

Over the years El Cerrito's Veterans Memorial Hall fell into disrepair. But it was saved by local veterans who stepped in to preserve the building. Today the County still owns the property and provides exterior and other major maintenance. The Veterans Memorial Building Association operates the building and some vets still meet there. Many organizations and individuals rent the Hall, which helps fund interior maintenance. Just as when it first opened in 1932, the Hall can be rented. Call (510) 528-4381 for information about renting this historic building.

LOUIS CHRISTOPHER HAGEN, JR.

The United States entered Word War I in April of 1917. In June Louis Christopher Hagen, Jr., a grandson of El Cerrito pioneers Christian & Madeline Hagan (later changed to Hagen) and Patrick & Johanna Sullivan, registered for the draft. He was 25 years old and single. He was working for Union Iron Works at the Alameda shipyards at the time. Louis was listed on his draft card as medium height and build with brown hair and blue eyes.

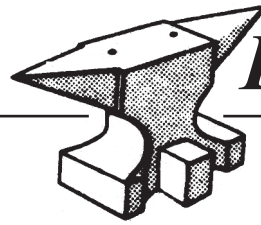
As a private in the Army's American Expeditionary Forces he was sent to Camp Green in North Carolina. Here he joined the Army's newly formed 3rd Division and was in training for about five months. There were about 28,000 men in the 3rd Division. The 3rd Division shipped out to France in April 1918. At first they were under French command and held the Germans back at the Marne River in France.

A short time later Maj. General Joseph Dickman became their commander and issued his famous edict in French, "*Nous resterons la*" ("We're staying there!") It was along the Marne on July 15 that the 3rd Division took the brunt of what was to be the last German offensive of the war. As units on either side of the division were driven back, the men of the 30th and 38th Regiments held their ground.

This feat, in which they stood their ground as if they were a rock, was called by Gen. John "Blackjack" Pershing "...one of the most brilliant pages in the annals of military history." It earned the division its nickname, "Rock of the Marne." Louis C. Hagen, Jr. was killed in that battle. He was buried at the American Cemetery "*Oise-Asne*" in Fere-en-Tardenoisian, France.

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- Images of America, El Cerrito Historical Society
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- WWI Draft Registration, Louis C. Hagen - 1917
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- www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM3BQJ_American_Legion_Louis_Hagen_Post_340_El_Cerrito_CA



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Our Next Event:

Annual Meeting and Veterans Hall Tour

2:00 PM Saturday, January 25

Veterans Memorial Hall, 6401 Stockton Avenue, El Cerrito

Built in 1932 as a memorial for veterans of the Great War, the Veterans Building continues to play an important role in El Cerrito. At our annual meeting the Society will elect officers, discuss our accomplishments and challenges, and hear from you – our members. We will also tour this Gothic-style building and hear from one or perhaps both of two veterans: Jack O'Leary and Joe Pickell of the Veterans Memorial Building Association. They are working diligently to improve and preserve this unique building for present and future use.

Unfortunately, this program is not wheelchair accessible.

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a volunteer, non-political, non-profit corporation that has as its purpose the preservation and appreciation of the history of El Cerrito. It does this by providing educational and research opportunities; by the collection of historic photographs, documents, artifacts and cultural objects; by advocating the preservation of historic resources in the city; and by encouraging others to help further these aims. Anyone may join; dues are \$25 (Household member), \$60 (Sponsoring member), and \$300 (Life member).

Veterans Memorial Hall

by Joanne Rubio

El Cerrito's Veterans Memorial Hall at 6401 Stockton Avenue is one of the original thirteen memorials built in the 1920s and 1930s in Contra Costa County to honor veterans. They were designed to be a place for veterans to meet and also as community centers, libraries and town meeting halls. Counties were authorized by the U.S. and California State government to raise funds through a temporary sales tax to build Veteran Memorials. In 1922 the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors voted to approve this building program county-wide. Each American Legion Post had to petition for the funds they needed. Our site was chosen for its (then) central location.

Veterans in El Cerrito formed the American Legion Louis Hagen Post 340 on November 16, 1928. The post was named after Louis C. Hagen, Jr. who was one of the first young men from El Cerrito to die in World War I. There were 27 veterans at the first meeting. They chose Louis Davis as their first Commander. Contra Costa County appropriated \$22,500 to purchase the land and build a Veterans Memorial Hall. The Louis Hagen Post 340 met at other sites in town before moving into the building on Stockton Avenue. Efforts to build the El Cerrito Veterans Memorial Hall began in 1929 and the building was dedicated on September 24, 1932.

The building itself was designed by the prominent architect James T. Narbett, who was assisted by his son Keith. It cost \$20,000 to build and was the only steel-reinforced concrete Memorial building in the county. The main floor included a large auditorium with a stage. Two lounges were off the stage. The second floor included offices and several meeting rooms. The building also contained a kitchen. The Veterans Memorial Association provided the furnishings.

The 1932 newspaper listed prominent veterans at the time who were instrumental in getting the Memorial Hall built. Some of those listed were H. Nissen, P. Lee, A. Bertoli, F. Begerow, C.

Schwake, F. Prosser, and J. Westbrook. Members of the Louis Hagen Auxiliary (wives, daughters, sisters, mothers of vets) were mentioned in the news article as well. Some of those were H. Allinio, F. Breneman, B. Brodt, E. Staley, K. Hagen, L. Peralta.

The El Cerrito Journal, our local newspaper at the time, put out a front page spread on the 1932 event. A large parade started the celebration on Saturday, September 24, 1932 at 2:30 PM. The parade began at Cutting Boulevard and San Pablo Avenue. It was led by the 143rd Field Artillery Band and the Grand Marshal was William F. Huber. The parade went down San Pablo Avenue to the county line and back to Veterans Hall.

Most community organizations and other local veteran groups participated in the parade. The celebration was

Contra Costa County's 13 Original Veteran Memorials

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| - Antioch | - Brentwood |
| - Concord | - Crockett |
| - Danville | - El Cerrito |
| - Lafayette * | - Martinez |
| - Piittsburg * | - Port Chicago |
| - Richmond * | - Walnut Creek * |
| - Soldier's Memorial Monument, built 1927 at the intersection of Victory Highway and Pacific and Redwood Highways. It now stands on Boyd Road in Pleasant Hill. | |
| * - no longer standing | |



Veterans Hall - EC Historical Society Collection, courtesy of the Duveneck family

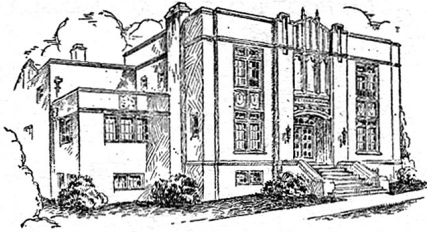
thought to be the largest event ever held in the community. After the parade there was a dedication ceremony followed by a buffet supper open to everyone. Later in the evening a "Dedication Ball" was held at the Hall and was open to the community as well.

Mayor J. R. Beck, who served in the Army during World War I, wrote an article commending the veterans, the American Legion Post and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for their hard work. He also encouraged the community of El Cerrito to use the building as a community center. He noted: "This is a happy moment for the city and all its citizens, and the completion and dedication of the Memorial Hall will live long as a milestone in the progress of El Cerrito."

A Brief History of the American Legion

Lt. Col. Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., the oldest son of our 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, was at General Headquarters in Paris four months after the end of World War I. His youngest brother Quentin Roosevelt had died when his plane was shot down behind enemy lines in the war.

Lt. Col. T. Roosevelt, Jr. and several others got approval to invite enlisted troops and officers to a "caucus" in Paris to come up with ways to boost morale for the troops waiting to get back home. After that meeting he suggested starting an organization to support and honor the troops. Things were set in motion in March of 1919 to start the American Legion. The organization was officially formed two months later in St. Louis, Missouri.



A CORDIAL INVITATION IS EXTENDED TO YOURSELF
AND YOUR FRIENDS TO ATTEND THE

DEDICATION EXERCISES

OF THE

EL CERRITO VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING

EL CERRITO, CALIFORNIA

LOCATED AT CORNER OF STOCKTON AVENUE AND KEARNY STREET

SATURDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 24, 1932 AT 2:30



THE EXERCISES WILL BE HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

LOUIS HAGEN POST No. 340, AMERICAN LEGION

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA

EL CERRITO POST No. 2521, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA AND NEVADA

BEST WISHES to
Veterans' Memorial Hall
— from —
New City Market
1613 San Pablo Avenue

Specials for Friday and Saturday

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Drifted Snow FLOUR, 25 lbs. | 59c |
| 50 lbs. | \$1.15 |
| WHEATIES, 2 pkgs. for | 13c |
| CRYSTAL WHITE SOAP, 10 bars .. | 25c |
| 1 Case | \$2.45 |
| SUPER SUDS, small | 3 pkgs. 23c |
| LUX, large pkg. | 19c |
| U. G. TOILET PAPER, 3 rolls | 19c |
| Westlake TOMATO SAUCE, 3 for .. | 10c |
| Westlake SALMON, No. 1 tall | 9c |
| LEG OF SPRING LAMB, lb. | 18c |
| RACKS OF SPRING LAMB, lb. | 14c |
| LEGS OF EASTERN PORK | |
| Whole or Half, per lb. | 14c |
| COMPOUND SHORTENING, 3 lbs. | 19c |

NEW CITY MARKET

1613 San Pablo Avenue

BEST WISHES to
Veterans Memorial Hall
from
EL NIDO MARKET
San Pablo and Stockton Avenues

Specials for Friday, Saturday

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| BUTTER, solid lb. | 23c |
| CAKE FLOUR, Gold Medal | 21c |
| FREE CAKE COOLER | |
| MORNING MILK, large | 6 for 25c |

Morton's Salt, 2 pkgs. for 15c
FREE BALLOON

| | |
|--|-------------|
| LUCKIES, CAMELS and CHESTERFIELDS | 2 pkgs. 25s |
| CORN FLAKES or Post Toasties | 7c |
| CRYSTAL WHITE SOAP .. 10 bars .. | 25c |
| DOG FOOD, Crown Prince | 3 for 20c |
| Nut Spread OLEOMARGARINE | 9c |
| SNOWDRIFT, 2 lbs. | 25c |

**S. & H. GREEN STAMPS
GIVEN AWAY HERE**

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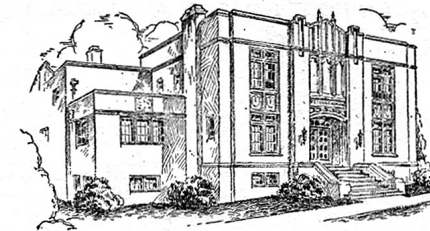
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Morton's Salt, 2 pkgs. for 15c
FREE BALLOON

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