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Orinda Historical Society Newsletter

November 2005

P. O. BOX 82, ORINDA, CA 94563

(925) 254-1353

An Architectural Treasure in Orinda

By Teresa Long

Tucked away by a picturesque creek in Orinda is a sight you'd expect to find in Wisconsin or somewhere else in the Midwest. Located near Glorietta Blvd. is a genuine Frank Lloyd Wright built house, one of fewer than 20 residential houses the architect designed in California.

Katie and Maynard Buehler of Orinda had this home built for them in 1948. They became excited after seeing photos in Architectural Digest showcasing Wright's work, and they dreamed about him building a house for them. But, they doubted he would come all the way to Orinda. As luck would have it, Katie heard about a couple who had persuaded Mr. Wright to travel out west to build a store (the Morris Gift Shop) on Maiden Lane in San Francisco. They wrote to Wright, and after he saw their Orinda property, he agreed to build the house for them.



Buehler Home in 2005

Museum Location

Lower Level of
Orinda Library
24 Orinda Way

Museum Hours of Operation

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

Also by Appointment
24 Hour Answering
Machine

925-254-1353

www.orindahistory.org

Upcoming Events

- **Holiday Social**
Wednesday, December 7,
6:30 to 9 pm at the
Orinda Community
Church
- **Next Board Meeting**
Wednesday, January 18,
2006 from 3 to 5 pm at
the OHS Museum

According to Katie, Mr. Wright was "crusty." He was a very particular man and had to have things just so. One didn't argue with Frank Lloyd Wright. He was a short man, which might explain the low ceilings in the hallway of the house that posed a challenge when it came time to get approval from the county house inspector. Mr. Wright was very attentive to detail; he insisted on examining the cinder blocks personally before they could be used to build the outside walls in part of the house.

Article is continued on Page 4



Holiday Social December 7th

Remember to send in your RSVPs by November 30th for the Orinda Historical Society's annual Holiday Social on December 7th. The event will be held at the Orinda Community Church. Come enjoy a delightful evening which includes, a social reception at 6:30 pm, and dinner at 7 pm. Afterwards, speaker Ben Randall Jr. will tell stories about the Orinda Theater and growing up in Orinda. Call 254-1353 for more info.

OHS Participates in Holiday Bazaar

On November 5th, the Orinda Historical Society hosted a booth at the annual Orinda Holiday Bazaar. This event was well attended, and the booth had lots of interest. Several OHS items including totes, Historic Sites of Orinda booklets, and coaster sets were sold. Thanks to OHS members, **Barbara Burkhalter, Pat Draa, Dan Holmes, Kay Norman, Kent Long, Marion Long, Susan Ross, Lucy Hupp Williams, and Helen Vurek** for staffing this booth.

Welcome New Members

Rick Crispino
Zand Gee & Brian Fessenden
Colette Kersten
Elvera Wallace
Emily Witt

*Suggestions or
feedback for this
newsletter? email*

newsletter@orindahistory.org

or contact

Teresa Long at 258-9771

Congratulations!

The following organiza-
tions celebrated a special
anniversary in 2005:

City of Orinda 20 years

Meadow Swim
& Tennis Club 50 years

Miramonte High
School 50 years

Orinda Arts
Council 55 years

Rotary Interna-
tional 100 years



Thank You

Recent Donations to OHS

- **Bobbie Landers**, who was Orinda's First Mayor, donated clothes, flags, signs, and memorabilia from the incorporation of Orinda.
- **Susan Millar** donated labeled shopping bags from now de-funct stores in Orinda.
- Author **Ginger Wadsworth** donated 8 of her books to the OHS collection of books by Orinda authors.
- **Mimi Wilson** donated 5 magazines dated from 1883 to 1939.
- **Sue Littlehale** donated Sarge's red sweater which he wore to many meetings in this city. Sarge Littlehale was a former Mayor of Orinda and OHS President from 2001 to 2004.

OHS is starting a Mayor of Orinda artifact box. This will include memorabilia from past Orinda Mayors.

OHS Gift Ideas

Looking for a perfect holiday gift? How about a classic black tote bag (\$15) with a photo of old-time Orinda on it? Or, for snuggling up with on those cold winter nights, a beautiful Afghan blanket (\$55), featuring the Orinda Theater and other historic scenes. These and other items can be purchased at the Orinda Historical Society Museum, and all profits from these items go to OHS.

Thanks to OHS member Dan Holmes, we now have some new items for sale. Dan has created attractive sets of coasters with historical Orinda photos from the OHS collection. There are 5 different coaster sets to choose from: each set has 4 distinct photo coasters. The 5 sets show photos from Wagner Ranch, Orinda Village, the Crossroads set 1, Crossroads set 2, and Orinda. Each set is \$18. Orders may be placed at the Museum, but do it now as they can take up to 2 weeks to complete. Call the Museum at 254-1353 for more information.

OHS Board Members 2005/2006

President: Lucy Hupp Williams
(650) 349-3382

Vice President: Erik Andersen
(925) 254-8444

Treasurer: Pat Jackson Draa
(925) 376-6657

Archivist: Susan Ross
(925) 254-3720

At-Large: Charles Blue
(925) 254-2324

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(925) 254-5677
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School Liaison: Kay Norman
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Videographer:
Jerry & Ruth Vurek
(925) 253-7995

Displays: Barbara Burkhalter
(925) 254-6868

Grants: Dan Holmes
(925) 254-3360

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
★ *Thank you to Rose Bolin,* ★
★ *the new owner of Allen's* ★
★ *Office Supplies in* ★
★ *Orinda, for generously* ★
★ *providing the printing of* ★
★ *this newsletter.* ★
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Down Memory Lane.....

The following is part two of Erza Nelson's memories of growing up in one of the oldest houses in Orinda, the "Old Yellow House." This house was built in 1893 by Captain Jenkins and is located on Moraga Way near McDonnell Nursery—the house is now painted a pale rose color.

It is the 1920s and Ezra remembers farm living.

Part II: Growing up in the Old Yellow House by Ezra Nelson:

The road going by our house was made into a paved but narrow concrete highway in 1922. But the feeling of a small family farm went on. Toward the back to the right stood the tall barn with its long sloping roof on the north side and the shortest one on the south. There was a good sized fruit orchard of pears, apples, cherries, peaches, quinces, a few grape vines and quite a large corn field across the creek. Mama always had her small flock of chickens. Papa began to make good use of the creek by building a rock and concrete dam and spillway to hold back the gravel that washed down every winter. He would strain the gravel and use it for construction jobs he did in Orinda.

From about where we lived and covering much of the land in Moraga were many pear orchards owned by the Moraga land Company. In summer we worked on the pear job. The men did the picking and the women sorted. Picking would start toward the end of July and go on for three or four weeks. We were paid when the job was finished. Hours were from 7 to 5:30 with an hour for lunch. The pay was around \$2 a day, more or less, depending on the market price. Most of the crop was sold to the Del Monte Cannery.

Speaking of pear orchards brings to mind a beautiful scene I once saw. While coming out from Oakland to Moraga on the Sacramento Northern electric train, as it was slowly rounding the Valle Vista curve, I looked out the window and spread out on the flat land below were some of those large pear orchards in full bloom. It was an unforgettable sight.

There were a number of family farms also on land owned by the Moraga Company. They were tended to by hard working Portuguese families who struggled to make a living on their hay and dairy ranches. The hills all around were covered with neatly kept hay fields. When fully grown the hay would be cut, left to dry a few days, then raked into long rows, stacked and finally pressed into large hay bales by the hay press crew. Horses were the beast of burden for all this work.

Sometimes wheat instead of hay would be grown. The threshing machine had an increasing power mechanism. The rear wheel of a small truck would be raised up, a long drive belt attached to it and that would power the thresher. It was a noisy job.

There would sometimes be large cattle drives going on the highway driven along by four or five cowboys. It was wonderful to see something like this. There was very little automobile traffic then but the cattle had right of way over any car that did come along.

To be continued in the next OHS Newsletter.



Orinda Architectural Treasure (continued from page 1).



Wright Designed Window

The house is a beautiful creation with its distinct flat roof line and other features that give it a unique Frank Lloyd Wright flavor. These include making use of large windows to bring the outdoors indoors, gorgeous redwood planks on the walls and ceiling, and the use of distinct geometric window shapes throughout the house. Before stepping into the house from the backyard garden oasis, one can look down through windows in the floor of the concrete patio and glimpse fish in the outdoor pond. After entering the cozy dining room with its walls of windows and cut-out squares recessed in a gold and wood ceiling, you know you are somewhere special. The living room is the grandest room with a hexagonal shape and a dramatic sloped ceiling with a large rectangular gold leaf inset that reflects the natural light. Redwood paneling along with cinder block are the materials of choice for this home. The hallway leading to the bedrooms is all wood, as are the walls in the bathroom. The kitchen, with its wood cabinets and dark counter top, is conveniently nestled near the center of the house.

As is typical of a Frank Lloyd Wright house, the furniture was also designed by the architect. The living room has a comfortable looking built in bench along the perimeter. The dining room features a unique wooden dining table where triangular pieces can be moved around and more pieces added to create a large setting for Thanksgiving feasts. Not all the furniture created by Mr. Wright was comfortable however; one chair Katie pointed out in the living room is notorious for people not being able to sit in it for too long.

The house is truly amazing, and so are the Japanese gardens surrounding it. These gardens were designed by Henry Matsutani. Maynard Buehler, who passed away recently, built a very authentic looking Japanese tea-house on a corner of the property after he retired. The gardens are extensive and include a Koi fish pond, waterfalls, bridges, ancient Chinese statues, and many charming paths. Katie brought one of the Koi fish back from Japan many years ago in a bowl of water on her lap on the airplane.



Japanese Tea House Built by Maynard Buehler

A fire in 1994 damaged the interior of the house, but it was reconstructed to its original design.

Members of the Orinda Historical Society and Orinda's Historic Landmark Committee were fortunate to take a tour of this house on October 21st. Thanks to John Holmgren for arranging this tour, to Bob Ray, a close friend of the Buehlers, for being our guide, and to Katie Buehler for her fascinating stories.



Dining Room



Backyard View



Living Room