

Sparks June 2020

El Cerrito arrests people without masks – a century ago.

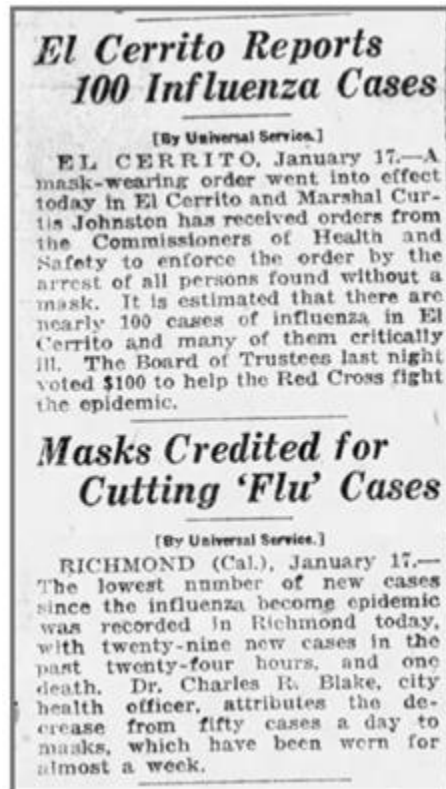
Historical Society member Chris Sterba found these items on the flu pandemic of 1918-1919. They ran in the San Francisco Examiner on January 18, 1919.

This was only two years after the city had incorporated, and we see the El Cerrito Board of Trustees (today known as the City Council) working with county health officials and the Red Cross to handle the second wave of influenza cases.

As today, masks were making a tremendous difference.

“El Cerrito Reports 100 Influenza Cases”

EL CERRITO, January 17 – A mask-wearing order went into effect today in El Cerrito and Marshall Curtis Johnston has received orders from the Commissioners of Health and Safety to enforce the order by the arrest of all persons found without a mask. It is estimated that there are nearly 100 cases of influenza in El Cerrito and many of them critically ill. The Board of Trustees last night voted \$100 to help the Red Cross fight the epidemic.”



El Cerrito and Black Lives Matter.



The El Cerrito Historical Society strongly supports the Black Lives Matter movement for social justice and equality and for significant and serious changes in policing and throughout the justice system. We are pleased to see our local community taking part in these history-changing protests.

The Historical Society remains active during the pandemic – and seeks donations of historical materials.

While we are not holding programs and our Shadi Room archive at City Hall is closed to the public, we continue to promote local history. We have helped people perform research, are improving our website, and continue to collect.

Recent donations include historical books, and material showing El Cerrito’s preparations in case of nuclear attack during the Cold War.

During what is a timeout for many people, we have noticed that many are cleaning out their homes and re-organizing their spaces. If you are among them and find photos showing life in our city, people in our parks, people in front of our stores – almost anything; or maps, interesting documents, journals, let us know.

The society collects materials relating to politics, culture, sports, and daily life in and around El Cerrito. We collect material from all eras of our history – including the present pandemic.

Contact davidsweinstein@yahoo.com.

The rehabilitation of Idaho Apartments provides affordable housing in a historic building.



As we drive or occasionally walk along San Pablo Avenue, our city’s spine, it’s easy to ignore its history as part of the Lincoln Highway that, starting in 1913, would soon link New York’s Times Square to San Francisco’s Lincoln Park.

One business that does hark back to the days when the highway, later named Highway 40, was the main East-West route in the nation, is the former Idaho Motel which was built during the 1940s.

In 1997 it was converted to affordable housing. Today, run by Resources for Community Development, a Berkeley nonprofit with projects throughout the Bay Area, the Idaho Apartments provides homes for formerly homeless people with disabilities. The 29-unit residence is at [10203 San Pablo Avenue](https://www.google.com/maps/place/10203+San+Pablo+Avenue,+Berkeley,+CA+94704/@37.8688889,-122.275,15z), just south of Eureka Avenue.

City manager Karen Pinkos has spotlighted Idaho Apartments because of a recent rehabilitation.

“The rehabilitation included new roofing, windows, stucco repairs, new unit finishes, paint, flooring, cabinetry, bathroom fixtures, sinks, refrigerators, and new kitchen cooktops,” she wrote in her weekly report. “Plumbing and electrical systems were also upgraded to provide LED lighting and more efficient water heating and space heating. Common areas and offices were upgraded, and a community garden was constructed along with an art mural. Check the mural out next time you are on San Pablo Avenue!”

Funding for the project included money from the city's now defunct (due to state mandate) Redevelopment Agency. Redevelopment had earlier funded the restoration of another historic building on the avenue, the Cerrito Theater (Rialto Cinemas Cerrito).

While the work on the Idaho was not done as a historic preservation project, the site does retain its historic appearance – rough stucco siding, red tile roof, a covered walkway. Today the apartments surround a pleasant courtyard and the floral murals add cheer.

The historical society believes that a project like this shows how historic structures can be preserved while adding value to our lives today.

Former County Line Cleaners gets a new tenant.



Another important historic structure on San Pablo Avenue has seen a positive change recently. The former County Line Cleaners building, [9955 San Pablo Avenue](#), not far from the county line, dates to the 1930s.

Its historic importance is tied to the city's Japanese-American community, many of whose members worked in the flower growing industry. Kenichi and Tomiyo Nawata ran their County Line Cleaners in this charming, brick faced building, which retains its historic looks.

It is one of only a few commercial structures in El Cerrito that remain to mark the Japanese-American

community during the pre-World War II years.

For several years the building had sat vacant, which is never a positive sign for an older building, historic or no. The property sold in June 2019 and today is occupied by a psychic reader.

Historical Society programs in the time of coronavirus.

We are living through historical times, friends. We here with the Historical Society wish you all well. The El Cerrito Historical Society will resume programs once rules and procedures allow for safe gatherings. We also look forward to resuming public hours at the Shadi Room archive in City Hall when that is possible.

-- Dave Weinstein

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.

