

Sparks from the Anvil - September 2018

Upcoming El Cerrito Historical Society programs. We have two exciting programs coming up:

The International Style in El Cerrito. Architects Campbell & Wong designed several homes in El Cerrito that partake more of strict, International Style design than the typical, less formal California mid-century modern of the 1950s and 1960s. Let's visit two of them on a single street to learn about El Cerrito's modernist heritage from Dave Weinstein, and about Campbell and Wong from Peter Parenti, one of the owners. This event is tomorrow, Sunday, October 14, 2018 from 4-6 PM and it's free. We will also tour a couple of neighboring homes. Space is limited; reservations required. Light refreshments. davidsweinstein@yahoo.com.

El Cerrito's Gambling Past: A Walking Tour. Join Historical Society Vice President Chris Horn to learn about El Cerrito's past, when gambling and nightlife thrived. From the teens into the 1940's El Cerrito was a center for gambling, dog racing, drinking, and vice.

Rancho
ON SAN PABLO AVENUE, EL CERRITO
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VISIT OUR BEAUTIFUL COCKTAIL BAR

The Rancho nightclub was opened in 1933, less than a month after the end of prohibition, in the Historic Castro Adobe. An array of nightclubs sprang up on San Pablo Avenue. This walk will pass by the site of some of these clubs including the Rancho, the Hollywood Club, the Wagon Wheel and the It Club. This event is Sunday, November 11, 2018 from 12-2 PM. It's free and we'll meet in the El Cerrito Plaza parking lot near Macaroni Grill.

El Cerrito businesses featured in out-of-town exhibits:

A TEPCO Teaser: An exhibit of TEPCO Chinaware will run through “at least the end of 2018” at the Contra Costa County Historical Society in Martinez. TEPCO, founded in 1918 in Richmond before moving to El Cerrito in 1930, was our city’s largest manufacturer back in the days when manufacturing, quarrying and farming provided much employment in our town.

The [exhibit](#) “will be a collection of Chinaware manufactured by the ‘Technical Porcelain and China Ware Company,’ more commonly known as TEPCO.” Most of the pieces on exhibit come from the collection of the CCCHS treasurer and his wife, Steven and Priscilla James. You can catch the exhibit on Tuesdays-Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 PM, and on the third Saturday of the month from 10 AM to 2 PM.

TEPCO ware has become collectible and with good reason. Not only was it well wrought; much of it is beautiful and varied, with lines of cowboy themed dinnerware, Tiki material, abstract patterns and much more. During World War II TEPCO turned out plates for use on ships built at the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond. The factory was on the site of what is today the DMV office, behind City Hall. The company closed in 1968.

The El Cerrito Historical Society has featured a program on TEPCO, with collectors and members Lynn Maack and his late wife, Sandi Genser-Maack. We have a few pieces from their collection on display in the Shadi Room at City Hall.

Down-Home Music: The Story of Arhoolie Records is on display at one of the best small museums that feature changing shows in the Bay Area. The [exhibit](#) will be open at San Francisco International Airport for a long while: through June 9, 2019. It’s in Terminal 2, departures level. And it is post-security – which means you need to be a ticketed traveler to see it.

Arhoolie began with Chris Strachwitz doing field recording of blues musicians in the South. He spearheaded the resurgence of interest in what came to be called “roots music.” Down Home is a fabulous record shop in El Cerrito (actually, its address is in Richmond, as is the case with many shops facing San Pablo Avenue.) It has been in business since 1976, an outgrowth of Arhoolie Records.

The museum exhibit will include “album covers, photographs, rare concert posters, musical instruments, the original Magnecord reel-to-reel tape recorder Strachwitz used for most of his recordings between 1962 and 1971,” plus other artifacts.

Bye Bye to Playland-not-at-the-Beach. Many people spent time in the final weeks of Playland-not-at-the Beach’s too brief life visiting the place, playing pinball, and drinking in its celebration of all things amusement park and Americana. “Playland-not” closed to make way for a new residential development on San Pablo Avenue. In addition to collections celebrating San Francisco’s long gone Playland at the Beach, there was an incredible Christmas village room, horror displays, and much more.

The most important display tied to El Cerrito was a miniature recreation of the Sells-Floto circus created by an El Cerrito man, Don Marcks, beginning back when he was a boy. It fills several large circus wagons and is incredibly complex, lifelike, and filled with joy. There were parades of elephants carrying riders, tigers being run through their paces, circus performers getting dressed before the show...Thousands of figures.

All were part of the collection of the late Richard Tuck, who passed the collection on to a group headed by Frank Biafore. The entire collection, including an original Laughing Sal of the sort that once entertained people at San Francisco’s Playland, was auctioned off last month. Hopes that somehow the collection could be preserved intact were not realized. The circus itself

was split apart. But it appears that two of the circus's new owners live in the Bay Area. Perhaps some or all of it might again go on display?

At one point, Frank told us, the city was working with Playland-not to ensure that El Cerrito retained this historic and cultural gem. But this was taking place several years ago through El Cerrito's Redevelopment Agency. Governor Brown ended redevelopment as a financing technique in 2011 – which removed a tool the city could have used to preserve Playland-not.