at Orland en route via Sacramento. They go to do a little pioneering and to prepare the way for some of the possibilities of the 20-acre tract of land they have recently acquired.”

Walter Maddox, who was born in Sacramento, apparently never lost his fondness for the Central Valley.

In 1915, during the early days of local irrigation development he bought a ranch in the Loam Ridge subdivision in Orland and planted an orchard. He continued his work in San Francisco while Ray ran the ranch. Ray began working there after



1930 Aerial View of Stege. The Maddox and Johnson families lived on Potrero, which runs from top center to middle left of photo. The area was owned and developed by Edith Stege, who started selling land in 1898. She developed this as “East Shore Park” housing development in 1910. (El Cerrito Historical Society collection, courtesy of the Richmond Museum of History)

he returned from France, where he spent 1917 and 1918 as a sergeant during World War I.

In 1927 The Western Outlook portrayed Mamie as something of a flapper, despite her 55 years, during the Seventh Annual Celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation.

“Dancing was kept up until 12:30 and Mac’s six-piece orchestra kept them stepping lively. Miss Helen Cady represented the Sacramento ‘Smart Set,’ and Mrs. Mamie Maddox represented the Yolo delegation.

“She is looking younger than ever,” the paper wrote of Mamie, “and was right up to the minute for style -- bobbed hair and abbreviated skirt, and really her son Ray had nothing on her; she danced everything but the ‘Charleston.’ ”

Ray, whom the magazine in this report called “the kid with the permanent smile,” had plenty to smile about. He married Helen the next year.

In 1927, Walter and Mamie moved to Presidio Avenue in San Francisco,

where Walter continued working for the railroad. The family also spent time on their ranch.

“After his retirement in 1939, Mr. and Mrs. Maddox moved to the ranch and they had made their home here with their son since that time,” his obituary reported.

The family continued to live on the ranch until Walter’s death in 1957.

“Walter Maddox Dies At Ranch Home Here, Was Retired SP Man,” the Sacramento Bee reported. He was interred at the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Orland.

Louisa White Johnson and Frank Johnson, in El Cerrito 1898- 1925

The story of Louisa (1864-1925) and Frank Johnson (1857-unknown) is similar to that of Walter and Mamie Maddox because Louisa was Mamie’s older sister.

Like the Maddox family, the Johnsons bought land from Edith Stege and built their home at 3650 Potrero, next door to the Maddox home. They



The house purchased by Felix and May Flint at 500 Fink Lane is now gone, but this house still in the same block is from the same time and likely similar in design. Fink Lane is now Portola Drive. (Chris Treadway)

moved in the same year as the Maddox family, 1898. This home, too, is gone.

Frank was born in Delaware in 1857 and was living in San Francisco by 1882. His parents were both born in Delaware before the Civil War.

He met Louisa in San Francisco and they married in 1885 in San Jose. By 1894 they were living in the rural community of Pleasanton and Frank was working as a "horseman."

When they moved to Stege, Frank at first worked for Southern Pacific. Over the years he worked as a printer, pressman, messenger, compositor, and a laborer for an iron works.

The 1920 Census shows that the Johnsons were renting a home in Oakland, where Frank worked as a coachman and Louisa as a private nurse. Before 1925 they were back at their home in El Cerrito.

Frank and Louisa helped to raise their niece Annette Maddox, born in 1899, who lived with them for a while. Annette attended schools in El Cerrito-Stege and in Oakland. When she was 20 Annette was working as a cashier and living at the Johnsons' home.

Louisa Marie White Johnson died in July of 1925 in El Cerrito. Her

obituary in the Oakland Tribune mentioned her survivors, husband, Frank Johnson, two sisters, Susie Fish and Mamie Maddox, and one brother, Howard White.

Felix Flint and May Fitzpatrick Flint, in El Cerrito 1900-1927

Felix Flint (1856-1917) arrived in the United States at age 6 from France, where his father was born. Felix's mother was French-Canadian. He grew up in Oakland and became a naturalized citizen.

May (1870-1951) was born in California. Her father, from Iowa, and her mother, from Missouri, came to California in the late 1860s. Both families lived in the Oakland-Berkeley area. Felix, who worked as a bricklayer, married May in Oakland in 1890.

The family may have been attracted to the El Cerrito-Stege area because of land and housing being advertised. The first subdivision was opened in the area in 1893, the Schmidt & Fink Tract.

Felix and May purchased one of these one-acre parcels a block east of the Santa Fe tracks at 500 Fink Lane, east of San Pablo Avenue not far

from the two other Black families. Fink Lane was later renamed Portola Drive. Their home is also gone.

By 1910 the family had grown to include six children between the ages of 3 and 17: Felix Albert, Lillian, Eva, Vivian, Samuel and Lewis. Three were born in their new community. Another daughter, Viola, was born after 1910.

Felix was working as a hod carrier, a person getting bricks for masons who are building homes, according to the 1910 census.

Felix, Sr. died of an unknown cause in 1917. His service was at Sunset View Cemetery. May and the children continued living in El Cerrito. May worked as a private nurse. Their oldest son worked as a machinist at the Judson Company steel plant in Emeryville. Lillian, the oldest daughter, worked as a store cashier/clerk.

When May's oldest son, Felix Albert, filled out his draft registration for World War I in 1917, he listed his address as Stege. But on Aug. 16, 1917 the town officially became El Cerrito after voters backed incorporation.

At the time, three of the children were still living with May. The older children had married or moved out.

Felix, Jr. did not serve in the First World War, but his youngest brother, Lewis Flint, served in World War II, as an Army corporal in France.

By the time of the 1920 census, May was still living in the home with three children and working as a private nurse. Felix was a machinist and Samuel was a "wicker worker." By this time El Cerrito's population had grown to 1,505.

In 1927 May bought a home in Berkeley. Her youngest son, Lewis, was still living at home and working as a floor layer. May remarried and continued living in Berkeley or Oakland until her death in 1951, age 80. All six of her children were still



California State Federation of Colored Women's Club meeting in Oakland, 1915. (African American Museum & Library at Oakland)

living and had families of their own.

Jesse Grant Matthews and Ella Nettles Matthews, in El Cerrito 1929 - 1934

Jesse and Ella Matthews lived in El Cerrito for a short time starting in 1929. He helped to build homes in El Cerrito as the town was growing. The family lived at 429 Richmond St., where the Plaza BART Station is today.

Jesse Grant Matthews (1881-1961) was born in Louisiana. He grew up in a large family on a farm in the hill country northeast of New Orleans. Jesse and his three older sisters were working on the family farm in 1900.

When Jesse was in his early twenties he moved to New Orleans, where he worked as a plasterer. Two of his older sisters joined him in New Orleans.

Jesse was soon working in various building trades, including as a plasterer contractor.

In 1909 Jesse married Emma LeBlanc in New Orleans. He was 28 and Emma was 17. Her family had lived in New Orleans for many years.

By 1917, when he registered for the draft, Jesse and Emma were living

on Pear Street in New Orleans and he was working as a painter.

By 1920 Jesse and Emma owned their own home on Pear Street. Unfortunately, Emma died that year of an unknown cause.

Jesse moved to Los Angeles, where he met and married Winifred "Ella" Nettles a year later. She had been born in Texas in 1903.

In 1926 they were living on Oregon Street in Berkeley and were prosperous enough to take a trip to Jamaica in 1926 by steamship. By 1929 the Matthews are listed in the directory as living on Richmond Street in El Cerrito. Jesse was a self-employed home builder. He built the family home, whose value was given at \$4,000. Ella was a domestic worker in a private home.

By 1930 the population of El Cerrito had grown to 3,808.

After six years they moved to Los Angeles in 1935, where Jesse continued to build homes. He was still a self-employed home builder when he registered for the draft in 1942. Ella and Jesse continued to live in Los Angeles until his death in 1961.

A note from society President Dave Weinstein:

Today, Black residents, who make up 5.4 percent of El Cerrito's 25,500 people, play important roles in the community, in business, as educational and political leaders, in sports, religious and cultural activities and more.

As people in El Cerrito, along with people everywhere, are coming to understand and confront ingrained and often misunderstood prejudices and actions against Blacks and other people of color, it is timely to look back at the development of the city's Black community.

This is an ongoing project for the Historical Society. Consider helping us learn and publish more about the history of the Black community, and other communities of color, in and around El Cerrito.

Once conditions allow, we plan more programs about the Black community.

The only live program we were able to hold in 2020 dealt with Pumpsie Green, the baseball player from El Cerrito High School who integrated the last Major League team to bring on a Black player, the Boston Red Sox, in 1959. Green lived in El Cerrito.

Would you like to write some history yourself? We can help. A memoir about your life or your family? Would you be willing to take part in an oral history? Do you have family photos, photos of activities, or other documents or materials that could shed light on the lives of your communities for students in the future?

Contact davidsweinstein@yahoo.com.

'African American Pioneers'

By Joanne Rubio, Board Member, El Cerrito Historical Society

RESOURCES

Original Documents:
Voter Registrations
City Directories
State/Federal Census
Signature on "East Shore Housing Development"
Birth/Marriage/Obituaries
Books/Newspapers/Magazines

Books

Pioneer Urbanites, A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco, Douglas Henry Daniels, Univ. Cal. Press, c. 1990

Negro Trailblazers of California, Delilah Beasley, c. 1919
African American Citywide Historic Context Statement, San Francisco, 2016
Western Outlook - African American weekly newspaper, 1894-1928

Images of America, El Cerrito, 2005 by El Cerrito Historical Society

Citywide Historical Context Statement (Draft), El Cerrito Hist. Soc., c 2012

Sunny Side History Project, The First Black Family in Glen Park - <https://sunnysidehistory.org/2019/12/24/the-first-black-family-in-glen-park/>

Read The Western Outlook online. Back issues of the magazine Walter Maddox helped found are available thanks to The Portal to Texas History, which has scanned copies of the publication at https://texashistory.unt.edu/search/?sort=date_d&fq=str_title_serial%3AThe+Western+Outlook&start=72

Our Publications

The El Cerrito Historical Society produces two publications, the Forge, a print publication we aim to produce four times a year, and Sparks (from the Anvil), an email publication we aim to produce monthly. Both hark back to one of El Cerrito's original settlers, William Rust, a blacksmith who worked at his anvil producing, among other things, sparks.



Do you like the new look of the Forge? Help keep it going by donating. The society has upgraded our Forge newsletter with more pages, color photos some issues, and better stock. This drives up our costs. Please consider a contribution of \$25, \$50, or any amount. Send a check payable to the El Cerrito Historical Society to P.O. Box 404, El Cerrito CA 94530.

We need you!

Help us document and reserve the city's history by becoming a member of the El Cerrito Historical Society. Membership, a bargain at \$25 a year, is open to everyone and includes this newsletter, our email updates and meeting notices. More importantly, it assists our mission to locate, preserve and educate people about local history. A membership form is online under "How you can help" at www.elcerritohistoricalsociety.org.

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Diversity in Contra Costa County, 1852

From September to October 1849 delegates met in Colton Hall in Monterey to write California's first constitution.

An election was held in November all across California and the Constitution was approved.

By February 1850 Contra Costa County was one of the original 27 counties formed in California. Its original area much larger until 1853, when Alameda County was carved out of part of Contra Costa County and Santa Clara County.

The people living in Contra Costa County voted on the first Board of Supervisors in 1852. One of those first supervisors was Victor Ramon Castro of the "Cerrito Ranch" as Victor called his part of the Rancho San Pablo, the 17,000-plus acres granted to the Castro family in 1834.

The first California State Census we have of Contra Costa County was taken in July of 1852 and consisted of only 62 pages. It was the only time California did its own census. This was four years after the start of the Gold Rush.

The 1852 census is an invaluable tool but it also presents an interesting problem. Alameda County was split off from Contra Costa County in 1853 and it is uncertain whether the reported count in the 1852 census includes or excludes the residents of the soon-to-be Alameda County. Including them would accurately represent the population of the Contra Costa County as it existed in 1852 but make comparisons to subsequent census data harder. Adjusting the numbers by removing the resi-

According to the 1852 Census the population of Contra Costa County was as follows and included Amador Valley, Livermore, San Ramon, Pacheco and San Ramon:

White 2,491

946 U.S. Citizens, 1,545 Foreigners
1,937 Male 554 Female

Black 2

Male over 21 years old: 2

Mulatto 19

17 Male 2 Female Over 21: 14

Indian 278

156 Male 122 Female Over 21: 104

The census also counted the number of horses, mules, cows, beef cattle, oxen, bushels of barley, oats, corn, wheat, potatoes other produce (vegetables) grown, acres of land cultivated, number of quarts of milk and any mining operations.

By 1860 Contra Costa County was divided into three townships. The El Cerrito/Stege area was part of Township 1.

Township 1 - Martinez and San Pablo

(San Pablo included everything in West Contra Costa County in 1860)

Township 2 - Lafayette and Alamo

Township 3 - Antioch and Pacheco

dents of Alameda County would provide appropriate baseline data for future Contra Costa and Alameda County censuses.

The 1852 census record gives us insight into the diversity of the county at that time though many names are missing as the surviving document was partially burned at some point in time.

Most of the diversity in the county in the 1850s was by where people were from such as Mexico, Chile, France, Germany, England, Peru, Argentina, Canada, Italy,

Spain, Holland, Australia, Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Russia, Norway, Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and Belgium, as well as from around the United States.

Some of the occupations listed in the 1852 census were rancher, cowboy, laborer, carpenter, watchmaker, dairyman, secretary, merchant, teamster, hotel keeper, butcher, baker, cook, school teacher, doctor, storekeeper, domestic worker, gentleman, saloon owner, saddle maker and housekeeper.