

THE LEFTOVERS

Published by the El Sobrante Historical Society

Issue #1

Winter 2012

This newsletter is issued quarterly, as part of the mission of the ESHS, to preserve and publicize the history of the community of El Sobrante. In this issue we will meet the founding members of the Society, announce the publication of the history of our town by Arcadia Press, review past and upcoming events, and read fascinating historical articles. If you would like to comment on this newsletter, or submit your own article for publication, please do so via: eshistory@gmail.com. Thanks!

Meet the Steering Committee—in alphabetical order, they are:

MAURICE (MAURY) ABRAHAM

As a four-year-old in 1946, Maurice moved with his family from Richmond to El Sobrante. He attended local schools, graduating from De Anza High School in 1960. He attended Contra Costa College, then San Jose State University, graduating with a BA in Geography/Urban Studies. Immediately following high school, he joined an El Sobrante civil engineering /architectural firm. This began a long and successful career in community planning and design that led him in 1992 to start his own independent planning practice in San Jose.



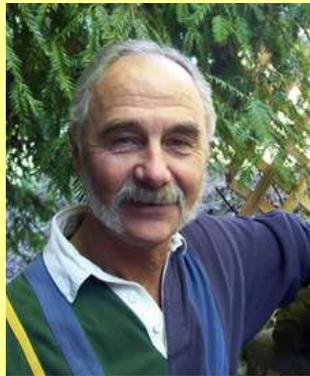
In 2003, Maurice returned to El Sobrante with his wife Jean, where they built their new home of his design on part of the Santa Rita Road property he had grown up on. Semi-retired, Maurice has shifted his attention to his

hometown, in part as a founding member of the El Sobrante Historical Society. He is also active in the Commonwealth Club of California, NoLabels, a national non-partisan political action group founded in 2010, a member of the San Jose State University Alumni Association and a past member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and the American Planning Association.

Maurice and Jean enjoy time with family and friends, and travel. Since 2002, they have visited 17 countries and over 500 cities in North America and Europe. These travels satiate their growing appetite for understanding the history and cultures of different world regions. Maurice also enjoys classic automobiles and non-fiction reading, research and writing (politics, government, economics, business, science and technology, history and ancestry). An avid photographer, he is currently enrolled at the New York Institute of Photography (NYIP) and has amassed a digital collection of over 60,000 travel, architectural and automotive images!

DONALD BASTIN

Born in Richmond, CA, Donald moved with his family to the new Sherwood Forest development in 1955. De Anza High School opened that same year, with Donald entering as a 7th



grader. Graduating in 1961, he moved to Berkeley, went to work, and eventually graduated from Cal-State Hayward, with a B.A. in History. Returning with his family to El Sobrante in 1986, Donald watched his two girls grow up and graduate from De Anza High, in 1995 and 2000. Returning to college, Donald earned his Master's degree in History, also from Cal-State Hayward (now CSUEB).

After serving for seven years as the Executive Director of the Richmond Museum of History, and writing a history of Richmond (Arcadia Press, 2003), Donald turned his attention to his home town, and with the help of dozens of local citizens, successfully published a similar history of El Sobrante, which is now available through Arcadia Publishing Company.

Donald is the webmaster of our ESHS website and edits this newsletter.

STEVEN JAMES

Born in Albany, Ca. in 1948. My family lived in the WWII housing on what is now El Portal dr. by Contra Costa College (CCC), until I was 4 years old. We then moved to El Sobrante, where I have lived since. I attended El Sobrante #1 (K-3), Marie A Murphy (4-6), and De Anza High (7-12)



graduating in 1966. I attended CCC (AA degree) and Sonoma State University, then drafted into the Army through the draft lottery in 1970. After serving my country, I received a BS degree in Business Management from Golden Gate University and started a career with Chevron Corp. I retired from Chevron in 2010. I've always had a great interest in history, with a fascination in California's rich history and how it has shaped and lead the way on many issues in America. Being part of the formation of ESHS, with the other like minded people, has enriched my retirement experience. It excites me to be able to preserve the history of our community.



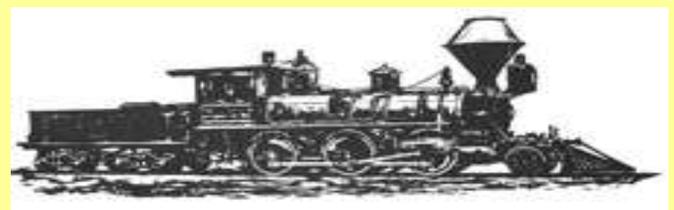
LYLE MILLER, Jr.

Lyle was born Nov. 28 1957, in Novato, California. He worked for several years for the San Ramon Valley Unified School District, while

attending high school at San Ramon Valley High, and graduated in 1975. Went to work in general auto repair and in 1987, took over dad's business at 4040 SanPablo Dam Road, when he retired.

Has been interested in history, antiques & collectables most of his life.

Currently owner/operator, with brother David, **El Sobrante Wheel & Brake.**



Careful research often results in unexpected surprises, as the following article shows-Ed.

EL SOBRANTE...PART OF SAN PABLO RANCHO?

Maurice P. Abraham

It's a widely-known and historically accurate fact that the El Sobrante community's name evolved from the 1841 Mexican land grant, Rancho El Sobrante, awarded by Governor Juan Batista Alvarado to brothers Victor Ramon Castro and Juan Jose Castro. It is also a common perception that the entire El Sobrante community was historically part of Rancho El Sobrante. But was it? By chance, I came face to face with this question.

AN UNINTENDED DISCOVERY

While recently perusing old Rancho El Sobrante maps, I made an unexpected discovery. I had initially set out to determine how El Sobrante's present major roadways related to the old rancho boundaries and historic ownership patterns. What I found, however, was that much of the older parts of El Sobrante appeared to lie outside of Rancho El Sobrante!

More specifically, the San Pablo Dam Road business district, the Appian Way corridor and the older parts of El Sobrante generally west of the May Valley neighborhood were shown to be outside the boundaries of Rancho El Sobrante and instead within the old San Pablo Rancho. In other words, it looked like most of the older parts of the El Sobrante community were never part of Rancho El Sobrante!

Although very anxious to share my findings, I hesitated to prematurely conclude that what I was observing was correct. So, I dug deeper, uncovering an old San Pablo Rancho map from September 1893 (Figure 1). This map supported my initial conclusion. The 1893 map clearly showed significant portions of San Pablo Dam Road (then Road No. 7) and Appian Way (then Road No. 18) to be within the boundaries of San Pablo Rancho (Figure 2).

An additional effort to verify my conclusion involved researching the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) mapping of the area. The USGS maps typically show historic rancho and U.S. government survey lines. The 'Richmond' quadrangle map of the USGS maps clearly shows the old boundary line that separates Rancho El Sobrante from San Pablo Rancho. Seeing this was the final confirmation I needed to know that my preliminary conclusion was correct.

I do acknowledge that this 'discovery' is certain to be well known to others, particularly those in the land title and land survey professions. But in all my reading about Rancho El Sobrante history, I have never seen it stated that much of the El Sobrante community lies within San Pablo Rancho. So, I have to assume it is not widely understood and therefore thought it important information to share.

This finding was of particular personal interest; the Santa Rita Road property my parents purchased back in 1946 abuts the Rancho El Sobrante/San Pablo Rancho boundary line, and that property is still in the family. My long-held belief that our property was part of the old Rancho El Sobrante had just been determined false. I now realized it had never been part of Rancho El Sobrante. It was in San Pablo Rancho!

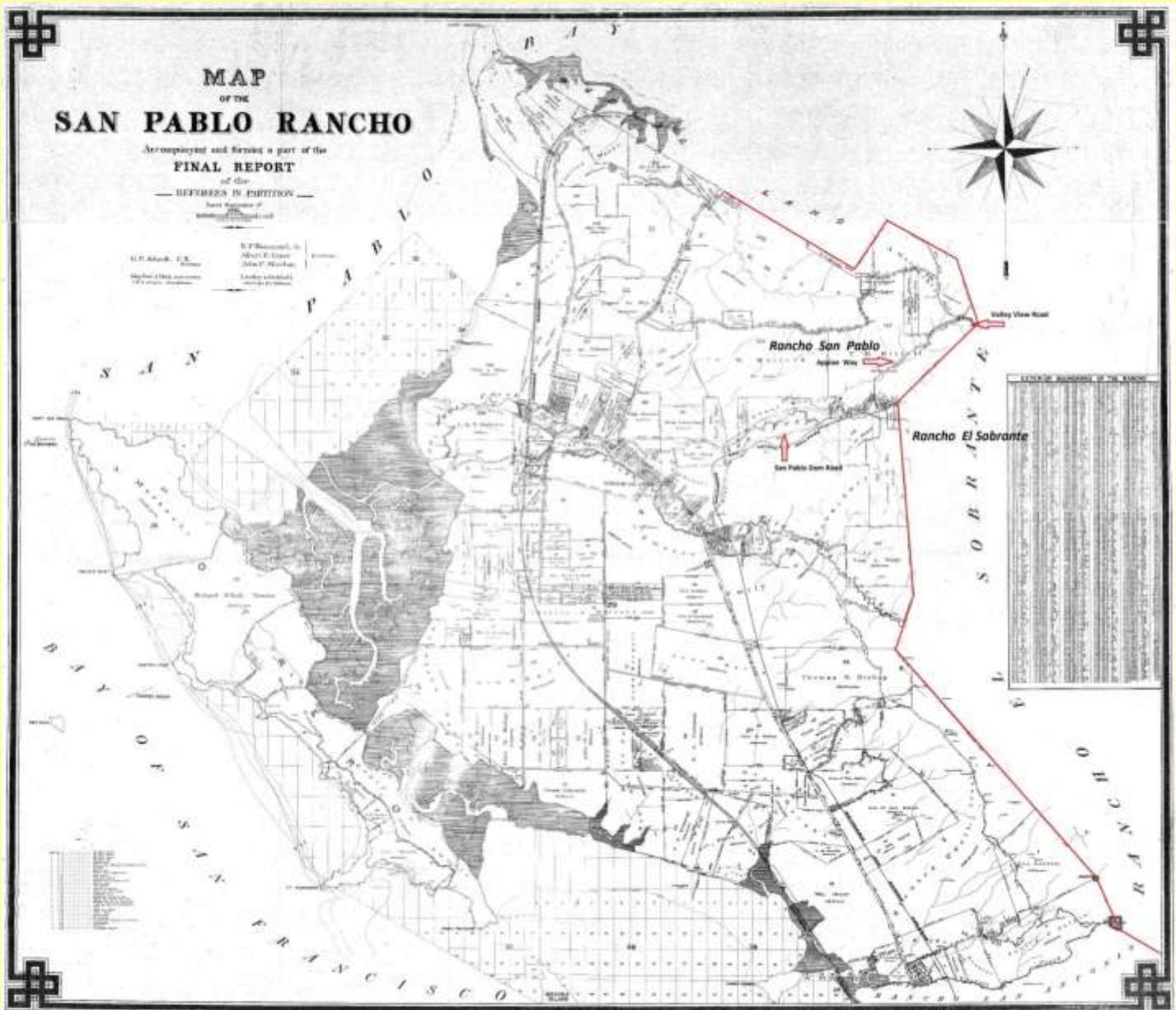


Figure 1 – Map of San Pablo Rancho. The red line is the common boundary between Rancho El Sobrante and San Pablo Rancho.

TRACING THE COMMON BOUNDARY

The common boundary of Rancho El Sobrante and Rancho San Pablo Rancho begins in the Berkeley hills, where the two Ranchos intersect with Rancho San Antonio. From that point, the common boundary proceeds along the Berkeley-El Cerrito Hills ridgeline. Easterly of El Sobrante’s La Colina/La Cima neighborhood, the boundary turns northerly through, bisecting the Jana Vista and Green Acres subdivisions west of Clark Road.

The rancho boundary then crosses San Pablo Dam Road easterly of the Canyon Pool Swim School on Campbell Lane, continuing along the easterly boundary of the Santa Rita Acres (Santa Rita Road) neighborhood. The Santa Rita Acres line is also a common boundary with the De Anza Vista and Whitecliff neighborhoods and the Richmond City limit line.

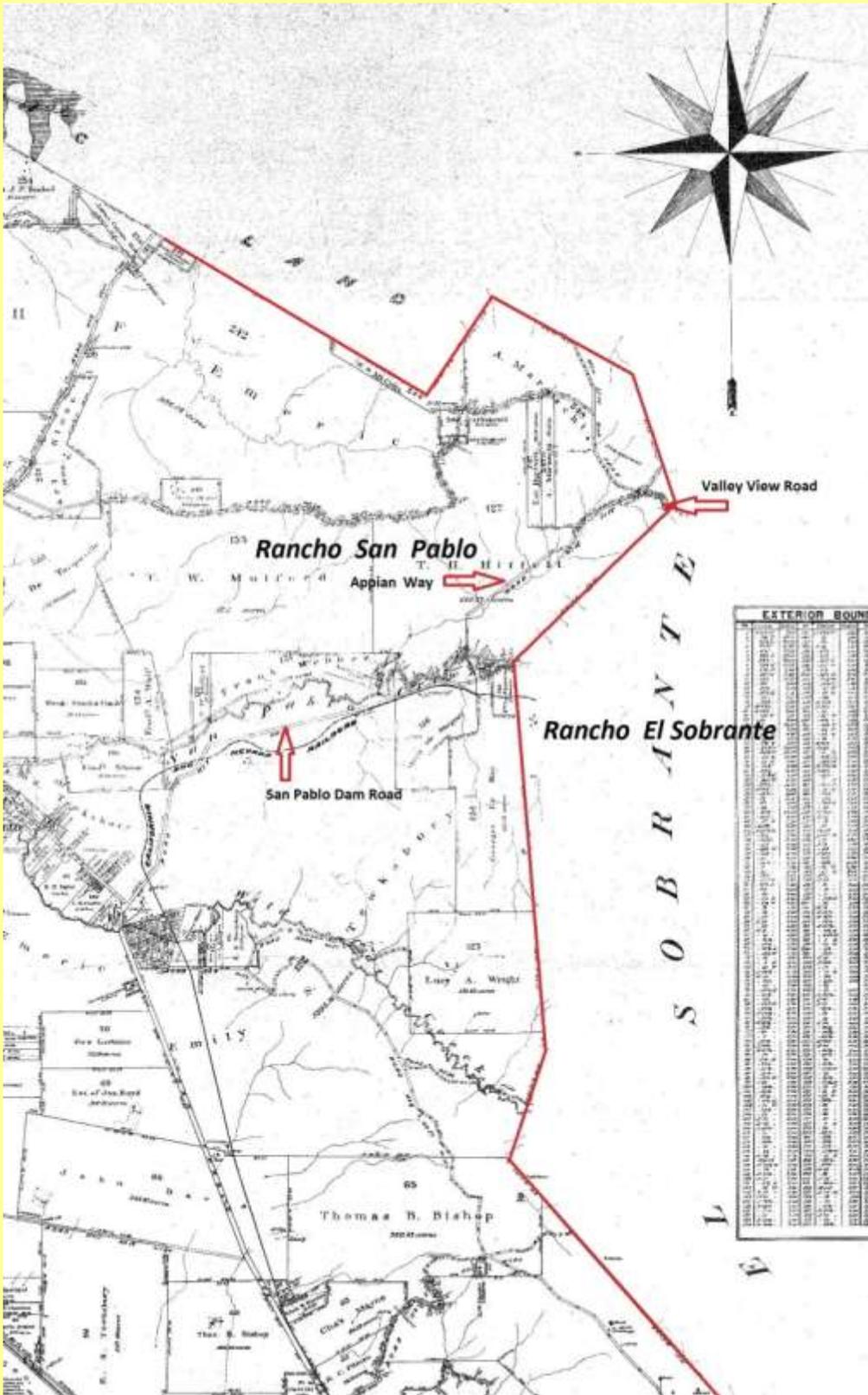


Figure 2. This enlarged portion of the 1893 San Pablo Rancho map in Figure 1 depicts the common boundary line's relationship to the San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way corridors.

Finally, the common rancho boundary crosses Valley View Road at the westerly boundary of Marie Murphy School, proceeding up to the El Sobrante Ridge easterly of the Sobrante Avenue/Circle Drive/Oak Knoll neighborhood. At the El Sobrante Ridge the common rancho boundary terminates at the boundary of Rancho Pinole.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FINDING

We now know with absolute certainty that very little of El Sobrante's early settlement area was ever part of the Rancho El Sobrante land grant. That said, it is equally important to recognize that this fact does not materially change anything other than the perception of El Sobrante's relationship to the historic ranchos. We are still El Sobrante; we still identify the community by the same prominent physical features we always have, the San Pablo and El Sobrante Ridge lines, the San Pablo

Dam Reservoir and the Interstate 80 freeway.

Clarification of the rancho boundaries in no way detracts from El Sobrante's history; in fact, quite the opposite. Knowing the community was actually part of both ranchos means the history of San Pablo Rancho is an integral part of El Sobrante's history. In fact, the rancho histories have always been tightly intertwined, as both were grants to immediate members of the same family, the Castros.

San Pablo Rancho was granted by Mexico to Francisco Maria Castro, father of Rancho El Sobrante grantees Victor and Juan Castro. When Francisco died, San Pablo Rancho passed to his wife, Maria Gabriela Berreyesa. Then, upon Maria's death, most of the rancho passed to their daughter, Martina Castro de Alvarado, wife of California's first governor, Juan Batista Alvarado. Governor Alvarado was the one that later approved the Rancho El Sobrante grant to his brothers-in-law.

So, the combined history of the two ranchos makes the lives of the entire Castro family, their settlements (Adobes) in San Pablo and El Cerrito and the ranching operations of both San Pablo Rancho and Rancho El Sobrante of even greater relevance to the history of the El Sobrante community. Going forward, persons interested in the community's history will now know that today's El Sobrante is underlain by not just one, but two Mexican land grants, Rancho El Sobrante and San Pablo Rancho.

The Year in Review:

The first meeting of the El Sobrante Historical Society took place in February, 2011. At this meeting, the basic outline of the organization was laid out, its mission statement was written up, and planning for the website was begun. Since then, meetings have been held, more or less, every month.

It has been a busy year. The website is now up and operational, a complementary Facebook page has been set up, and two exhibits have been organized. In addition, we set up a booth



at the El Sobrante Stroll, in which we exhibited a selection of historic photos and

encouraged residents to join our group and help in collecting and preserving local history.

On October 22, we joined with many other local



historical societies, at the library in Hercules,

helping to get the word out that there was a new historical society in Contra Costa County. In the accompanying picture, Maury Abraham is sitting behind the ESHS table. The two ladies are, from left, Margaret Faria Prather and her sister Deanna Faria Brownlee. They are descended from old Portuguese families in Pinole. Margaret tends bar at Rancho Liquors in El Sobrante.

Our first exhibit, **"A Place for all Reasons,"** also went up in October, at the El Sobrante Library.



This exhibit chronicled, appropriately enough, the history of the library itself. Not only did we assemble this exhibit from scratch, but we were obliged to spiff up the display case, located in the entrance-way of the library, as it had been

neglected. However, the patrons who saw the exhibit, and the library staff, were very positive in their response to this first display by our



organization. We will be opening a brand-new display on January 16, 2012, showcasing an exhibit of Native American artifacts recovered from a local El Sobrante site in 1950.

On loan from the Philippi family, of Santa Rita Road, these items are a priceless heritage of the local community and will be on view for only a short time. So don't miss out!

In early December, just in time for the holiday Chamber of Commerce mixer, we put up a display in the local Mechanics Bank.



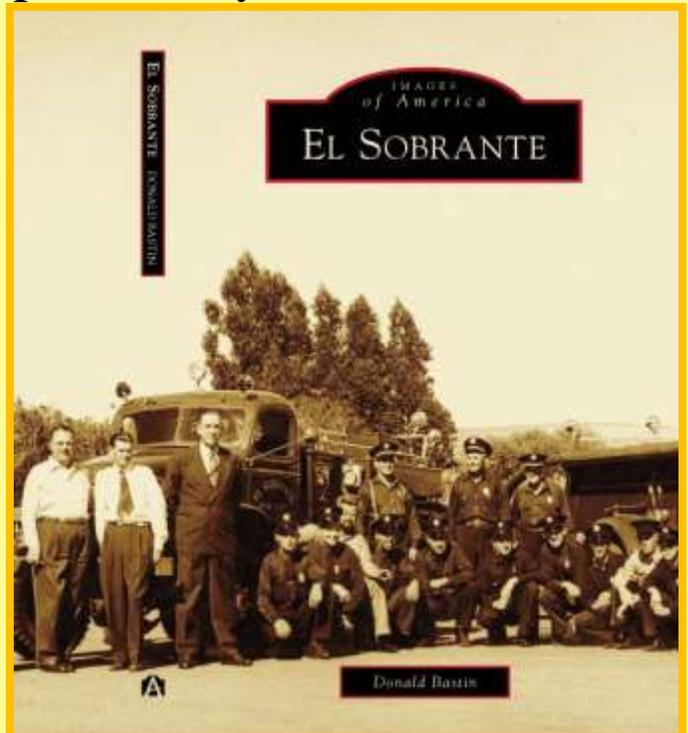
Left: Clementina Diaz

Right: Steve James

This display is a collection of large photos representing an historic time-line of El Sobrante history. It is located on the back wall of the bank, by the rear entrance. If you have not had a chance to see it, please do so before it must be taken down.

Last, but certainly not least, the new Arcadia book, "El Sobrante" was finally put into print. In fact, so much material was collected for the book, that it could not possibly have been included in this slim volume. That was the principal reason for the decision to form the historical society.

Now in Print! *El Sobrante*, published by Arcadia Press.



This is the first comprehensive history of the community of El Sobrante ever published. Most of the photographs used in the book were donated from local families, and have never been seen before. The story of El Sobrante is told from the late 19th century to the present. If you live in El Sobrante, or grew up here and moved away, or just like local history, you owe it to yourself to pick up a copy.

The price to the general public is \$21.99 + tax. However, by purchasing your book through the El Sobrante Historical Society, you can eliminate the tax, saving around \$2, and you will be helping out the ESHS. Otherwise, the book will be available on-line, directly from Arcadia Press or through Amazon.com. It should also be available at local bookstores.

Books will be available for sale at the bi-monthly meeting of **SPAWNERS** (San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society) on Wednesday, February 1, at the El Sobrante Library. Author Donald Bastin will be talking about the history of San Pablo Creek and El Sobrante starting at 7 pm.

Mark Your Calendar:

- 1. Monday, January 16--**Exhibit Opening: *The First People of El Sobrante*, El Sobrante Library. Exhibit of Native American artifacts found right here in El Sobrante!
- 2. Wednesday, February 1—A History of San Pablo Creek and El Sobrante.** Talk and slide show by Donald Bastin. New “El Sobrante” books will be available for sale. Proceeds benefit the ESHS. SPAWNERS Meeting. **El Sobrante Library, 7 pm.**
- 3. Wednesday, March 14—El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce Mixer, hosted by ESHS.** Brief talk about the history of El Sobrante and the new history of El Sobrante book published by Arcadia Press. Books available for sale.
Where: Mechanics Bank
When: 5:30 p.m.
Free Nibbles!

ESHS Steering Committee:

- 1. Maurice Abraham:** Administrator, Facebook Page; Historical Researcher and writer.
- 2. Donald Bastin:** Administrator, Website; Newsletter Editor; Historical Researcher and writer.
- 3. Steve James:** Membership and Communication Secretary;
- 4. Lyle Miller:** Community Liaison and general support.

Visit us on-line at: ESHIST.ORG

Questions, Comments, and other communication? Send to:

ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM

The El Sobrante Historical Society is an informal non-profit organization, dedicated solely to the preservation and display of the history of the community of El Sobrante. We depend on our members and local residents for the information, artifacts, and photographs that make up the society's collection. Become a member and help out! It's free and simple. Just visit the website, at eshist.org.

Mission Statement:

To Promote the Awareness and Appreciation of El Sobrante Valley history through Preservation and Education, and chronicling of the community's heritage for current and future generations.