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Orinda Historical Society Newsletter

January 2006

P. O. BOX 82, ORINDA, CA 94563

(925) 254-1353

Fun Orinda Stories at Holiday Dinner

The annual OHS holiday dinner held December 7, 2005 was a delightful evening full of good company, delightful food, and entertaining stories from speaker Ben Randall Jr.

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

Ben's family moved to Orinda from Oakland in 1939. Ben showed pictures of his parents, Emily Randall and Ben Randall Sr. Ben Sr. was a photographer who had worked in the 1930s at Niles Canyon making Bronco Billy movies. He met Bill and Don Rheem at Tommy Thompson's Oakland Kodak photo store, and around 1938 they asked Ben Sr. to manage the Orinda Theater. Ben Jr. had many fond memories of the Orinda crossroads like fishing by the Willows restaurant in Orinda and catching 6 inch size brook trout. One of his early memories was in 1943; he sneaked into the Orinda theater to see a preview of the movie *the Outlaw*, and his father chased him out.



*Ben Randall Jr. & Lucy Hupp Williams
with 1963 Ben Randall field plaque*

Upcoming Events

- **Next Board Meeting**
Wednesday, February 15,
2006 from 3 to 5 pm at the
OHS Museum
- **General Meeting**
Wednesday, March 15,
2006 from 7 to 9 pm at the
Orinda Community Church.
Speaker to be announced.

Do you know how
Orinda got its name?
Find out in the next
OHS Newsletter!

In 1942, Ben Jr. worked at the theater; he followed his dad through the aisles to find any lost items after a showing. He didn't know it at the time, but his dad would drop money to make sure he was paying attention. Ben Jr. later worked at the theater doing jobs like scraping gum and changing the seat cushions, taking tickets and changing the sign. They would have double bills back then, so twice a week his dad (and sometimes Ben) would have to take the old movies back to San Francisco and swap them for the new reels. "These were big heavy canisters," Ben Jr. said. Ben Sr. had a portrait studio and darkroom in the Orinda Theater, located under the rising slope leading up to the seats. If Ben couldn't find his father, he would bang on the floor. Ben Jr. not only worked in the theater, but when he was 16, he worked in the pear orchards in Moraga.

Ben Sr. was the official Highway Patrol photographer, and he would sometimes have to leave the theater to take photos of car wrecks. Ben recalled a funny incident where a truck with brake problems lost its load of tomatoes in front of the Casa Orinda. The driver was eventually found by the patrolmen drinking in the Casa bar. Ben Sr. was also the official grammar school photographer; Ben Jr. had his old class photos (class of 1949) from Orinda Union School to share. He told the story of one smart Orinda youth, Ed Neighbor, who in high school read Einstein's *Theory of Relativity* and found a mistake. Ed wrote Einstein who responded that he would correct the problem in the next edition. Ed went on to become a well known physicist.

(article continued on page 4).

**Suggestions or
feedback for this
newsletter? email**

newsletter@orindahistory.org

or contact

Teresa Long at 258-9771

Congratulations!

**The following organizations
are celebrating a special
anniversary in 2006**

WomenSing	40 years
Orinda Moraga Pools Association	50 years

 **WomenSing** began as the Orinda Women's Chorale in 1965. Now celebrating it's 40th season, **WomenSing** has grown into a 55 member auditioned chorus with members from throughout the bay area. They will be performing in Orinda on March 26th and June 17th. For concert and ticket information, see www.womensing.org

OHS needs a new DVD Player, preferably one with a VHS tape player built in. If you have one to donate, please contact us.



Thank You

Recent Donations to OHS

- **Ben Randall Jr.** donated a variety of Orinda photos and memorabilia.
- **Peggy Meyer Boynton** donated Orinda Union School class photos from 1944 to 1951.
- **Mrs. Siefert** donated a booklet *My Sister Lucy* autographed by Ida May Hanson Davis.
- **Chantha Luangrath** donated Oakland Tribune newspapers from 1935 and 1936.
- **Lucy Hupp Williams** donated a book about early architecture of Contra Costa & Alameda, a poster from the Orinda Community Church, and a 1984 Tilden aerial photo.
- **Sue Littlehale** donated various documents & articles regarding Orinda's incorporation.
- Former Orinda Mayor **William Dabel** donated a Contra Costa Mayor's 1988/89 conference plaque.

Rotary Grant Helps Preserve Artifacts

OHS has received a generous grant from the Orinda Rotary Club Foundation for storing and preserving documents and artifacts. A new map case will be purchased, and storage shelves will be built in the back room. Many thanks to the Orinda Rotary Club!

School Yearbooks Wanted

The Orinda Historical Society is looking for donations of yearbooks from the Orinda schools. We currently have the following school yearbooks in our collection:

OHS Yearbook Collection

- Miramonte High School Yearbooks 1974, '75, '77, '79 & '86
- Orinda Intermediate School/Inland Valley Intermediate '75, '78, 90,
- Pine Grove 1956, 62

We would like have a more comprehensive selection. We are especially looking for 1941 to 1958 Acalanes High School yearbooks. Call the museum at 254-1353 to donate.

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

Assistant Archivist: Kent Long
(925) 258-9771

Finance/City Liaison: Carl Weber
(925) 254-8473

Newsletter: John Holmgren
(925) 254-5677
Teresa Long
(925) 258-9771

School Liaison: Kay Norman
(925) 254-9536

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.* ★
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Down Memory Lane.....

The following is part four 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 no longer yellow, but is currently painted a pale orange/rose color.

It is the 1920s, and Ezra remembers working on the house and some of its features.

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

Some of my earliest recollections of family life was when my father was putting a concrete and rock foundation under the house. All of us had a part in hauling out the excavated dirt and bringing gravel up out of the creek. It was all done by wheelbarrow and hand labor.



Old Yellow House

Here is a first hand account taken from a diary my brother Earl kept in 1928. For October 10th it reads: "Papa is digging out the cellar. When I came home he was using a coal oil lamp for light. I fixed a wiring so he could have an electric light in the cellar." And then for October 25th he wrote: "I did not work in the (service) station this afternoon, and therefore I went to Moraga to see the St. Mary's College. This was the first time that I have seen the college since it has been built. I watched the football team play football. The road to the college is very rough; I had to crawl along in second gear on my motorcycle so as not to break my back. I think they will pave the road soon. When I came home and ate, we all worked in the cellar and we took out 16 wheelbarrows of dirt. That broke last night's record by one load. We quit at 8:30 and went to bed."

My father also dug by hand the well in the basement. He made it four feet in diameter and lined it with bricks. The water was used for all purposes: drinking, washing and watering the plants. The well still has plenty of water, but the hand pump needs repair.

Many have wondered about this house: "Who built it and when? Why is it so close to the road?" I once asked my mother if she knew who built it. She told me it was built by Captain Jenkins. She said something about his liking the barn but not the house so I kind of thought that may have been one reason he didn't stay there long. From what I have been able to find out the house dates back to 1894. My brother Clyde once said, "If that house could only talk!" It surely would be interesting to know more of its beginnings.

Here are some of its features: it has eight comfortably sized rooms, four upstairs and four down. The central stairway just off the front door goes to the four bedrooms up above. The stair well is preceded by a well made redwood railing. Ceilings are ten feet high. The second floor rooms have roof angles that slope down to about four feet above the floor which gives a cozy feeling in rainy weather.

To be continued in the next OHS Newsletter.

Remembering Orinda in the 1950s:

David Hupp, brother of OHS President Lucy Hupp Williams, shares his fond remembrances of a favorite Orinda eating place. Do you remember T-Bones? If you happen to have an old photo of T-Bone's wagon, we'd love to have a copy for the archives.

T-Bone by David Hupp



I learned to love hamburgers in Orinda, California, at least the conventional ones, those with a straightforward set of garnishes: a slice of tomato, a leaf of lettuce, maybe a slice of pickle or some relish, catsup and mustard. Such burgers depend upon the quality of the meat and the bun. I ate the best in Orinda at T-Bone's, my first experience with street food.

I don't remember the exact year in the early-to-mid 1950s when T-Bone opened his hamburger wagon, but I remember enjoying many delicious hamburgers 40 years before Mad Cow madness and tens of billions of imitations served. The T-Bone experience pioneered the thousands of street-food wonders I have enjoyed living in Berkeley and Portland, as well as visiting other cities in the United States, Mexico, Thailand, Vietnam, France and Italy.

I don't remember T-Bone's real name. I recall he was a nice guy, a little solemn, a World War II vet, above medium height, and hunched over at his shoulders. I never knew whether his posture preceded life in the lunch wagon, or whether the confined dimensions of his place of business shaped the man. It didn't matter; he knew his business.

T-Bone's was located in a vacant lot across from the present Longs Drugs, next to the bakery building. I vaguely remember the configuration of his lunch wagon. It was mobile, but parked for long term. His diverse patrons came especially from the bank, catty corner across the street.

We'd get our burgers and move on, or sit at one of the couple picnic tables provided on the lot.

I only recall eating hamburgers at T-Bone's. I have no idea if he sold his namesake steaks, nor do I know what happened to him the many years since.

My hamburger enjoyment has evolved a great distance from those original T-Bone's, which I ate thoroughly well done. Until the Mad Cow/insurance anxiety put the kibosh on my enjoyment of hamburgers I had developed my pleasure to near tartar-like rarity. But none were so memorable as those I ate at the Orinda Crossroads.



Holiday Dinner (continued from page 1).

The most touching memory was when Ben Jr. found out that his father, who use to take Ben to the horse races at Bay Meadows and Golden Gate Fields, had quietly used his track winnings to buy appliances for families of handicapped kids who patronized the Orinda Theater. Ben Sr. would name the appliances after the race horse that had won the money, e.g., a washing machine would be named Speedway.

Ben Jr. passed around memorabilia such as his 1948 dance card, a 1953 Acalanes vs. Diablo Program, a plaque (shown in photo on Page 1) in memory of his father that used to be on a fountain at the Pine Grove ball fields. He has donated all of these items to the Orinda Historical Society. Our warmest thanks go to Ben Randall Jr. for a memorable evening and to all the many volunteers who helped organize this wonderful holiday dinner.