



Bulletin

April 2024

Local Groups Hold A History Fair For Diablo Valley College Students

Locally based history organizations participated in the first Diablo Valley College History Fair on April 17 at the college's Pleasant Hill campus.

The event featured display tables of local historical societies from Antioch, Clayton, Concord, East County and San Pablo, CCCHS, the Walking Ghosts of Black History (based in Hercules), California State Parks, and the National Park Service, which has four historic sites within Contra Costa County. Diablo Valley College partnered and assisted in the event (and most importantly provided lunches for us).



The purpose was to inform college students about local history, opportunities for history internships, and to let them know about potential careers they can get in the field of history. Becoming a teacher isn't the only job in the field, as students found out by visiting the display tables and attending two panel discussions which presented career possibilities in history.

Above, CCCHS Executive Director LeighAnn Davis (seated, right) talks to students at the CCCHS table. Five students signed up for internships with us at the event.

At the panel discussions, representatives of CCCHS, the Lindsay Wildlife Museum, the National Park Service, local author Dan Hanel, and an attorney talked about the historical work they perform.

For more photographs of the event, see pages 8 to 10 inside.

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CCCHS Remembers Jeff Rubin, Champion Of Local History And Preservation

By John Greitzer

The local history community in Contra Costa was saddened to hear of the unexpected passing of Jeff Rubin on February 10. Jeff was president of the Pinole Historical Society and the Pinole History Museum, a tireless advocate for the preservation of local history, and a longtime friend of CCCHS.

Everyone who met Jeff was impressed with his knowledge and perspective, his commitment to history, and his willingness to work together to raise its profile in our schools and our communities.

He has been a key member of our History Alliance, the group of local historical society representatives from jurisdictions throughout Contra Costa County.

“Jeff was an amazing person and a champion for local history,” said CCCHS Executive Director LeighAnn Davis. “He had a plan for PHS that was light years ahead of the curve. Such a profound loss for the community and everyone who knew him.”

Most recently Jeff and the PHS had been working to secure a location for the Pinole History Museum, in the face of uncertainty about its quarters.



Jeff was the speaker at our first Author In The Archives event on October 17, 2015, featuring the book, [Pinole Through Time](#). Jeff co-authored it with George Vincent, co-founder of the Pinole Historical Society.

Jeff had other interests as well. A former journalist for the *New York Post* and other newspapers, he had a newsletter publishing and design business, and was the founder of National Punctuation Day, which is on September 24 of every year. In a CBS Radio Network interview in 2010, Jeff said he created the holiday in 2004 because of a decline in knowledge of punctuation and other written language skills in children and adults alike.

“About that time I found out about Chase’s Calendar of Events. I submitted National Punctuation Day, they accepted it, and the rest is history,” he told the interviewer. Jeff and his wife Norma Martinez-Rubin (a former mayor of Pinole) also created Punctuation Playtime, a 45-minute assembly for K-6 students to teach them about 13 punctuation marks. “You’d be stunned how much the kids retained after 45 minutes,” he said during the interview.

Jeff Rubin, *continued*



Jeff's wife Norma kindly provided these photos of her and Jeff on a trip to New Mexico. The photos demonstrate their interests in both culture and history.

At left, Jeff and Norma are pictured at a scenic vista on their way to Bandelier National Monument. The photo was taken for them by a friendly fellow traveler.

The photo below shows how travel, the quest for knowledge, and good timing can combine for a great opportunity. Norma and Jeff are

shown sitting in the living room of the home of scientist Robert Oppenheimer, which they were invited into by chance.

“Being in the Oppenheimer house was a treat,” she recalled. “It wasn't open to the public. We happened to be there when a staff member needed to enter it and we were welcomed inside. At the urging of a docent, we replicated the seating positions of Oppenheimer and friends pictured in a photo on the living room wall.”

Norma recalls that when she and Jeff traveled, they made it a point to visit a local museum, to gain knowledge and ideas for exhibits and displays for one in Pinole – something that, as a building, has yet to come to fruition. The Pinole History Museum board, formed in 2017 and on which Jeff presided, needs to reexamine how to continue to preserve the rich history of the City of Pinole. Doing so will require the active participation of history lovers, supporters, and others willing to contribute time, energy, creativity and a generous spirit to co-develop future plans and activities in partnership with the Pinole Historical Society. If you are interested in volunteering your time and talent, contact Norma at normarti@hotmail.com.



A man of many cultural interests and boundless energy, Jeff is gone far too soon. He will be missed.

We extend our sympathies and our gratitude to Norma Martinez-Rubin for graciously providing her photos and memories.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS A BIG HIT FOR MUSEUM OF THE SAN RAMON VALLEY

By John Keenan, Museum of the San Ramon Valley

Editor's Note: The Bulletin asked John Keenan, of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley in Danville, to talk about the origin and success of the museum's virtual programs, which were launched during the Coronavirus shutdown. Here is his account of this innovative program.

As we all know, it was a tough time for many of us, but we saw it as an opportunity to stay connected with our community and continue providing educational and entertaining experiences.

When the Museum of the San Ramon Valley had to temporarily close its doors, we knew we had to get creative. Our team brainstormed ideas, and the concept of a virtual online speaker series emerged as the right solution. We had already experienced success with hosting our major fundraiser, Back to School Under the Stars, on Zoom, so we knew we could leverage this platform to bring engaging content into people's homes.

Our goal was to offer a monthly program that would not only inform but also entertain. We wanted to ensure that our attendees didn't feel like they were in a classroom. Instead, we aimed to create an enjoyable and informative experience, complete with knowledgeable speakers who were passionate about their topics and could captivate audiences through the virtual medium.

We've covered a wide range of fascinating subjects, from the story of the Old Mint in San Francisco and the history of Camp Parks to the amazing travels of John Muir, The Escape from Alcatraz and the Sunol Water Temple, just to name a few. All of our programs are recorded and available on our YouTube channel, so you can revisit them or catch up on any you missed.

To ensure a smooth and distraction-free experience, we use the Zoom Webinar platform, which mutes all attendees. This way, we can eliminate any background noise and allow our presenters to focus on delivering their programs effectively. Of course, we still encourage audience participation by enabling them to submit questions through the Zoom Chat Stream or Q&A, which we curate and address at the end of the session.

It's been a fun journey so far, and we've been amazed by the reach of our virtual programs. We've had attendees from as far away as Scotland and many others from states across the country.

It's a small team of three people that puts the program on: Dan Dunn, our executive director and host of the program; Donna Grier, our administrative director; and me.

We hope everyone will continue joining us for our future virtual events, as we have many more exciting topics and speakers lined up. If you have an interesting story, please contact me as I am always on the lookout for the next program.

To attend our free program, visit museumsrv.org, select "What's On," and then "Virtual Programs." You can also see all of our past programs.

Descendant Of Contra Costa's First Sheriff Visits The CCCHS History Center

By John Greitzer

Staff at the History Center were delighted to have an esteemed visitor stop by on April 2, when Will and Doreen Jones came by to do some family history research on Will's side of the family.

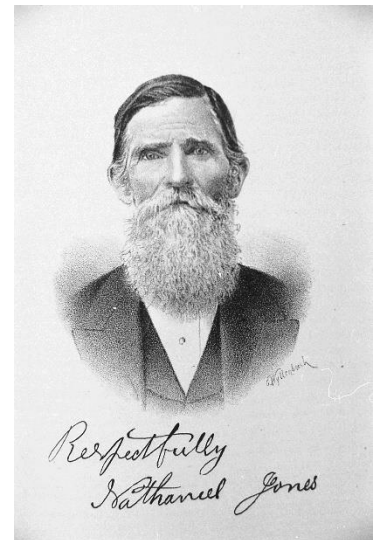
Will is the great-great-grandson of Contra Costa County's first sheriff, Nathaniel Jones.



He told us that Nathaniel came across the country from Tennessee in 1846 on a wagon train. In 1850 he was elected sheriff in the newly established Contra Costa County, in the newly established State of California.

The following is from the Contra Costa County Sheriff's website at www.cocosheriff.org:

"Jones ... settled his family on 372 acres of land in Acalanes that he bought for \$100. He held the position of Sheriff for two years, the original term of office. He also served as the public administrator and as a county supervisor."



Will and his wife Doreen came by to do some family research, looking for newspaper articles or other information about Nathaniel and the family line. Our genealogist, Lisa Gorrell, was able to find a portion of the family tree, and our staff was able to provide some additional information as well.

Will and his wife Doreen live in the Bay Area but Will was raised in Nevada, where his father was a rancher.

Doreen, a retired educator who taught at the University of San Francisco, talked with our volunteer staff about the importance of scanning and digitizing our archives and the need to apply for grants to help accomplish this important task – advice we are indeed following.

We are grateful for having the chance to meet with Will and Doreen and get some insight into the County's first elected law-enforcement officer.

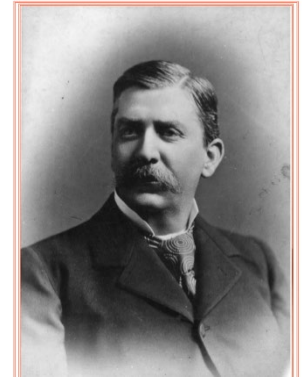
Photo of Will Jones by John Greitzer; engraving of Nathaniel Jones from CCCHS Archives.

Recent Accessions At The History Center

Here are a few highlights of our accessions of donated material in the first quarter of 2024:

--a video CD: When the Game Stands Tall: The story of De La Salle Spartans

-- naturalization papers for James Rankin from 1874, when the Scottish-born Rankin became a citizen in Martinez (ten years later he would be elected sheriff of Contra Costa County, and a city park is named after him); donation also includes his marriage license to Sara Brown and his certificates from the Masons and Odd Fellows clubs (*photo of Rankin at right from CCCHS Photo Archive*)



James Rankin

--newspaper editions of *Freedom News*, a Richmond CA-based newspaper, containing issues from June to December 1969 (*Freedom News* was a newspaper published in Richmond from 1967 to 1974)

--Contra Costa Horsemen's Association card for W.H. Murphy from 1938

--photographs from the San Ramon Valley Horsemen's Association (digital format on a thumb drive)

--microfilm of the following newspapers: *Contra Costa Independent* (1981), *Richmond Independent* (1942), *West County Times* (various years 1986-2006),

--two postcards of the San Rafael Ferry in Richmond (*photo at right from CCCHS Photo Archive*)



--four high-school yearbooks (Las Lomas High School for 1983/1984, and John Swett High School from 2000-2002)

--films taken at Rodgers Ranch in Pleasant Hill around 2017, believed to have been filmed by Pleasant Hill High

--oral history material regarding the history of Black Diamond Mines recorded by the East Bay Regional Park District

--collection of envelopes from correspondence addressed to Judge A.F. Bray, circa 1930s (Judge Bray was the leading champion and co-founder of CCCHS)

Thank you to all of our donors, who are too many to list, for adding to the CCCHS archives. We rely on your generosity and commitment to preserving the history of Contra Costa County.

ANTIOCH'S CARMEN DRAGON LEFT A RICH MUSICAL LEGACY FOR YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE

By Marjorie Newton

Editor's Note: At a February event at Lindsay Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek, we spoke about Frank and Rose Dragon of Antioch and hinted there was more to the story. Here is the rest of their story, about their illustrious son Carmen.



Photo from calisphere.org

In 2003, the Antioch Unified School District named an elementary school after Carmen Dragon. It may seem strange that a school would be named for a dragon named Carmen, unless you know that Carmen Dragon was a famous musician, composer and director born in Antioch in 1914.

Carmen was the son of immigrant Italian parents, Frank and Rose. The family name Dragon was formerly Dragone or Drago. Carmen is listed in the 1920 census as Carmine. He had an older brother, Peter, and a younger brother, Roland.

While a student at Antioch High School, Carmen composed the song, "Forward, Antioch," which was performed at a school program in 1930. He was proficient on piano, string bass, accordion, trumpet, and trombone. During his college years, he had his own orchestra.

Dragon introduced elementary school students to classical music through a radio program broadcast weekly to classrooms. His radio show, "The Standard School Broadcast," was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company from 1928 through the 1970s.

Carmen also arranged musical scores for many films, winning an Oscar in 1944 for the film *Cover Girl* starring Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth. He also hosted a show on Armed Forces Radio. In 1964, he was granted an Emmy Award for the Glendale Symphony Christmas Special. Carmen recorded more than 75 albums for Capitol Records with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic, and the Capitol Orchestra. In 1989, he was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Carmen Dragon died in 1984 survived by his children: his son Daryl (known as "the Captain" in the duo The Captain & Tennille); his daughter Carmen, a classical harpist; son Dennis, drummer for the Surf Punks; and daughter Kathryn, manager of an orchestral rental library.

Unfortunately, Carmen Dragon died before he knew how much he was appreciated by his community. It is appropriate that a man who was responsible for the education of millions of elementary school students in knowledge of classical music and musical instruments should have his name on the Camen Dragon Elementary School.

Scenes From The History Fair At Diablo Valley College

By John Greitzer

The following pages illustrate a few highlights from our first ever History Fair at the college campus on April 17, 2024.

At right, Leon Watkins, co-founder of **The Walking Ghosts of Black History**, gives CCCHS Executive Director LeighAnn Davis a certificate of recognition for her work with military veterans. Based in Hercules, The Walking Ghosts of Black History preserves the history of African Americans in the U.S. military, from the founding of our nation up to the present. The group has had exhibits displayed on the U.S.S. Hornet in Alameda and the S.S. Red Oak Victory Ship in Richmond, among other locations. At the History Fair they displayed numerous panels with information about notable African Americans in the military and their accomplishments and importance to the nation.



At left, co-founder Larry Thompson unfurls a banner for The Walking Ghosts of Black History. He and Leon Watkins founded the group in 1991 to tell the story of African Americans' military service to the nation. The idea began when Leon Watkins was cast as the flag bearer with the Massachusetts 54th Regiment in the 1989 film "*Glory*" starring Denzel Washington, Matthew Broderick and Morgan Freeman. The film's producer, Freddie Fields, contributed 20 authentic uniforms used in the movie to help start The Walking Ghosts of Black History Re-enactment Organization.

For more information: <https://thewalkingghostsofblackhistory.yolasite.com>

Scenes From The History Fair At Diablo Valley College



A visitor stops by for information at the table of the **San Pablo Historical Society**, one of several local historical societies that took part in the History Fair.

San Pablo is one of the county's oldest settlements, with a rich history spanning the California and American periods.

For more information:

<https://sites.google.com/sanpablohistoricalsociety.com/museums/home>

The **East Contra Costa Historical Society** knew enough to bring a shade canopy. Being from eastern Contra Costa, where the real heat is, they know how to prepare for full-sun outdoor events. Perhaps that's why they always seemed to have a couple more visitors than the other tables. Or it could be East Contra Costa's agricultural and commercial history that drew people in.

For more information:

<https://eastcontracostahistory.org>



More Scenes From The History Fair At Diablo Valley College

The **Concord Historical Society** (right) also participated in the History Fair, with a variety of information on hand, welcoming students who stopped by, as did all of the participating agencies. They ranged from the local historical societies, to the Walking Ghosts of Black History, to the California State Parks Department, to the John Muir National Historic Site managed by the National Park Service. The Concord Historical Society maintains the historic Galinda Home and Gardens.

For more info:

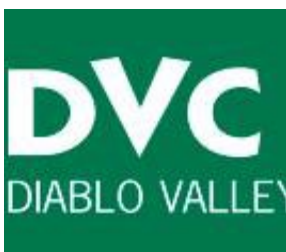
<https://www.concordhistorical.org/>



At left is the **Antioch Historical Society's** table. Founded in 1974, the group collects and preserves historical artifacts and resources of cultural and historic value or significance relative to the City of Antioch and its sphere of influence. The Antioch Historical Museum contains a wide variety of interesting items that chronicle the city's history. The museum has been recognized and designated as a Blue Star Museum by a collaboration of the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families and the Department of Defense.

For more info:

Antiochhistoricalmuseum.org



***Thank you to Diablo Valley College
for sponsoring and hosting the History Fair***

President's Message

By Tara Weber

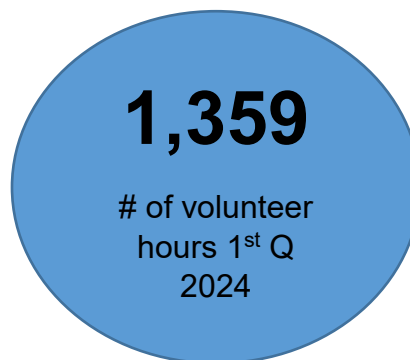
By the time this hits your mailbox or inbox, we will be days away from the official start of Spring. Spring, my favorite time of year, when we get to see new growth sprouting on the trees and shrubs, bees buzzing around pollinating our flowers and the warmth of the sun as a welcomed change.

So too at the History Center we see new growth and “bees” buzzing around. Our hard-working volunteers are buzzing around handling research inquiries, cataloging accessions, indexing maps, digitizing photos and negatives, and so much more. Our new Executive Director Leigh Ann Davis is busy with outreach and other programs designed to rejuvenate the public's interest in local history.

We are well on our way to exceeding last year and pre-pandemic volumes as far as the History Center activity is concerned. The figures below are the highest they've been since 2018. The History Center is definitely back in full swing! Of course, with increased volume comes the need for more volunteer help. If you, or someone you know, has a few extra hours each week or each month, we'd be delighted to welcome you aboard.

Right now, the two biggest challenges the Society faces is the increase in rent and the decreasing space for which to house the new items that are donated to us (known as accessions). The Board of Directors along with our Executive Director are working hard in weighing our options and whether the purchase of a building is possible. If you know anyone with a spare, temperature-controlled building lying around, call us! We want to talk to you.

In the meantime, we are open for business and eager to show you around. Please stop by!



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Our mission: Preserve, protect, and provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County.

Hours: Tuesday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
First and third Saturdays of the month 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

www.cocohistory.org

Facebook: Contra Costa County Historical Society