

Sparks July 2020



The West County Times welcomed Turnabout Thrift Shop to El Cerrito in 1986.

El Cerrito non-profit works to get through the pandemic

By Jon Bashor

In 1918, 50 young women volunteers with Berkeley Dispensary Auxiliary began raising funds to purchase a new Dodge motor car to help nurses and social workers meet the needs of patients suffering from influenza and other health conditions during the flu pandemic. The car was purchased in early 1919 and was welcomed by the health workers who had made 8,429 home visits the year before.

The organization soon began holding annual rummage sales, including one that was held on the first two days of the 1929 stock market crash and netted \$652.40, enough to erase the dispensary's outstanding debt. In 1932, the Berkeley Dispensary was renamed the Berkeley Clinic and the auxiliary continued its fundraising, primarily through annual rummage sales.

The Berkeley Clinic Auxiliary continues to raise money through the sales of donated items at the Turnabout Thrift Store at [10052 San Pablo Ave.](#) in El Cerrito. The all-volunteer non-profit store, operated by the Berkeley Clinic Auxiliary (BCA), moved to its current location in August 1986.

In 2017, the El Cerrito City Council issued a proclamation congratulating BCA "on the occasion of its centennial year and for its century of selfless service."

Read more about the Turnabout Thrift Shop on the historical society website link [here](#)



Christine Roed and her granddaughter, Anya Gutman. Courtesy of Anya Gutman

The society mourns the passing of Christine Roed.

If you close your eyes and picture Christine Roed, you're picturing someone with a smile. For well over a decade she has been one of the El Cerrito Historical Society's most valuable volunteers, helping to archive our collections, clipping news articles to keep track of history as it happens, and helping out at society events.

It was at those events that she really came into her own, greeting program goers with a warm welcome, cheerfully flagging down passersby to encourage them to learn about history at our booth during the July 4 festivities.

Christine (Kutulas) Roed died June 18 at age 96.

Christine, who taught for many years in the West County school district, also knew about the city's history from living in the area since 1950. Often she would supply details about people, properties, creeks and changes she had seen over the years.

Earlier this year the society honored Christine with a plaque recognizing her contributions to El Cerrito history.

Joann Steck-Bayat, a former officer of the society, worked with Christine and others when the society moved its collection from a musty spot in the basement of the library to our new Shadi history room.

“For me, she was a great help and had such an uplifting spirit when a group of women ten years ago sat in the Shadi room and sorted through and started to catalogue everything that was brought up from the temporary housing spot in the library,” Joann recalled. “We met every Wednesday at 1 p.m. for two hours for more than a year. Those hours were relaxing as we read articles, found a treasure, and the women would tell their El Cerrito stories that related to those finds.”

Read more on the historical society website link [here](#)

Learn about our neighboring city in a program upcoming this fall.

When the lockdown was declared in March it put a kibosh on several excellent programs the society had arranged. Some of them, including panel discussions about developer Earl “Flat Top” Smith, and a history of local journalism as it collided with the Internet Age, will take place live once public meetings are allowed and are wise.

Our next program will take place in virtual space, and it doesn’t take place until October. But mark your calendars because it will be a good one.

Albany: A Small Town with a Big Past

An illustrated online talk on Zoom by author Karen Sorensen

Albany’s history is filled with interesting stories, many related to larger issues of the early 20th century, from notorious dynamite factory explosions to an early 1900s plague scare.

Explore these stories with Karen Sorensen, author of the new book, Albany – Stories from the Village by the Bay.

The book includes little known details about Charles MacGregor, the man who built many Albany and East Bay homes; the history of Albany Hill – El Cerrito it was called! -- and how extensive electric train systems linked residents to the rest of the Bay Area. Karen, an Albany writer, historian, and fifth-generation Californian, wrote the book, Images of America, Albany, and has authored numerous articles on Albany history.

7 p.m. Thursday October 22, 2020

Zoom attendance information will be supplied closer to the date and will be available on our website via this [link](#)

For information, Dave Weinstein, 510-524-1737, davidsweinstein@yahoo.com

Should we save our cinemas?

Rialto Cinemas Cerrito has sent requests to its patrons to tell lawmakers to provide financial assistance to movie theaters nationwide to keep them from going belly up during closures forced by the pandemic.

The Rialto owns and operates the historic, 1937 Cerrito Theater, a cultural gem. During the closure, Rialto has been improving the interior of this theater, which shows they are looking forward to reopening when that becomes possible and if they can hold out.

Please consider showing your support by signing a petition at <https://saveyourcinema.com>.



Murrieta Rock area after clean-up

There's been action at Murrieta Rock.

What was once El Cerrito's most prominent landmarks – visible from San Francisco – has sat for decades hidden by brush and poison oak. If you have walked or driven by the corner of Arlington and Cutting Boulevard recently, though, you have notice Murrieta Rock, named for the famous Spanish Colonial era bandit who was said to have used the spot as a lookout.

The rock has recently been cleaned of brush. Admire it. Its future is uncertain. For a long while Trekkers has hoped the rock would eventually be acquired by the city for a rock park of the sort that dot the Berkeley Hills.

But the two lots that house the rock have been on the market. One, alongside the rock, has sold, and construction is underway on a home. As to the other lot that houses the rock itself – unknown at this time.

It's interesting, by the way, that history records the spelling of "Murrieta" several ways. We are adopting the double R version, which seems most common today. But books have also spelled it "Murietta" and "Murieta," the spelling commonly used in the 1850s.

Murrieta died in 1853.

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.

