

THE LEFTOVERS

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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. If you would like to comment on this newsletter, or submit your own article for publication, please do so via: eshistory@gmail.com. Thanks!

ESHS and EBMUD to Partner in Preservation of Historic Site

Donald Bastin



In the Spring, 2012 edition of the *Leftovers*, we

summarized the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps around the San Pablo Reservoir during the 1930s. Part of that article described a rock wall and stairway, built by the CCC boys in 1935, and which served as an “observation point” from which to view the lake from the old San Pablo Dam Road. With the creation of the El Sobrante Historical Society early in 2011, it has been one of our goals to preserve and enhance this site, creating a place of historic interest while bringing attention to the little-known activities of the CCC in our area.

We have six photographs of the construction of the original rock wall, all dated March of 1935. Apparently, all construction related to this project took place within this single month (they didn’t fool around in those days).



The above photo was no doubt taken just prior to the beginning of the wall construction, and shows a group of CCC boys clearing the site. In the background can be seen the outfall tower, which still exists (though is no longer functional) and which serves as a reference point for those looking for the old wall.



This image was taken just after beginning of actual construction. The man in the foreground is troweling mortar onto a large boulder, working the west end of the wall.

Behind him can be seen a pile of boulders, probably just unloaded from the truck at the right.



Here we see a shot above the site, taken from the hill on the south side of the old Dam Road (now a service road for the Municipal Utility District). About a third of the wall has been completed, on the left. From this vantage point it is clear that this area was intended to be used by motorists as a turnout and stopping place from which to view the lake.



This photo shows the completed site, as does the following image, probably taken within minutes of each other.



These two images clearly show the gap in the middle of the wall, which is the entrance to the rock stairway, leading down to the edge of the lake. As we have no original pictures of the stairway, the function of the gap was something of a mystery until the site was re-discovered (in 2010).

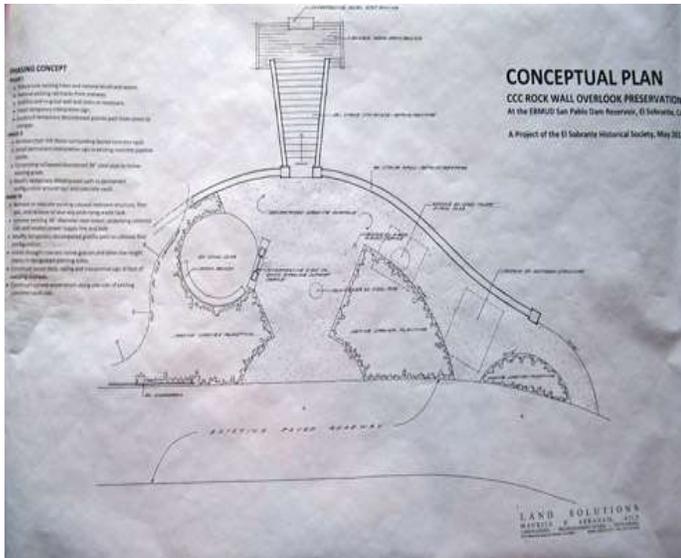


This final image, looking east toward Orinda, again shows the completed wall, with the CCC boys engaged in planting trees.

As noted, your historical society has been involved for some time in discussions with the staff of EBMUD to come up with a plan to preserve and enhance the rock wall site. Finally, in late January of this year, an on-site meeting was arranged with ranger supervisor Elizabeth Hill. The historical society was represented by myself (Donald Bastin), Maurice Abraham, and Steven James. We were joined by Femke Oldham, coordinator for SPAWNERS (San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society). SPAWNERS' mission is to protect and preserve the San Pablo Creek watershed, and since this area is part of that watershed, their participation seemed natural. In addition, SPAWNERS has been working with EBMUD for almost two years, doing work along Wilkie and Appian Creeks, with mitigation funds supplied by the utility. Thus, we already have something of a relationship.

We looked over the site for the better part of an hour, asking questions, and informing Elizabeth of our plans for the restoration effort.

To help better understand our intentions, Maury had produced a detailed drawing, showing progress in three phases.



Note: The metal rails running down the steps are not part of the original stairway, and will be removed.

At the end of our meeting, Elizabeth promised to take the matter up with her superiors and get back to us as soon as possible.

This phased approach allows us to reduce the project to bite-sized chunks that are manageable and can be taken on as funds and resources become available. It also allows flexibility in dealing with the needs and interests of the Utility District.

Late in March, Elizabeth communicated the good news that, in essence, our project had been approved. In fact, it has been assigned a “priority” status. However, due to various constraints, including funding, actual work by the District will not begin until the summer of next year (2014). The details of the work are still to be worked out; the main consideration has to do with the outfall tower and whether it will remain in some kind of functional status. The answer to this question will determine what current structures will remain and what can be removed (or moved). But the important point is, the Utility District has agreed that the site has historic significance and will be preserved as part of their own history and the history of El Sobrante.

In the meantime, we have been granted permission to do preliminary work on the wall and stairway. This should begin in the next few months. So we are finally moving ahead and the goal is in sight. In time, we will be able to point to a restored historic site honoring the long-forgotten but important work of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the El Sobrante area.



From left: Steve James, Elizabeth Hill, Femke Oldham, Maurice Abraham. They are situated at the gap in the wall, at the top of the stairway (see next image).

Library Celebrates 100 Years

Maurice Abraham

The 100th anniversary of the Contra Costa County Library system was celebrated recently at a Gala event at the El Sobrante Library. The El Sobrante Historical Society, along with Historical Societies from El Cerrito, Pinole, Hercules, and San Pablo provided narratives and slide presentations of their respective branch library's history.



Donald Bastin (left) and Tom Panas. Tom is telling the story of the El Cerrito Library.

Donald Bastin, El Sobrante Historical Society co-founder and author of the book *Images of America, El Sobrante*, a photographic history, told how the El Sobrante branch began in the home of Blanche Burg. The library had only 200 volumes when it opened in 1938. When in 1943 WWII called Ms. Burg to work in the shipyards, the library was closed. It opened again in 1947 in a small rented building, then moved again in 1949 to 'larger' quarters in the Mitchell Building, still standing on the corner of Valley View Road and Appian Way.

The old library is easily identified today; it's the tiny, unpainted store front at the far left end of the building. This remained the library home until the current library was constructed and opened in 1961. Each Historical Society presentation placed the library history in the context of the local community's history. The oldest library still in use is the one in Crockett, located in its original building, which originally housed a branch of the Bank of Pinole. It was

donated to the town in 1919 by the C & H Sugar Company.

An overview of the library system was provided by current County Librarian, Barbara Flynn, who acknowledged the significant role of the system's first librarian, Alice Whitbeck. Ms. Whitbeck began work in August 1913 and during her 18 years service led the system's expansion into numerous local communities. Ms. Flynn reviewed the systems past history, its evolution into today's information age and its plans to continue its march into new information technologies.

Ms. Flynn opined, quite persuasively, that hard bound books will not be disappearing any time soon, despite the increasing use of digital readers. The Library system will evolve and accommodate, but there will always be those unwilling to abandon the simple satisfaction of holding and reading an old-fashioned book.

Other participating speakers included Sup. John Gioia, El Sobrante-Pinole Branch Librarian Ian Richards, George Vincent (Pinole HS) and Celeste Martin (San Pablo HS).



From right: Barbara Flynn, County Librarian, John Gioia, Ian Richards.

A standing room only crowd was on hand to hear about the Library and to celebrate its first century with a large birthday cake, coffee and punch. *Photos courtesy of Rita Xavier, San Pablo HS*

They reinforce the perception that ours was a close-knit and sharing little town in the 1950s.

Each year, for at least seven years, the Leber family hosted a Christmas party for the children in their local school. According to the local newspaper, the *El Sobrante Herald*, the school superintendent chartered the local Beninger bus line to carry the children to and from the Leber home. Lower and upper grades were delivered at staggered times, to allow all the children to receive attention. Ice cream and cookies were served and the kids were treated to movies. Each child received oranges, a box of animal cookies, candy canes, and a box of candy with an individual gift.

Lyle received the invitations from one of the original recipients, Dale Weiss. Thanks to Dale and Lyle for preserving this precious bit of our history.

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### Remembering Laura Romano

Laura Romano passed away on January 21<sup>st</sup> of this year, at the age of 93. She was a long-time resident of El Sobrante, moving into the Rancho Vista housing tract, with her husband and two boys, in the late 1940s.



*Laura with husband Vincent and sons Kenneth and Dennis (Ken is the older)*

For 25 years Laura was a teacher at Rancho Elementary School. Here we see her teaching class, sometime in the late 1950s.



In 1955, the Romano family moved to a new home in the recently completed Sherwood Forest subdivision.



It was here that I met Kenny and his mom. Ken and I both began

attending De Anza High School from the first day that it opened in 1955. My family had also bought a home in the new Sherwood Forest development. Pretty soon Ken and I were walking to the new school together. He got my attention one morning by shooting a BB gun in my direction. We were best buds after that.

I didn't know Laura as a teacher, but I do remember her as a very warm, kind, and loving human being. She and husband Vincent were married for 72 years.

*Donald Bastin*

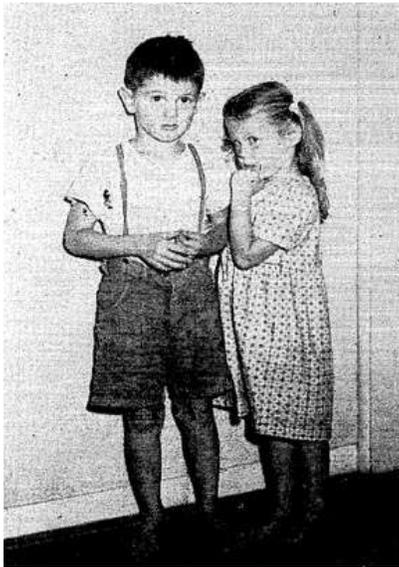
## **60 Years Ago: Stories From the El Sobrante Herald**

### **September 11, 1952: New Sheldon School Opening November 10**

The brand-new Sheldon Elementary School, located on May Road, was scheduled to open for the regular fall session in September. However, construction delays and a one-month carpenters strike would delay the opening by six to eight weeks. In the interim, children would attend classes in various makeshift sites. The kindergarten class, and first through fifth graders would either use the old Sheldon School building on Castro Road, or the Recreation Hall, on Appian Way. The sixth grade class would meet in the nearby home of Mrs. Dick Bruno, who “graciously donated the use of her large rumpus room.”

### **September 11, 1952: Missing De Bord Children Found in Backyard**

**The following article is quoted as written, without comment:** “A group of



local organizations, including the Vets, Sobrante Riders, scoutmasters, members of the Sheriff’s office, Constable Howard Biele, the San Pablo Patrol, the El Sobrante Fire Department, and

other local citizens numbering over 100 scoured the Appian Way area Wednesday night for two small children who had been missing since 4:30 in the afternoon. The climax to the frantic search came at approximately 11:30 p.m. when the youngsters were found in their

own backyard asleep under a large box. Missing were Tom DeBord, 7, and his sister, Janice, 6. When they didn’t return home, their mother, Mrs. Earl DeBord, called for help in locating the children and willing search parties took over. It was feared that the youngsters may have fallen into the creek nearby. Asked why they didn’t come in the house, Tom told his parents that they tried the door about 8:30 p.m. and found it locked. . . Mr. and Mrs. Earl DeBord . . . wish to thank the various organizations and individuals who joined in the searching party to help them locate the missing children.”

### **October 30, 1952: Ground Breaking For St. Callistus Catholic Church Held Saturday**

Ground was broken for the new St. Callistus Catholic Church on Saturday, October 25. Long in the planning, progress was expected to be rapid, with construction complete within 120 days. The ceremony was attended by many local dignitaries, including Fire Chief Charlie Matteson, Judge Wilson Locke, Vincent Raney (architect), and Bob Johnson (contractor).



In the photograph, the people are identified as, from left: Edward Gille, Father P. Garrigan of St. David’s Church, Father Michael Ryan, pastor of St. Callistus Church, Kenneth Hetzel, Pat Fahey, Bob Munro, and Tom Corcoran.

## Meet the New Guy

*Joseph Camacho recently joined the  
ESHS Steering Committee*

Joseph is a husband, father of three, and was born in Oakland and raised in Alameda, CA.

He is a relatively new addition to the El Sobrante community, having purchased his first home in El Sobrante in 2009. As a veteran of the United States Air Force, Joseph served from 2001-2005, specializing in communications and computer systems, mobile communications and intelligence.



*Joe, with daughter Gracie*

After separating from the military Joseph moved back to the SF bay area and continued his career in IT for a few years before making the decision to go back to school to follow his passion, history. He graduated with multiple AA degrees: History, Social and Behavioral Sciences and Arts and Humanities. Joseph is graduating with a BA in Political Science and a minor in History, with an emphasis in American Political History. As an active member of his community Joseph was selected as a recipient of the San Francisco Foundation's Koshland Fellowship for his work

in higher education, veterans issues and the needs of the underserved communities.

Joseph continues his service to his country through community service. He also continues to serve his fellow veterans, and active duty members serving around the world, as a member of the board of directors for Their Angels Military Support Group. Their Angels is the Richmond-based non-profit organization and is nationally recognized as a veterans-serving organization dedicated to serving our troops deployed around the world. Joseph was recently appointed by John Gioia to serve on the El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) and hopes to work towards bringing the unique community of El Sobrante closer together.

*The El Sobrante Historical Society is an informal nonprofit 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](http://ESHIST.ORG).*

## We're On Facebook!

### 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.
- 5. Joseph Camacho:** Historical Researcher and Writer; MAC Liaison; Tech Support.

Visit us on-line at: [ESHIST.ORG](http://ESHIST.ORG)  
Questions, Comments, and  
other communication? Send to:  
[ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM](mailto:ESHISTORY@GMAIL.COM)