

Pinole Historical Society Newsbriefs



P.O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564

www.PinoleHistoricalSociety.org info@PinoleHistoricalSociety.org

MAY 8 PROGRAM

'KABOOM: SECRET STORIES OF THE HERCULES POWDER WORKS, THE WORLD'S LARGEST EXPLOSIVES FACTORY'

Pinole and Hercules are really one place together. Life in the two valleys of Pinole and Hercules has been inextricably linked since 1878, when ruthless and visionary men bought the lands of Refugio Valley for a dynamite factory.

The town of Hercules was incorporated by DuPont in 1900; for nearly 75 years its population remained under 300. This company town housed workers, technicians, and managers, closely linked with nearby Pinole.

Dynamite transformed the explosives industry — and made our modern industrial world possible. San Francisco was the cradle of the dynamite industry in America. More than 15 companies established dynamite plants around the Bay.

Mankind's mastery of the energy of chemical explosives is fundamental to every aspect of our life today.

The story of Hercules is the earliest story of technological and industrial innovation that assured California's place on the global stage.



Loading dynamite in Hercules, 1930s.

Author and Hercules Historical Society historian Steve Lawton will tell the real story of Hercules, from its early days until now, with documented historical facts, rare photographs and maps never before seen. You'll learn about the rough industrial pioneers, daily life in the company town, business during wartime, the post-war decline, the conversion to suburbia, the financial crises, and yes, the deadly explosions.

Join us Friday, May 8, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in conference rooms 2A and 2B of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, 1301 Pinole Valley Road. Refreshments will be served.

You'll hear the story of California Powder Works, DuPont, and the Hercules Powder Company, which produced one of the first internationally branded products: Hercules dynamite. The Hercules story is a big book of California history, including chapters of the Civil War, the Transcontinental Railroad, and the destruction of San Francisco.

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Published quarterly by the Pinole Historical Society

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It's also posted on the PHS website.

FOR ADVERTISERS: 2,000 printed copies of *PHS Newsbriefs* are distributed every quarter, generating readership among thousands of Pinole and West County residents. Hundreds more receive the newsletter directly from the PHS via its database and website. **If you're interested in advertising, please contact Jeff Rubin at info@PinoleHistoricalSociety.org or call him at (510) 724-9507.**

KABOOM

Continued from front

For years this was the largest dynamite factory in the world. Chinese laborers were, for a time, the backbone of a rugged workforce performing dangerous tasks. It was the largest producer of TNT during World War I, the "Chemists' War."

Breakthroughs in chemical technology were made by scientists working on "The Hill" at Quinan Hall.

Farsighted managers built one of the first industrial hospitals in America, and a pioneering social club; all these buildings, and more, survive today.

PHS CALENDAR

MEETINGS

May 8: Program: "KABOOM: Secret Stories of the Hercules Powder Works, the World's Largest Explosives Factory." (Story on front page). The public is invited to this FREE event in conference rooms 2A and 2B of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, 1301 Pinole Valley Road. Refreshments will be served.

May 13, June 10, July 8: Monthly Board of Directors meeting. The public is invited to attend and speak on any of the items discussed at these meetings. Pinole Senior Center, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

ONGOING

Pinole Library history exhibits. Two exhibits are at the library, 2935 Pinole Valley Road. Library hours are: Monday (10 a.m. to 6 p.m.), Wednesday (2 to 8 p.m.), Friday and Saturday (12 to 5 p.m.).

PHS booth at Pinole Farmers' Market. We are at the farmers' market every other Saturday from April through December.

2015 PHS MEETING DATES

- Friday, September 11
- Friday, November 6.

PinoleHistoricalSociety

Board of Directors: Marcia Kalapus, President; Jeff Rubin, Vice President; Mary Drazba, Treasurer; Jo Ann Gannotti, Secretary; Norma Martinez-Rubin; Mary McMains; George Vincent. **Director Emeritus:** Jack Meehan. **Newsletter Editor:** Jeff Rubin



Hercules Powder Works acid area and wharf.

Guest columnist

Stella Faria

A TRIP DOWN OLD SCHOOL MEMORY LANE

From my hilltop home across town, I can still see the ghost of the old Pinole-Hercules School perched atop a knoll off of Samuel Street.

Winding up to the

school itself was a very narrow road that was not easy to navigate, especially for school buses in later years.

My son, Allen, was in the school's last seventh-grade class; his grandmother was in one of the

first classes in 1906, and I spent my first eight years of school there, so we represent three generations in the school's history.

The school was a two-story building, painted a dusty, dull shade of lime



Stella Faria

green, with a bell tower and a wide stairway at the front entrance. The front schoolyard was paved with asphalt, which our parents complained was very hard on our shoes.

It was designated as the girls' playground and had a couple of basketball hoops.

However, most enjoyment was found in drawing very large chalk circles for dodgeball or a variety of designs for hopscotch. I recall envying girls who came to school with a new taw made from broken chains or other jewelry, which made for very accurate landing in the right box.

The flagpole was also in the front yard, and the flag was raised and lowered daily by the school

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1940 EIGHTH-GRADE CLASS PHOTO. Stella Faria, the author of this article, is in the third row from the bottom, fourth from left (white collar).

Geoff Torretta

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A TRIP DOWN OLD SCHOOL MEMORY LANE

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 janitor. On Halloween the local, older rowdy boys would hoist a neighbor's garbage can up the flagpole. It was amusing to us kids, but very upsetting to the school staff.

Playgrounds

The back yard of the school was the boys' playground, and there was a lower dirt baseball diamond reserved for the seventh- and eighth-grade boys. It was bordered on the south side by a large grove of eucalyptus trees which had been planted one Arbor Day while my mother-in-law was a stu-

dent there. She told us many times that she had planted one of those trees and remembered which tree was hers. We were always happy to go along with her story.

When the recess bells rang, we lined up in rows by class on the schoolyard, and marched very quietly to our classrooms. The kindergarten and second-grade classrooms, lavatories, and drinking fountains were on the lower level with an open concrete basement, which also housed the large oil-burning furnace and some storage rooms.

During the rainy sea-

son, that basement area became our playground, still separated by a girls' side and a boys' side. The girls had fun playing jacks, as the concrete floor provided a good, high ball bounce, allowing more time for pickup. I can only guess what games were played on the boys' side, but marbles were every boy's property for bragging and making deals.

Classrooms

On the upper floor, there were six classrooms, a small auditorium, the principal's and nurse's offices, with a

long hallway down the middle. The steps in each of two stairwells always seemed to be creaky. They handled a lot of traffic, as we went up and down those stairs eight to ten times a day.

The auditorium was used only for special programs, and was crowded one day in early June each year with parents proudly attending their child's graduation from the eighth grade.

The classrooms and grand hallway floors were wood and treated with oil (not varnished). At the back of each classroom

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A TRIP DOWN OLD SCHOOL MEMORY LANE

Continued from page 4

was a cloakroom with hooks to hang our coats on and shelves to put our lunch boxes on, unless we chose to run home for lunch if we lived in town. In the wintertime, it was a mess of dripping raincoats, muddy galoshes and umbrellas, if we were lucky enough to own one.

The blackboards (green in some cases) were lined at the top with alphabetical or numerical borders, and each room had what is now considered a collectible school-house clock. It was a job for a boy, but it almost seemed like an honor to be asked to erase the blackboards for the teacher.

The wooden desks with wrought iron legs had ink wells which were filled and used only in the upper grades. It took

a little skill to write with those wooden pens that held removable points.

At the back of each room was a pencil sharpener. A broken point on a pencil was sometimes just an excuse to take a break.

Each year a photographer came to take class pictures. Everyone made an effort to be well groomed and to wear his or her Sunday best. We did not have individual photos, but were lined up in tiers, and our teachers rarely posed for the picture.

In the late 1930s, Mrs. Jordan had a combination sixth- and seventh-grade class with as many as fifty-five students, so that class picture really stood out. She ruled that class with an iron hand and was my favorite teacher, who made learning interesting and fun at the same time.

In 1948, I went to work at the old school for Margaret Collins, who had been my third-grade teacher and was now the district superintendent. There was a post-war influx of families to the area, and the old building could no longer accommodate the growth.

Because of a shortage of teachers, the state was issuing emergency and provisional credentials. Temporary classes were held at the Methodist church and at St. Joseph's Church Hall, which had been moved to Pinole after having served as a kindergarten in Hercules many years before.

Children were being bused from El Sobrante, Tara Hills, and Montalvin Manor until schools were completed in those areas.

I moved with Miss Collins to Pinole Hercules

School #2 in 1951. It was later named the Margaret Collins School.

Pinole Junior High was opened in 1967, so the death knell was sounded for the old school on the hill. It was sad news for the entire community when it was announced that the building would be demolished because it was not earthquake proof. That fateful day came in 1968.

That proud old building was swelling with wonderful memories that will live on forever with those of us who were fortunate enough to have walked through its hallowed hallways.

The bell from the bell tower is all that remains, with a memorial plaque, at Collins School.

Those schools that replaced it can never live up to the standards set by the Old School on the Hill.



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Pinole **Historical** Society

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(PINOLE RESIDENCY NOT REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP)

**PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION, AND SEND CASH OR YOUR CHECK,
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MEMBERSHIPS ARE FOR THE 2015 CALENDAR YEAR (EXCEPT LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS)

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AMOUNT ENCLOSED: [] Cash \$ _____ [] Check # _____ \$ _____

DATE PAID: _____

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Give the gift of history to a loved one or friend. Fill out the above application, circle **GIFT**, and include your information below. Your recipient will get a 2015 gift membership to the Pinole Historical Society and a note from us informing them that the gift is from you.

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2015 IS THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PANAMA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION

One hundred years ago, in April 1915, the citizens of Contra Costa County had exposition fever! The greatly anticipated Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) opened on February 20, 1915.

The fair officially commemorated the completion and opening of the Panama Canal. So too, the fair celebrated San Francisco's rebirth after the 1906 great earthquake and fire.

Contra Costa County, as the operational arm of the San Francisco-based businesses, knew the fair was all about its citizens' contribution to the wealth, culture, and spirit that made the PPIE possible. If Contra Costa was a colony of imperial San Francisco, then Contra Costa was the jewel in the crown.

The Contra Costa Board of Supervisors recognized Friday, April 4, 2015, as the centennial of Contra Costa County Day at the PPIE.

In its resolution, the supervisors acknowledged the important role that Contra Costa County continues to play in creating the wealth, economic bounty, and trade for which San Francisco is noted.

More than 10,000 individuals from the county traveled by car, ferry, and train to San Francisco for the day. Many of the travelers arrived in the quarter-mile convoy with floats, banners, and more than 300 automo-



Contra Costa County exhibit-hall entrance.

biles to parade from the Ferry Building to the Marina District, site of the PPIE.

Exposition fever built in Contra Costa as residents, public officials, and chambers of commerce actively encouraged the United States Congress to select San Francisco as the Exposition City for the 1915 event.

President William Howard Taft lent his significant weight to his selection by proclaiming San Francisco as the "city that knows how!" Citizens along the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad line rallied to see President Taft on October 13, 1911, en route home to Washington, D.C. Taft made the transcontinental journey to heft the ceremonial first spade of dirt at the exhibition's official ground breaking.

Sheriff R.R. Veale and Hercules Powder Compa-

ny Superintendent James Birmingham, Exhibition County Commissioners to the PPIE, worked tirelessly to promote Contra Costa County, its agricultural products, its manufacturing industries, and its connection to the exhibition. A film crew traveled the county creating a promotional film reel shown in the U.S. South and East to entice immigrants west.

Women did their part as well. Not to be left out, Phoebe Apperson Hearst organized the Panama Pacific International Exposition Womens (yes, correct spelling) Board to coordinate the exposition supporting women's role. Shares were sold to raise capital for board activities.

Womens auxiliary members, working under their respective county Womens board chairwoman, acted as exposition hostesses. Mae Sadler Mead, the Byron

Hot Springs' largest shareholder, was the youngest member of the Womens board and was the Contra Costa County Chairwoman.

Few remaining artifacts survive from the Contra Costa County exhibit in the PPIE's California building. There are several panoramic views taken of the Contra Costa throngs arriving on parade.

A few postcards and posed photographs are located in private collections and historical-society archives. Only one, the Byron Hot Springs exhibit, is still intact, preserved, and displayed, thanks to the Martinez Historical Society Museum.

Please contact the Pinole Historical Society, or the author of this article (Historian@Byron-HotSprings.com), if you can locate Contra Costa County exhibit items for our centennial day commemoration. Hap-PPIE Contra Costa Day!

— Carol A. Jensen is vice president of the Contra Costa Historic Landmark Advisory Committee, and a member of the California Historical Society, Contra Costa County Historical Society, East Contra Costa Historical Society, and John Marsh Historic Trust.

☆ ☆ ☆

The Pinole Historical Society will have a program on the PPIE on November 6. Watch for details.

Back in the day

DISCOVERING A GEM OF PINOLE'S HISTORY

Part one: A pioneer family's background

By **George R. Vincent**

Little is known about Pinole's early history between the years 1860-1880.

This period was known as the Immigration Phase of Pinole's past. It was a time marked by the American expansion and takeover of the Spanish-speaking Rancho lands.

It was also a time of the decline of the native Californio lifestyle and Rancho culture.

A recent discovery of family treasures of these bygone years has shed light on the activities of a local family whose downtown home remains one

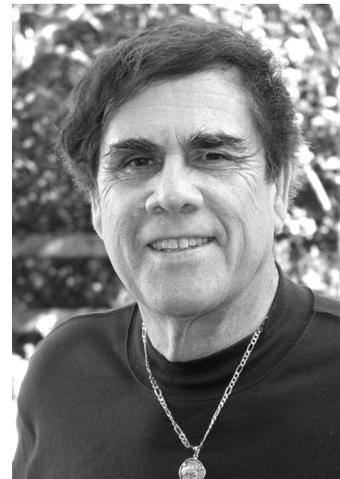
of the few surviving buildings of very old Pinole.

The small, wood-framed home at 2235 San Pablo Avenue was

originally known to Pinoleans of recent memory as the Tessie Curran Baldwin house. Today, the sparkling white dwelling is owned by



The Tessie Curran Baldwin home.



George Vincent

William McMaster, a nephew of the deceased Tessie Curran Baldwin.

McMaster also inherited and generously shared a family collection of photos and documents that revealed a living history of the earliest occupants of the Curran home.

The building was constructed in the late 1800s, during the early time when both homes and businesses were intermingled along dusty

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DISCOVERING A GEM OF PINOLE'S HISTORY

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San Pablo Road, as a busy downtown Pinole grew away from its San Pablo Bay beginnings.

Undoubtedly, the home's occupants witnessed the Martinez to San Pablo stage pass by their doors. The home began as a slaughterhouse and butcher shop, but was remodeled into a residence in the 1870s for newcomers Cipriano Silvas and his wife, Maria Rosario Alvarado Silvas.

Cipriano Silvas had been a school teacher in Chile before emigrating to California and meeting his wife-to-be, who was a daughter of the aristocratic Los Angeles family of the famous Rancho de la Cienega.

The couple had their own rancho in the Pinole Valley area, raising a large family of eleven children. The family prospered and was well-



Cipriano Silvas (far left) and his family.

known in the Pinole region.

Cipriano, nicknamed "Cap," could read and write fluently and was often asked to translate or write letters and documents.

In the 1870s, the family moved to the growing downtown section of Pinole. Once there, daughter Theresa

married a local, John Curran. Their daughter, Tessie, was raised close to home across San Pablo Avenue on Quinan Street. Tessie would later marry Superior Court Judge Charles Baldwin.

Tessie was a granddaughter of Cipriano and Maria Silvas. She was a dental hygienist for the Richmond schools and lived most of her adult life in Richmond. She

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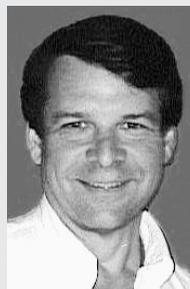
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You can help us preserve the history of Pinole

Always seeking to improve and add to the society's collection, the PHS welcomes inquiries from individuals owning objects which are significant to the history of Pinole.

Though we do not have a museum, we have three exhibit spaces at the Pinole Library and conduct history programs for service organizations, retirement residences, and schools.

Artifacts are an important part of these programs. Please contact us at info@pinolehistoricalsociety.org or call (510) 724-9507 if you have an object you'd like to donate.

Also, you can view the numerous PHS programs right on your computer. Go to the city's website www.ci.pinole.ca.us/about/videos.html and scroll down to PINOLE HISTORY. Several recent programs have been added.

In memoriam

John Thaddeus Cwalina, M.D.: March 11, 1945 to March 17, 2015 (age: 70).

A native of Pinole, John was the oldest of the four children of Dr. Thaddeus and Lilys Cwalina — John, Mary, Christine, and Paul.

His father was a much-loved physician in Pinole for decades, assisted in his Tennent Avenue practice by his wife, who was also a nurse. Dr. Cwalina was remembered for making house calls to patients any time of the day or night.

John followed his father into the medical profession. He was an anesthesiologist for many years at Brookside Hospital.

He enjoyed his pets, playing the piano and golfing. John was a devout Catholic and member of the Santa Maria Parish Church of Orinda.

John's wife predeceased him. He is survived by daughters Angie Cwalina and Rachel Palmer; his sister, Mary; brother, Paul; niece Debbie Cwalina, and four grandchildren.

DISCOVERING A GEM OF PINOLE'S HISTORY

Continued from page 9

inherited her grandparents' home and lived there the last year of her life.

Tessie loved being a native of Pinole and a living part of its history. She willed the Pinole Historical Society a generous gift upon her death to help the society preserve Pinole's history.

Today, the historic Tessie Curran Baldwin home has been aptly renamed. It has been meticulously maintained in decor as the Garden of Gems, operated by Lee Ann Miller and her daughter, Amber Edwards.

Behind the gleaming white picket fence lies a residential jewel in the setting called old Pinole.

Part 2 will run in the summer issue of Newsbriefs.



Tessie Curran, 1922.

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PASTOR JOHN WRIGHT

PHS SEEKING FAMILY FILMS FOR HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

Got film? The Pinole Historical Society is embarking on a major project to archive the city's history — family by family and event by event. Our objective is to establish a permanent, digitized collection of Pinole's history.

Do you have film of past Holy Ghost parades, Pinole Valley High School Homecoming parades, Memorial Day or July 4 parades?

How about important athletic events, such as a high-school football, basketball, baseball, softball, or volleyball game?

Perhaps you have film of an important event that took place in Fernandez Park, or a ribbon cutting or an event that has a place in Pinole's history—such as the 1958 flood?

We're looking for any video or film you have—VHS,

Beta, camcorder, DV tape, 8mm, Super 8mm, 16mm, 35mm, motion picture.

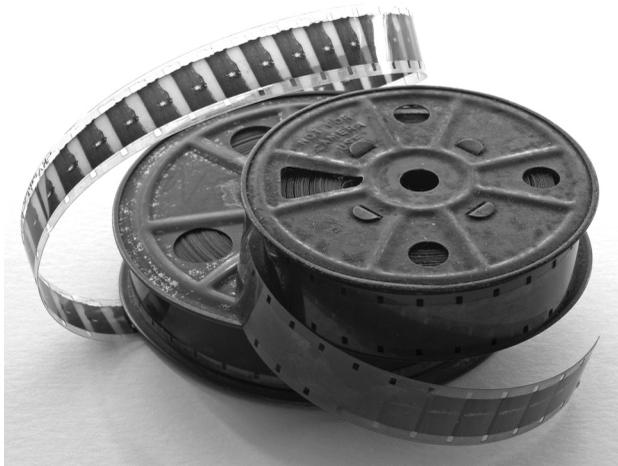
Nearly everyone has taken home movies. That makes everyone who has taken film a historian.

We want to collect, digitize, catalog, and preserve old movies on DVD (and whatever formats are to come) to exhibit, educate, and entertain.

The PHS will share these videos on a film archive that we will establish, similar to the The Pioneers Film Archive on YouTube created by the California Pioneers of Santa Clara (www.youtube.com/sccpioneers).

Film connects with the past in a unique way. It's immersive, educational, and entertaining for young people. It's a way to get young people interested in history.

Got film? Please contact us at info@pinolehistorical.com



GOT HISTORY?

The Pinole Historical Society is grateful for donations of artifacts, photos, newspapers, memorabilia—anything of historical significance.

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2358 San Pablo Avenue
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The Pinole Historical Society promotes awareness and appreciation of history through preservation and education, and chronicles the city's heritage for current and future generations.

City adds history videos to website

Several PHS programs have been added to the City of Pinole website: www.ci.pinole.ca.us/about/videos.html

- 2012 Veterans Day Memorial/Flag Retirement.
- 2013 Veterans Day Memorial/Flag Retirement.
- 2014 Veterans Day Memorial/Flag Retirement.
- Japanese American Internment program (2012).
- Old School bell dedication (2013).
- February 7, 2014, program: "Bars, Barbers and Characters of Early Pinole."
- September 5, 2014, program: "Presidential Rosies."
- November 7, 2014, program: "Maritime Contra Costa County."

We thank Bob Kopp, who recorded most of these events for the society.

Scroll down to PINOLE HISTORY on the city's website to find all the Pinole history programs.

The Pinole Mural

A Community Legacy



Watch The Pinole Mural video at this link:

<http://www.pinolehistoricalsociety.org/PinoleMural.mov>



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Saturday – Sunday
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CLOSED MONDAY

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THEN AND NOW

Early in the 20th century, downtown Pinole had 14 saloons; the Swenson and Lewis Saloon (left corner) and the Stats Hotel and Saloon (right corner) were two of them. Antlers Tavern now occupies the Swenson & Lewis

site, and Tina's Place occupies the Stats site. The entire west side of Tennent Avenue, including Forester's Hall, the large white building with the A-frame roof, was destroyed in a massive blaze in 1908.



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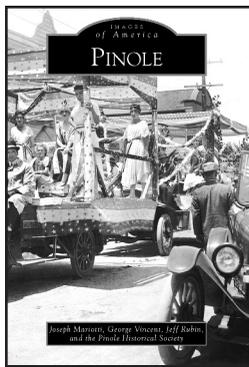
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LOCAL HISTORY BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM PHS

The Pinole Historical Society stocks Arcadia Publishing books about Hercules, Richmond, El Sobrante, El Cerrito, Crockett, Rodeo, Martinez, Port Costa, and Maritime Contra Costa County. And, of course, we have plenty of Pinole books.

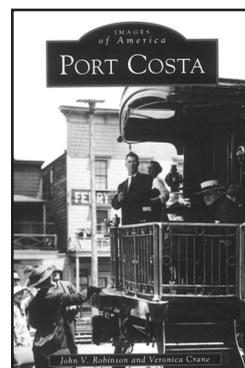
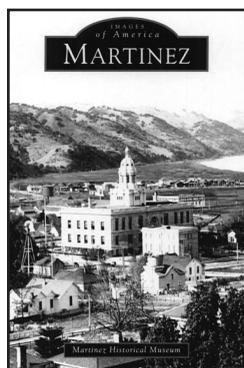
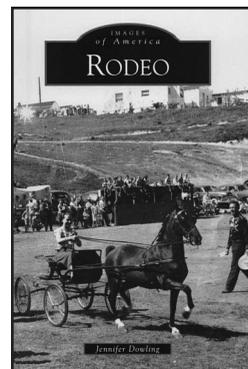
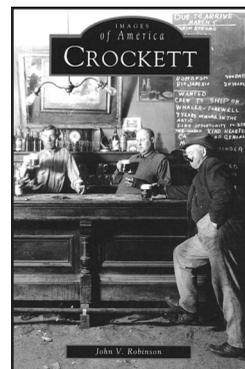
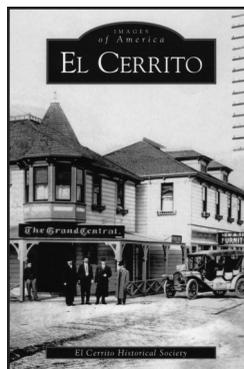
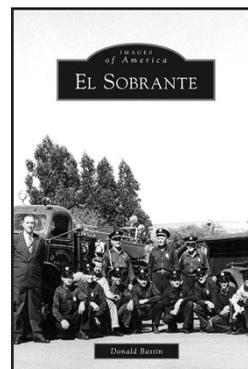
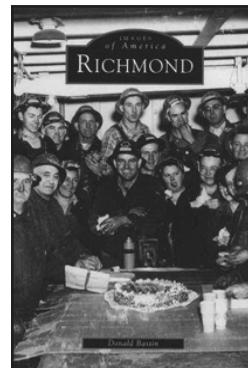
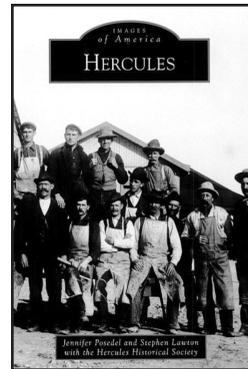
You may purchase one or more of these books from us at the Pinole Farmers' Market—we're there every other Saturday from April through December.

Pinole, Hercules, Richmond, El Sobrante, El Cerrito, and Maritime Contra Costa County books are **\$24**, including sales tax.

Crockett, Rodeo, Martinez, and Port Costa books are **\$22**, including sales tax.

You may order one or more by mail (prices listed include sales tax and postage) and we'll ship them to you immediately.

Mail your check and order form to **Pinole Historical Society, P.O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564.**



50 years ago — 1965

May 4: Willie Mays hits 512th home run to break Mel Ott's National League record.

May 5: First large-scale U.S. Army ground units arrive in South Vietnam.

May 12: West Germany and Israel establish diplomatic relations.

May 13: Several Arab nations break diplomatic ties with West Germany.

May 16: The Campbell Soup Company introduces SpaghettiOs under its Franco-American brand.

May 18: Gene Roddenberry suggests 16 names, including Kirk, for Star Trek captain.

May 21-23: On the U.C. Berkeley campus, the Vietnam Day Committee runs an anti-war teach-in. Speakers include Dr. Benjamin Spock, socialist leader Norman Thomas, novelist Norman Mailer, journalist I.F. Stone, and Professor Staughton Lynd of Yale. Bertrand Russell sends a taped message.

May 22: Beatles' "Ticket to Ride" single goes #1.

May 24: U.S. Supreme Court declares federal law allowing post office to intercept communist propaganda is unconstitutional.

May 25: Muhammad Ali KOs Sonny Liston in first round in heavyweight boxing title rematch.

June 3: NASA launches Gemini 4, the second U.S. two-man orbital flight, with astronauts James McDivitt and Edward White. Gemini 5 completed 64 orbits of Earth.

June 6: Rolling Stones release single "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction."

June 12: Sonny & Cher make their first TV appearance on American Bandstand.

June 28: First U.S. ground combat forces in

Vietnam authorized by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

July 8: Joe Morgan is first Houston player with 6 hits in a game.

July 13: San Francisco Giants' Juan Marichal is named All-Star Game MVP (NL 6, AL 5).

July 15: Mariner IV sends back first pictures of Mars.

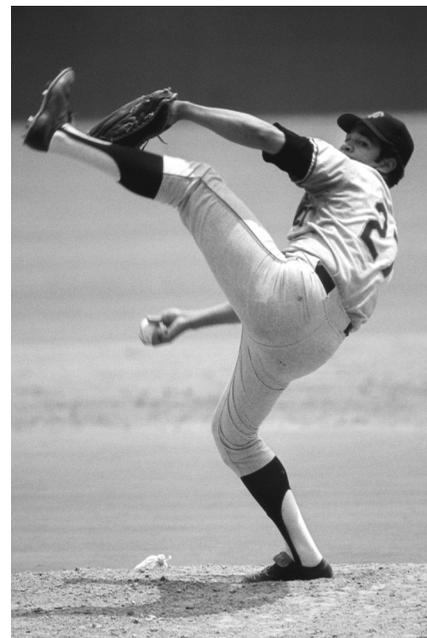
July 24: Bob Dylan release "Like a Rolling Stone."

July 24: Casey Stengel resigns as manager of New York Mets.

July 27: President Lyndon B. Johnson signs a bill requiring cigarette makers to print health warnings on all cigarette packages about the effects of smoking.

July 28: President Johnson announces that he has ordered an increase in US military forces in Vietnam to 125,000. To accomplish this, the monthly draft call is raised from 17,000 to 35,000.

July 30: LBJ signs Medicare and Medicaid bill, which goes into effect in 1966.



Juan Marichal

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