

El Cerrito Historical Society History Quiz, July 4 2019

One. In 1772, when the Fages-Crespi expedition of Spanish explorers passed through the East Bay, Lt. Pedro Fages reported seeing few Native Americans in the area now called El Cerrito. To what did he attribute this? Some, all, or none of these answers could be true.

- a. A lack of freshwater sources compared to nearby areas.
- b. A recent inter-tribal war
- c. A proliferation of bears
- d. Fear of the large approaching party of soldiers caused the native population to hide



Two. This building at 9951 San Pablo Avenue which currently houses a yoga studio has a fabled past because:

- a. It was the Stag Club, last of the nightclub and gambling halls built before the new, reform City Council banned gambling and vice in 1946.
- b. It was the home and “citadel” of mob boss Big Bill Pechar, who ran the nearby Wagon Wheel, and had bullet proof doors and a safe stuffed with cash.
- c. It was the first recording studio used by Creedence Clearwater Revival when they were known as the Golliwogs and before they moved to Fantasy Records.
- d. Physicist Ed McMillan, who was living in El Cerrito, established a laboratory in this building during World War II while working on the Manhattan Project to develop the atom bomb.

Three. Moeser Lane, just a few feet from where we are standing today, was in the news in the early 1970s. Why? Some, all, or none of these answers could be true.

- a. A truck lost its brakes making the turn onto Moeser from Arlington, hurtled down the street and hit a car carrying a mother and her five children, killing them all as well as the driver of the truck.
- b. The city of El Cerrito opened the upper extension of the street, which had ended in a dead-end at Shevlin, providing a direct connection between the flatlands and the upper hills.

- c. The El Cerrito Garden Club, working with the California Native Plant Society and others, won national acclaim for a project to landscape Moeser Lane with native plants.
- d. The Guinness Book of records listed Moeser as the steepest residential street in the world, a title it retained until it was beaten out by Baldwin Street in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Four. When Creedence Clearwater Revival hit big in 1969 with hit single after hit single, people worldwide were amazed that they came from an obscure small town in the Bay Area and not from some Southern Bayou. But people and things in the city played an important role as leader John Fogerty devised the band's sound. Which of the following played a role?

- a. Portola Junior High and El Cerrito High were regionally famous for the quality and quantity of garage bands they produced, providing rich inspiration for the "Golliwogs" and "Blue Velvets," as Creedence was originally called.
- b. John and his older brother Tom would frequently sneak into the It Club on San Pablo Avenue to hear rockabilly, country music, and soul bands perform.
- c. John Fogerty was inspired by a music appreciation class at Portola that ranged from Beethoven to boogie woogie and was taught by a pony-tailed beatnik, Mrs. Starck.
- d. Louis Gordon Music, a record shop at the new El Cerrito Plaza, always got the hottest discs, including the El Dorados and "Susie Q," and John would buy them with his paper route earnings.

Five. Today El Cerrito is known as a politically progressive town. But as late as the 1970s and 1980s, this wasn't always so. During those years, which of the following took place? Some, all, or none of these answers could be true.

- a. In 1985 the City Council voted not to celebrate Earth Day, with a majority seeing the new holiday as too political, and for advocating policies that not everyone in town supported.
 - b. The Council agreed, after heated discussion and on a split vote, to hire a major contracting firm for street work that also did work in apartheid-era South Africa
 - c. The Council refused to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, even as almost every other city was doing so.
 - d. After one of its members, Jean Siri, asked that the council approve a resolution opposing American involvement in Central American wars, her colleagues passed an ordinance banning any council discussion of non-city business.

Six. Can you close your eyes and picture what El Cerrito looked like 100 years ago? Let's try. Which of the following are true? Some, all, or none of these answers could be true.

- a. Redwood forests still covered much of the hills, although logging had already denuded the Berkeley hills.
- b. A landmark that could be seen from San Francisco – and even from sea – was Murrieta Rock, high in the El Cerrito Hills.
- c. The area today occupied today by Sunset View cemetery was a large dairy farm, with the barn on the site of today's Fatapple's Restaurant.
- d. Among the first things you'd see at arriving at the southern end of town were two saloons and Blind Jim's cigar stand.

Six. The answer is b. and d. Redwood forests were still in parts of the Oakland Hills when Europeans arrived – but not in Berkeley or hereabouts. Today, Murrieta Rock is still at the corner of Arlington and Cutting Boulevards but hard to see because it is engulfed in overgrowth. It is possible that cows roamed the upper hills of what is today Sunset View, but in fact the cemetery was already in business 100 years ago, making it one of the oldest businesses in the area. The description of two saloons and Blind Jim is from El Cerrito's founding librarian, Fay Breneman.

Answers:

One. The answer is b. Fages cited “the great many bears living around these places.” The party encountered plenty of freshwater, both streams and even a small lake.

Two. The answer is b. Pechart was one of the crime bosses who were trying to monopolize gambling throughout Northern California.

Three. The answer is b. and c. The upper portion of Moeser Lane was opened to public use in 1970. The city did not have water lines to support standard landscaping, so the Garden Club, working with the Native Plant Society, volunteered to plant and maintain low-water native plants. Their effort won praise, and illustrated articles on the project ran in several national magazines.

Four. The answer is c. and d. According to John Fogerty’s autobiography, “Fortunate Son,” from which all this information is drawn, there were few if any bands in El Cerrito schools that performed regularly or stayed together. He does not report catching music at the It Club, which he probably would have mentioned.

Five. The answer is a. and c. Several years later a more liberal council did agree to back Earth Day, and it has become one of the city’s important events.

Despite the city not officially supporting Martin Luther King Jr. Day, people from St. Peter CME Church protested, and led a Martin Luther King Jr. march on “back streets,” recalls Pat Durham, one of the founders of the march. They fought for the city to recognize the celebration, and five years later, the city did. Today it is the longest running Martin Luther King Jr. celebration in the area.

In the mid 1980s, the city council discussed such a ban on council consideration of non-city business following Jean Siri’s proposal, but the city attorney determined that would not be legal.