

Sparks August 2021

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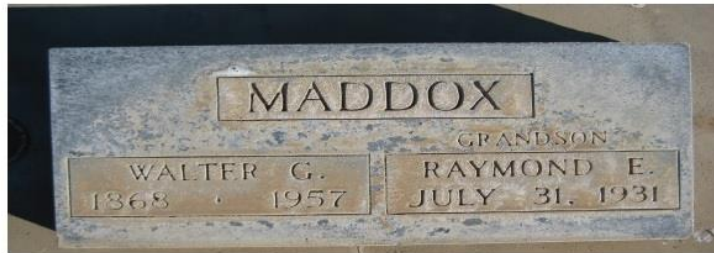


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Early Black resident helped found weekly newspaper



The gravestone for Walter Maddox is in the IOOF cemetery in Orland, Calif.

A glimpse of the legacy of El Cerrito pioneer Walter G. Maddox

By Jon Bashor

El Cerrito Historical Society members were introduced to Walter George Maddox in the December 2020 issue of this newsletter.

Maddox and his wife, Mary E. White Maddox, were the earliest Black family to live in El Cerrito, as Joanne Rubio wrote.

In 1971, Albert Butler sat down for a recorded conversation with Ruth Beckford, a noted African-Haitian dancer, teacher and author. Butler was the grandson of Alfred J. White, a member of a pioneering Black family and the father of Walter Maddox's wife, Mary "Mamie" E. White Maddox. White was the owner of a barber shop in San Francisco. A recording of their 90-minute conversation is available online, while the original tape is held by the African American Museum and Library at Oakland.

Butler's recollections tell of Maddox's hospitality, innate talents and his as a Black man who rose to a high position

in an industry dominated by white men: railroads.

About 10 minutes into the recording, Butler talks about going to live with his uncle and aunt, Walter and Mamie Maddox, in Stege, part of which became part of El Cerrito years later. Butler said he was "sort of raised by him." Butler describes himself as a "puny, under-developed kid," skinny "like a skeleton" and prone to crying. "They took me out to Stege, a little town, just a hamlet" where Maddox had obtained a plot of land, built a house and raised a couple of cows, Butler recalled. There was

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The July issue of the Forge leads with a look at how early Black papers covered the issues of the day – which are still the issues of today.

An early Black resident of El Cerrito helped found a weekly newspaper – back in 1894

In January, the historical society's hard copy magazine, The Forge, wrote about the very earliest Black families who lived in what later became El Cerrito, starting in the late 19th century. In the July 2021 Forge we take a closer look at one of these gentlemen, Walter G. Maddox, a self-made man who rose in the ranks of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

He was also a civil rights leader and founder of a popular newspaper that served the Black community on the West Coast for decades. Learn more about Maddox and newspapering in an enlightening article by El Cerrito journalist Jon Bashor in the latest Forge.

The Forge is sent free to members of the society, but anyone can [read it online](#). Wouldn't you love to be a society member? See below to find out how.

When El Cerrito raced through the hills



Rich Bartke donated a memento of the Hillside Run, a race sweatshirt, to the Historical Society.

Most of us recall that back in the 1970's there was a fitness craze. Folks were going to the gym, exercising at home, etc. Among the biggest attractions were jogging and running. Indeed, every week-end one could find local races; it seemed like every community had one. They were often referred to as "T-shirt races" because the sponsors often gave to those who paid the entry fee a T-shirt with the name of the race and/or community, and sponsor.

And so it came to pass that El Cerrito started one. It began with the city firefighters, who became fitness fans, and many of them ran.

The firefighters measured out a course that was exactly four miles and started and ended at Cerrito Vista Park. From the front of Contra Costa Civic Theater it went south on Pomona, then west on Waldo, and north along the BART path. The half-mile mark was just before reaching Moeser Lane.

The course then turned east, up Moeser Lane to Navellier. There it passed the one-mile mark. Turning north, the course went to the end of Navellier, across Potrero to Blake Street. There it turned west and went downhill to Elm. The runners ran north on Elm a block to Hill Street, then down to the BART path.

It was level going south on that path, to Moeser. Then came a left turn, and runners headed up Moeser to Cerrito Vista Park. Once in the park, the runners went right, around the path to the finish line in front of the bleachers.

One of the great things about this run was that after the race, all registered runners were treated to a barbecue lunch in the Community Center patio/garden.

It is thought that the first contest, of just firefighters, was in about 1974. By 1977 others were also competing. Within a very few years the Hillside Run became rather large, with usually well over 100 registered entrants.

In the early years the El Cerrito Firefighters challenged the Richmond Firefighters to a friendly competition on race day. Later the El Cerrito City Council challenged the Richmond City Council to race.

By the end of the 1970's, the City took it over, and its Park & Rec Department became the sponsor. After a few years the West County running club, the Zephyrs, sponsored it. That sponsorship ended, and the race became a "fun run", with no sponsor, no entry fees, and no T-shirts. That pattern continued until the last known run, September 17, 1995.

-- Rich Bartke, a regular participant in the run from 1979 to 1995, is a former president of the historical society and one of its founders. He also served on the City Council, and as our mayor.

Our August program: From Back Streets to Major Civic Event: El Cerrito's Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration



The Gumbo Band entertained at the 2021 Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in El Cerrito. Photo by Dave Weinstein

Patricia Durham, a founder of the 32-year old El Cerrito Martin Luther King Jr. Parade and Rally, will discuss how this event came to be. "Back then Martin Luther King Day was not a holiday in El Cerrito. Back then, we were only allowed to walk the back streets of the city," she recalls. Founders of the event, which was originally not sanctioned by the city, came from St. Peter Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and the El Cerrito branch of the NAACP.

Today, Durham, adds: "Not only is Dr. King and the Dream recognized as a holiday in El Cerrito, we now walk/drive down San Pablo Avenue." Durham is a historical society board member.

4 p.m. Saturday August 21, via [Zoom](#).

Meeting ID: 889 0025 3478 Passcode: 143031. +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

The Society thanks new and renewing members and donors: Lisa Caronna-Perley; Robert and Lynn Hrubes at the supporters level; Jon and Katherine Meurer; Chris Treadway, Gabriel Quinto and Glen Nethercut.

Marvin Collins made a generous donation towards our publications.

Please join the El Cerrito Historical society

Help us document and reserve the city's history by becoming a member of the El Cerrito Historical Society. Membership, a bargain at \$30 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. We also offer memberships at the sponsor level for \$75 and life memberships for \$400. We accept donations of any amount.

Please note that we have increased membership rates modestly, for the first time in many years.

The El Cerrito Historical Society produces two publications, the Forge, which is a print publication, which we aim to produce four times a year, and Sparks (from the Anvil), an email publication which 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.

