

VC



# Orinda Historical Society

November 2004

P. O. BOX 82 , ORINDA , CA 94563

(925) 254-1353

## News From “the Famed Tunnel Strip” by Erik Andersen

Celebrities in Orinda? No, I’m not talking about the hugely successful Orinda Film Festival. It was at Milt Nelson’s Orinda Willows. Milt was one of the anchor tenants – along with Casa Orinda and others – in a mini Las Vegas that once stood at the Orinda Crossroads. The Willows featured live radio broadcasts, a live band, and Hollywood stars from time to time.

How about a whole chicken with rice, baked potatoes, French bread, Caesar salad, flaming baked Alaska, a bottle of wine, and a bottle of California champagne (before the French cracked down and made us call it ‘sparkling wine’...). How about \$10 for all that – for two!

The Historical Society received a donation of scores of old photos from The Willows. The pictures show what a jumping place it was – and everyone dressed to the nines! The Orinda Historical Society encourages people to come visit – enjoy the menu we have on display and flip through the photos. We would love to identify some of the people and celebrities that are having so much fun. If you used to be a regular there, you might see some familiar faces in the images.

The Orinda Historical Society recently led two tours of the Caldecott Tunnel. Someone you know may have worked on the tunnels, and we are interested in recording oral histories of anyone who may have been involved in the construction of the first three bores. With talk of a fourth bore through the Berkeley Hills, we would like to add additional depth to our records of this important engineering feat.

On the subject of great accomplishments – as we mark the end of 2004, The Orinda Historical Society wants to recognize the contributions of two important members that left us this year.

**Sarge Littlehale** was a dedicated member and recent Past President of The Historical Society, the Chairman of the Orinda Historical Landmark Committee, a Rotarian, a former Mayor of Orinda, and a consistent attendee and contributor to Orinda City Council and Planning Committee meetings. Sarge made important contributions to the community on many levels – particularly on transportation issues. His presence and leadership will be missed by so many.

This year also saw the passing of **Paul Williams**. Paul was a diligent record keeper, local history buff, and a strong Board member for many years. He provided many contributions to the archives of the Historical Society, including research and identification of the property lines of the Mexican land grants in the area and the local stop of the California-Nevada railroad. These two men will be greatly missed.

## 18th Century Cannon Ball Found in Orinda

While doing some drainage work at his Orinda home several years ago, Bob Skrak discovered an amazing find, an 18th century artifact: a cannon ball from the Spanish settlers days. An appraiser estimated that the cannon ball was from the 1780 to 1790s. His neighbor is reported to have found a Spanish dagger some years ago. Bob and Joyce Skrak have generously donated the cannon ball to the Orinda Historical Society.

### Museum Location

Lower Level of  
Orinda Library

### Museum Hours of Operation

Monday, Wednesday,  
& Friday 3-5 p.m.

Also by Appointment

24 Hour Answering

Machine

925-254-1353



### Upcoming Events

- **Annual Holiday Party:**  
Wednesday, Dec. 1st:  
6:30 p.m. reception &  
7:00 p.m. dinner.  
*Reservations & payment  
are due by Nov. 19th.  
Call 254-1353 for fur-  
ther information.*





## An Interview with Clark Wallace by John Holmgren

### **Holiday Happenings**

*The Orinda Historical Society participated in the Orinda Holiday Bazaar on November 6th and 7th.*

*Thank you to all the volunteers who helped staff the OHS booth at the Bazaar!*

**Clark Wallace is a long-time Orinda resident and real estate developer who had these memories to share:**

My Dad opened an office near the Orinda Crossroads in 1938 right after the Broadway low level tunnel was completed. He and my grandfather started their own real estate office in 1928. I was born in 1933, graduated from Cal in 1955 and joined my father's business.

During the 1930's, Dad was doing some Moraga Ranch activity (real estate) and met Arthur Breed who was managing the ranch for the Moraga company which was owned mostly by the James Irvine Foundation of Orange County. Along about 1952 Dad had an idea he got from Arthur Breed. Arthur had a big ranch out in San Leandro.; it was a working ranch and they had about 100 employees most of whom were from the Canary Islands. The last of them died about 5 years ago. Breed tried to find a buyer for the Moraga Ranch.

In 1953 Dad and the other parties who owned the ranch sold it to the Utah Construction Company. Utah took it and kind of master planned it. There were about 5,000 acres starting at upper Ivy Drive and extending south to the EBMUD borders and extending east into what we now know as Burton Valley in Lafayette. Utah worked the ranch and kept it going and did some subdivision development. We were part of the county. They worked the ranch through the rest of the '50's. I came in 1958 and worked in parts of the ranch. Utah was making so much money, and they had interests all over the world including in Italy and in the mining of bauxite in Australia. They also had Harbor Bay Isle over in Alameda

Bill Barnes ran the ranch and they used my Dad as a broker. Russell Bruzzone was a young developer and they sold him some lots over in Lafayette. Russ had originally been in Venezuela in the ice cream business; he was very entrepreneurial. Utah wanted to sell and Bruzzone wanted to buy so we sold it in a series of three transactions to Russ. I can remember the first was in 1963. It involved all the residential lots that were completed. Some were in Burton Valley, some in Moraga, There were a few odd lots even in Orinda but Utah sold most of Inland Valley while they were still in title. There were 319 lots in various stages of completion or under construction, most of which were in Moraga. This was Bruzzone's first major acquisition of the ranch. Clark Wallace checked out the lots. Most of them were sold in one year. Bruzzone bought the land that comprised the Moraga Ranch in 1963-65. Breed owned a significant percentage of the old Moraga Company and he ran it. He tried to find a buyer for the Company. In 1964 Bruzzone badly wanted to acquire all the retail business in Moraga. As part of the master plan there had been an excessive amount of real estate in Moraga in anticipation of 40 or 50 thousand homes. There were three major transactions in which Russ bought from Utah all of what we call the Moraga Ranch and Utah was gone.

## Photo Gallery

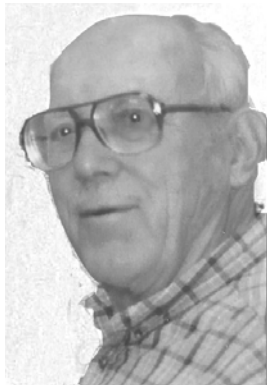


OHS Board Member **Carl Weber** visiting the museum with daughter **Liz Witbeck**, son-in-law **Ray Witbeck**, grandchildren **Timothy & Hannah Witbeck**, and friends.



**Sarge Littlehale** and **Erik Andersen** helping clean up the museum after some flooding in January 2004.

## In Memoriam



**Sarge Littlehale:** Former Historical Society President



**Paul Williams:** Historical Society Board Member

*Thank you to Allen's in Orinda for generously providing the printing of this newsletter.*