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Orinda Historical Society Newsletter

January 2009

P.O. BOX 82, ORINDA, CA 94563

(925) 254-1353

Museum Location

Lower Level of Orinda
Library
26 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

Holiday Party: A Tribute to Vasco Giannini

The Orinda Historical Society's annual holiday dinner on December 3rd had a big turnout with over 100 people attending. However, the guest of honor, **Vasco Giannini**, was unable to attend this celebration. He had fallen earlier in the month and was still recuperating. Nevertheless, the evening was a fitting tribute to Giannini, the owner of Black's Market, and a favorite Orinda businessman and volunteer.



Vasco Giannini (far left) with fellow Black's Butchers—1948

OHS archivist **Kent Long** gave a wonderful slide show presentation about Giannini and the history of Black's Market. Started in Orinda in 1947 by Frank Black, Black's was an Orinda institution for over forty years. In 1948, Vasco moved to Orinda and started the butcher shop in Black's. In 1960, he bought Black's. The market was a well-loved store known for its quality and service until it closed in 1991.

Many members of the audience shared touching and humorous memories of Vasco and Black's. **Peter deLaveaga** remembered being a grocery bagger and cashier for Vasco and how much he learned about business and life while doing so. **Bobbie Landers** was a regular customer and could still recall her Black's charge card number. **Don Dierkes**, **Dave Englehart**, **Clark Wallace**, and **Orinda Mayor Sue Severson** each recounted fond and funny stories about Vasco. Black's memorabilia was on display, including a courtesy clerk shirt and name tag that **Erik Andersen**, OHS Vice President, wore while working as a teenager at Black's. These items are currently on display in the

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Upcoming Events

- **February Board Meeting**
Wednesday, February 18th,
3 to 5 pm at the OHS Museum
- **March General Meeting**
Wednesday, March 18th, 7
to 9 pm at the Orinda Community Church—**all are invited to join OHS for a fun filled evening—Speaker to be announced**
- ☑ • **BBQ—Save The Date**
May 30th—join Vasco Giannini for a BBQ in Salida—details TBA

Moraga Adobe

Friday February 6th, 7:30 pm at 25 La Cuesta in Orinda, join Bobbie Landers for the first meeting of the **Friends of the Moraga Adobe**. Learn what needs to be done to save this important historical landmark. **RSVP to Bobbie at 254-8260**

OHS Honors Volunteers

The Historical Society honored two women at their December Holiday Dinner. **Mary Ellen Jones** and **Dorothy Bowen** were presented with the Orinda Historical Society's Annual Award for 2008. Both women are great contributors to the Orinda community.



Mary Ellen Jones



Dorothy Bowen

Mary Ellen Jones is an expert on historical preservation. She is the Regional Vice President of the California Conference of Historical Societies, representing Contra

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Thank You

Recent donations to OHS

- **Bea & Dick Heggie** donated various historical papers.
- 1957 & 1958 Miramonte yearbooks from an anonymous donor.
- **Kathy Eastman** donated two scrapbooks of Sue Kilgo.
- **Mary Nurse** contributed a book about the History of Orinda Country Club.
- **Pat & Rich Adams** donated many Wagner family photos, articles and certificates.
- A signed History of Orinda Book was donated by **Robert Mills**.
- **Richard Procunier** gave various papers regarding Orinda's incorporation.
- **Sue Farmer** donated Orinda Newcomers albums and artifacts.
- **Vasco Giannini** donated various Black's photographs and articles.
- 1930s Castro Ranch Rodeo posters were donated by **Jill Lamont**.
- **Betty Karplus** donated three Campolindo yearbooks.
- **David Starkweather** gave a property marker corner post.

Thank you to Rose Bolin, the owner of Treible's in Orinda, for generously providing the printing of this newsletter.

Holiday Party *Continued from Page 1*

window at the OHS museum.

Lucy Hupp Williams, OHS President, circulated a card that was signed by well wishers at the dinner and later delivered to Vasco along with a video tape of the celebration. He was so thrilled that he has invited all OHS members down for a BBQ at his home in Salida (near Modesto) on **May 30th 2009**. OHS needs help arranging transportation for the BBQ; if you can assist, contact the museum at 254-1353.

The food at the dinner was delicious, thanks to the catering talents of **Wendy Wittenberg Shay** and her team from **Herb and Spices**. The flowers and wine at the dinner were provided courtesy of the Giannini family. The wines were a Chardonnay and a Merlot from the **Michael Pozzan** winery, which is owned by Vasco Giannini's daughter and son-in-law.

The holiday dinner could not have happened without all the help and support of **Reverend Frank Baldwin**, his staff from the Orinda Community Church, and the following OHS members: **Susan Ross, Dave Englehart, Carl Weber, Betty Karplus, Buz & Lucy Williams, Carol Lu Zischke, Sue Littlehale, Kay Norman, Kent & Teresa Long, and Jerry Vurek**.

OHS Honors Volunteers *Continued from page 1*

Costa County and is a board member of the Contra Costa Historical Society. She was a founding member of the Orinda Historical Society and is valued for her expertise and passion for history.

Dorothy Bowen shares her knowledge of Orinda through her wonderful articles that appear in the Orinda News. Dorothy has contributed to many OHS newsletters and is always very generous with her information. She also volunteers at OHS and is "always happy to help us with anything," says Lucy Hupp Williams, "We value her immensely."

OHS President Receives Prestigious Awards



Lucy Hupp Williams

OHS President Lucy Hupp Williams has been named "Orinda Volunteer of the Year" by the Orinda Association. She will be honored at a dinner at the Orinda Country Club on January 25th. Lucy was happily surprised when she found out the news of this well-deserved award. Lucy has put in countless hours at the Orinda Historical Society and has been instrumental in keeping the museum open.

If that weren't enough, this month Lucy also found out that she will be honored in March by being added to the San Mateo County's Womens' Hall of Fame. She is being recognized for her volunteer efforts on disabilities, youth sports, as well as for her work starting the Foster City Historical Society. Obviously Lucy is a hard worker and quite a history lover. The OHS is extremely lucky to have her on board.

OHS Board Members 2009

President: Lucy Hupp Williams
(650) 349-3382

Vice President: Erik Andersen
(925) 254-8444

Treasurer: Betty Karplus
(925) 254-4970

Recording Secretary:
Carl Weber
(925) 254-8473

Archivist: Kent Long
(925) 258-9771

Assistant Archivist/Database:
Dan Holmes
(925) 254-3360

Membership: Open

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

At-Large: Susan Ross
(925) 254-3720

At-Large: Pat Draa
(925) 376-6657

Displays: Open

Newsletter: Teresa Long
(925) 258-9771

School Liaison: Kay Norman
(925) 254-9536

Videographer: Jerry Vurek
(925) 253-7995

Wagner Descendant Visits Old Homestead

Pat Adams and her husband Rich, who live just over the hill in Piedmont, visited the Wagner Ranch Nature area this past September. It was her first visit to the old Wagner homestead. Pat is the great granddaughter of General Theodore Wagner, who moved to Orinda during the 1880s, and was the namesake of the Wagner Ranch area. In 1882 Theodore Wagner built a very lavish home on this property which he called Oak View Ranch. It was destroyed by fire in 1887, and was soon rebuilt, but as a much smaller house. In the 1920s the land became the property of the water company (EBMUD) who tore down the remaining structures. In the late 1960s, the Orinda Union School District built the Wagner Ranch elementary school. The 16.5 acre Wagner Ranch Nature area is what remains of Wagner's original 241 acre ranch.



Pat and Rich Adams visit the Wagner Nature Area

Wagner Ranch naturalist Toris Jaeger gave Pat and Rich Adams a warm welcome, took them on a walk, shared stories, and showed them ruins of the cornerstone of the second Wagner house. Toris also pointed out a wide variety of plants including a large redwood tree that Wagner had planted over 100 years ago, walnut trees and a 400 year old oak. Members from the community including the OHS, Orinda Rotary Club, the Orinda Association, and the Wagner Ranch Nature Area were in attendance.

Pat brought along a wealth of Wagner family heirlooms and knowledge. Besides family photographs (see two examples below), she had newspaper articles including obituaries for George Wagner, and many documents including 1860s army papers for Theodore Wagner.

Theodore Wagner obtained the property (in the area that was then known as Orinda Park) from Herman Sandow when he married Sandow's daughter Ida. Theodore and Ida had four children, Carrie, Louise, George, and adopted son Willie. Willie was adopted because Theodore promised an army buddy of his that he would take care of Willie if anything happened to his friend. The Wagners eventually moved from Orinda to Berkeley when they could no longer afford to run the ranch. Carrie and Louise Wagner were two of the first women to graduate from UC Berkeley. George Wagner got his Engineering degree from Cal Berkeley in 1898 and married Josephine Hefferman in 1908. They had two daughters, Jo Eugenia (born in 1909) and Mary Georgia, who was Pat Adam's mother. Theodore Wagner died in 1916. George and his family moved to the Philippines for more than five years where George was in charge of building the water works in Manila. George also worked in Hawaii with the Honolulu Plantations Company. George died in 1927 at the young age of 51, but his wife Josephine, Pat's grandmother, lived to be 100. Pat's aunt, Jo Eugenia Wagner Angel, eventually moved back to Orinda and lived there until she died in 1970s.



Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Wagner and "Our Boy" George Albert Sandow
Front porch of 2nd house, 1890

Pat has generously allowed the Orinda Historical Society to copy her treasure trove of Wagner memorabilia, and it has been added to the OHS archives.



Old Residence of Gen. Theo Wagner, Orinda Park 1884

Exciting news for The Moraga Adobe, an Orinda Landmark



Recent photo of the Moraga Adobe

The Moraga Adobe, in Orinda, tucked away in the hills above Del Rey School, is a quiet place where time goes by and the local deer like to hang out. Unlike the prominent Orinda Theater, this Orinda treasure is rarely visited. Located on private property, the public does not currently have access to this historic building. However, thanks to the new owners who have purchased the property, members from the Orinda Historical Society, the Orinda Historic Landmarks committee, and various others were able to tour the adobe in October. The Moraga Adobe, built in 1841 by Joaquin Moraga, is the oldest existing adobe building in Contra Costa County. This building has a significant history not only to Orinda, but to the entire Bay Area.

The Moraga Adobe has been recognized as a historical landmark by the State of California in 1954 (Landmark #509,) the City of Orinda in 1995, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The California State plaque near the front door of the adobe reads as follows: **“The Joaquin Moraga Adobe—1841: Jose Joaquin Moraga—member of the Juan Bautista De Anza 1776 expedition, founder and first commandante of the Presidio of San Francisco—was the grandfather of Don Joaquin Moraga who with his cousin Don Juan Bernal was awarded this grant in 1835 which they called Rancho Laguna De Los Palos Colorados. In August 1941 this property was acquired and restoration made by Katharine Brown White Irvine of Oakland. Later ownership was bequeathed to her grandson William Thornton White III— Contra Costa County Historical Society 1954 California State Registration No. 509”**



The Moraga family lived in the adobe for many years. Joaquin Moraga died in 1855 and eventually the adobe was abandoned by the family. The adobe deteriorated and became in very poor shape by the 1930s. The property was purchased, and a very extensive renovation was done in 1941 with the an addition at the rear of the building.

The building as it exists today with its peeling paint and boarded up windows (to keep out the local youth), is in generally good shape thanks to the last remodel done in the 1960s by then owner Don Manuel. The interior has a 1960s era style working kitchen and bathroom. The new owners, who have ties to the Lamorinda area, are very motivated to preserve and make this historic building accessible, and they are asking the community for help in doing so. **Bobbie Landers** is hosting a get together for a new group, **Friends of the Moraga Adobe**, to tackle this challenge. The first meeting for this group is **Friday February 6th** at 7:30pm at Bobbie's house at 25 La Cuesta in Orinda. Please **RSVP to 254-8260** if you are interested in helping to preserve this historic treasure that is hidden in Orinda's backyard.



Moraga Adobe circa 1930 before the restoration



Moraga Adobe after the 1941 remodel



OHS member Susan Ross tours the Moraga Adobe in October 2008