

Contra Costa County's Names & Place Names (Continued)

Living on the ranch and managing it was John Miller, a rising railroad executive. His lavish living aroused suspicion. The books were audited. It was found that Mr. Miller was keeping two sets of books as well as two wives. His bigamy and embezzlement were never prosecuted. To avoid mutual embarrassment, it was agreed that John should go into voluntary exile. He relocated to the obscure river town of Isleton. It is unknown how Mr. Miller solved his love life.

Bill asked, "How many hanging trees were there in Contra Costa County?"

There were three famous ones and untold others.

The first one was at 1985 Pleasant Hill Road, next to Murderous Creek. The story is that, around 1849, an Indian was hung for stealing horses. The tree has since been removed.

In Martinez, there was a famous hanging tree in the 1850's in front of the court house. The last man hanged in front of the courthouse in 1874 was a poor farm laborer named Martin. The equipment wasn't set properly, and his head popped off. It may not have occurred on the 1850's tree.

The third hanging tree was in Canyon. Cattle thieves were supposedly hung there. It is believed that the tree was located near the old Canyon school house.

Bill explained a reason for naming his book *Shadows on the Hills*. After both scoundrels and heroes are gone, only their names remain on the land, fading and fleeting like shadows on the hills. His wife, Kathleen, suggested the title, *Stories Behind the Place Names of Contra Costa County*.

**Need A Ride To The Society Meeting On November 15th?
Contact Bill Lloyd: 837-9382.**

Over 42 Years Looking Back!



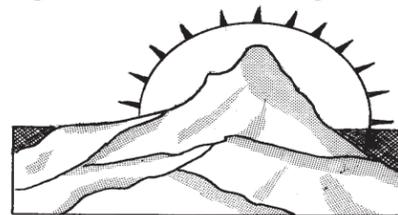
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**NEXT MEETING
THURSDAY,
NOVEMBER 15TH
"The California Trail & The
Routes People Took To Come
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SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



November 2012

ALAMO · BLACKHAWK · DANVILLE · DIABLO · SAN RAMON

William Mero Discussed Names And Place Names In Contra Costa County At September Dinner Meeting

William Mero spoke at the SRVHS September 20th meeting. He is the author of "Shadows on the Hills". The book deals with origins of names and place names in Contra Costa County.

Bill is a graduate of UC Santa Barbara and holds a master's degree from UC Berkeley. Bill worked for Chevron as an exploration geologist and geophysicist for 30 years, becoming Chevron's Division Geologist for Alaska.

Place names are important to historians. They are marks upon the land. The most famous example is in England. The extent of the Viking conquest is evident from the place names in England. By examining place names, the boundaries of the Danish and Norwegian conquests can be traced in Anglo-Saxon England.

Contra Costa County is basically the same. Bill showed a map of Contra Costa County with a line drawn through it. West of the line, most of the names are derived from the Spanish. That was where the Spanish and Mexican pioneers settled. East of the line the names are Anglican.

A picture of the Spanish land grants in Contra Costa County shows most were west of the line running near Mt. Diablo.

A picture from the 1830's shows John Marsh's land grants are east of the line.

A sad thing is the loss of the original Indian names. Over 26 USA states have Indian derived names. This is not true of Contra Costa County. This is due to the movement of the local Indians into the Spanish Missions and the Indians contraction of European diseases for which the local Indian immune systems had no defense (Measles).

Bill showed a slide of some local tribe locations in Contra Costa County. There are a few names that remain on the land today. The Carquinez Straits is named after the Carquin tribe. The Sacalan in the Lafayette area is translated into Acalanes.

(Continued on Page 2)

The California Trail And Stories Of Early Pioneers And The 49ers Topic Of November 15th Dinner Meeting

At our Thursday November 15th meeting Dr. Steve Larimore shares stories about the California Trail. Many San Ramon Valley pioneers trekked across to California in the mid-1800's. Steve is active in the Oregon-California Trail Association that researches and marks the various routes 49'ers and others took to cross the continent from the Eastern states. From 1846 – 1860 these trails were forged by Conestoga wagon trains and mule teams carrying all the worldly possessions early Californians brought with them. He will show a video depicting the numerous branches of the California Trail early travelers chose after crossing Utah and Nevada. The markers his group places at key points along the trails contain diary quotations recorded by emigrants during their arduous journey. Steve became fascinated with the California Trail after reading James Holliday's book "The World Rushes In" describing the Gold Rush. His presentation dovetails well with the recent Gold Rush Exhibit at the Museum and will focus upon the Johnson Cutoff around Lake Tahoe.

The meeting will be held at the San Ramon Golf Club, 9430 Fircrest Lane, San Ramon. We will gather at 6:30 pm, eat at 7:00 pm, and enjoy our speaker. We hope to see you there.

Contra Costa County's Names & Place Names (Continued)

The Spanish and the Anglos named the land in their own language. Since the American conflict, there were a number of ways that areas were named. People settled around post offices. There were certain rules for post offices. The names of post offices could not be duplicated within a state. That is why Lafayette was not named Centerville. California already had Centerville.

Bill showed a picture of the San Ramon post office around 1900. There were lots of name changes here, as well as in Pittsburg. The San Ramon name was influenced by land grants from Castro and Pacheco. The town of Limerick eventually changed its name to San Ramon.

Railroads were important. There are a few places in Contra Costa County whose names are directly derived from railroad station names: Byron, Knightson, and Saranap are examples.

Saranap, located north of Alamo, was a thriving community for many years. The name is derived from Sara Naphthaly, mother of Samuel who was president of the Oakland, Antioch, & Eastern Railroad. This railroad served Danville.

Street names are derived from railroad stops.. One is Hillgrade. Another is Camille.

In naming railroad stations, some companies allowed their local station masters to name them. The station master named them after whatever came into his mind, like sons, daughters, or literary figures. Names that could become confused with Morse Code were unacceptable.

Some Contra Costa County settlers influenced names. In San Ramon, there was Granville, Lynchville, Brevensville, and Brewinville.

The first Anglo settlers in the San Ramon Valley were the Smith family, arriving in 1848. The town of Granville grew up near their home. Between 1850 and 1860, the present day town of San Ramon was known as Brevensville or Brewinville. About 1860, the name was changed to Lynchville. Lynchville was changed to Limerick in 1891. San Ramon became the official name in the 1920's.

Inmanville was named after Daniel Inman, who built a blacksmith shop in the Danville area in 1852. This became Danville. Daniel Inman came from Danville, Missouri. Most historians today believe that Danville was named after Daniel Inman rather than the Missouri town.

Crow Canyon was named after the Crow family that came there in the 1860's. The Crow family were staunch unionists and pro Lincoln. Many of the settlers in the San Ramon Valley were from the border states and tended to be confederate sympathizers.

On July 4, 1864, there was a holiday picnic in San Ramon. At this picnic, someone began reading the Declaration of Independence. The Crow family was patriotic but not well educated. They created a near riot over this reading, believing it to be secessionist propaganda.

Bollinger Canyon was named after Joshua Bollinger who settled here 1855.

Hartz Avenue, a major street in Danville, was originally a trail between the Booth and John Hartz farms.

There is Harlan Drive in Danville. Joel Harlan, born in Indiana, came to California by wagon train before the gold rush in 1846. Joel's uncle was a partner with John Marshall in his lumber mill. In 1856, after working in the gold fields, Joel bought 2,000 acres near Danville.

The San Ramon Valley and much of the area west of Mt. Diablo were influenced by the Spanish land grants and their names. There were Castro and Pacheco. Amador was to the south. Leo Norris bought 4,400 acres from Jose Maria Amador in 1850 about a quarter of a mile west of San Ramon Valley Boulevard.

There were adaptations of Spanish names. Alamo was named after the poplar or cottonwood trees lining San Ramon Creek.

San Ramon is a popular name in Spanish speaking countries. St. Raymond Nonnatus (San Ramon in Spanish) was tortured by Algerian Muslims for preaching Christianity. He was made a cardinal by Gregory IX in 1239. He is invoked by women in labor and by persons falsely accused. Towns of that name are found in Argentina, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Uruguay, and Costa Rica.

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The Sales Table — Nancy Ramsey

(Nancy Ramsey)

The Alamo Grammar School 1876 notes and envelopes are available. There are Mount Diablo, Front Street, Southern Pacific Depot, Tassajara School, the "Grand Dames" series of three San Ramon older homes, and miscellaneous packages with eight historical scenes for sale. Our price to members is \$3.50 per package. Lots of postcards with historic scenes are available for \$0.20 each. Postcards of the one room school at Tassajara are out of print.

Do stop by the Sales Table.

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To The Society Meeting
On November 15th?
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R E C O R D

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Dinner Reservations **Thursday, November 15, 7 p.m.**

\$20.00 per person

San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Clubhouse
9430 Fircrest Lane
(North of Alcosta Blvd., San Ramon)

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Mail to: S.R.V.H.S., P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

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In Memoriam



Ron Mello

October/10/1942-September/22/2012

Ron had a propensity for doing things right and a priority for family first. From the half century long storybook love for only one woman, to raising his kids and grandkids and caring for his ailing mother, his dedication was unwavering. The same philosophy carried over into everything he did. He followed the “four way test” as an Alamo Rotarian and gave back to the community that he lived in and loved like his father and his father before him.

Growing up on the ranch, Ron was interested in anything mechanical. Tractors, go-karts, cars. He learned the art of body and paint from his brother. From the old barn on Livorna Road, they would turn out paint jobs gracing the fenders of Walnut Creek Yellow Cabs and hot rods for the Oakland Roadster Show. Like all of his cousins, Ron loved race cars. When it came time for him to choose, he decided Jeeps were the way to spend his weekends. With his Jeeps, he could still satisfy his hot rod heritage, need for speed, love for the great outdoors, and pack the whole family along to quench a thirst for exploring. The fun was preparation, part people, part journey, and of course destination, be it a sleepy campsite, rocky trail, or dune lined beach. Able to fix anything with duct tape and bailing wire, he could always “Portuguese rig” his way back home where his tools waited and the job would get done right. He was the quintessential DIY guy, never one to hire. He could carve the turkey perfectly, fix a washer, drier, or a bike tire. The only thing he lacked was the time to do it all.

The information above was taken from the Ron Mello memorial service program on October 4, 2012, Wilson & Kratzer, Danville, CA.



Roy S. Bloss

Apr. 2, 1918 - Oct. 14, 2012 Former Alamo, CA Resident.

Roy Bloss passed away in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, on Sunday, October 14, 2012, at the age of 94. Roy was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and was a 53-year resident of Alamo, California, from 1955 to 2008. Roy was pre-deceased by his wife, Roberta Madie Bloss in 2005. He is survived by his son, Wayne Bloss of Pittsburg, CA; daughter, Roberta Lenore Bloss of Redondo Beach, CA; grand-daughter Angelique Wilroy Hall and husband, Michael Hall of Valencia, CA, and two great grand-daughters, Megan and Alexa. Roy was an avid historian who researched, preserved, and wrote about many historical events. Having worked for the trucking industry for many years, he became intrigued about the concept of relay stations and the pony express and in 1959 wrote a book entitled, “Pony Express-The Great Gamble”. In 1960, he was committee chair for the Contra Costa 100th year Celebration of the Pony Express. Additionally he served on the Board of the Contra Costa Historical Society, having been president from 1983-84. He was also a founding member and charter president of the San Ramon Valley Historical Society in 1970 and has been named as honorary life member. In 1970, Roy impacted local history as the Chairman of the Association to Preserve Danville Boulevard. In this role he was successful in keeping the county from widening the Boulevard to four lanes. Later in 1973 he was co-chairman of the Alamo Cityhood Campaign and ran for a council seat of the proposed new city. Although the cityhood was narrowly defeated, he was elected to a city council seat of the city that wasn’t formed. In 1983, Roy retired from the Western World Pet Supply Association where he was the executive vice president. Private services will be in Southern California. Published in *Contra Costa Times* on October 21, 2012



Members’ Corner

The Board of Directors and fellow members of the Society extend a warm welcome to new member Peggy Gierke, Danville, CA.

Peggy should have been included in the September 2012 SRVHS newsletter. The newsletter editor slipped up.

We hope that you will enjoy this organization. We urge you to attend the field trips and the bi-monthly dinner meetings with guest speakers discussing their areas of expertise, participate in the selection of historic sites in the San Ramon Valley, and share your views and experiences with other Society members. We also urge you to join and support the activities of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and the San Ramon Historic Foundation.

Restoration of Hap McGee Ranch Wagon:

Rancher Hap McGee bought Camp Swain in 1946. It was owned by the San Francisco Protestant Orphanage Society and located along the border between Alamo and Danville. It was use for a summer camp. To transport supplies on his cattle ranch he used a large wooden wagon pulled by a team of draft horses. Trucks on ranches right after the war were still not common. In 1964 when 680 was built, the old Camp Swain buildings were demolished. The remnant of the land was transferred to the Town of Danville for a park and the old wagon was stored in one of the small barns. Today Hap McGee Park still evokes the memory of the former ranch with the houses and several barns still standing. However time has taken its toll and the wagon needs quite a bit of restoration work. The Society voted to cover the cost of the work and signed an agreement with the Town of Danville. The wagon was transported to Don Wood’s ranch on November 1st where Joe Hardman has volunteered to do the restoration. Once the work has been finished the wagon will return to Hap McGee Park for display. The preservation of vital historical artifacts certainly fits our mission.

Historic Preservation of the Root Houses:

Two Root family homes once adorned Hartz Ave. in Danville at the corner of West Linda Mesa (across from Pete’s Carwash and Brass Rail restaurant). In 1950 Shell Oil Company purchased the property and moved the homes west onto Railroad Ave. and West Linda Mesa. The Railroad Ave. house built by James Root, Sr. was home to him and his wife Viola Root (Danville’s long time telephone operator). Currently that home is undergoing restoration with the addition of an office complex (the cube) behind it. At the moment construction is stalled pending the solution of a problem with windows.

Next door facing onto West Linda Mesa is the home of Austin Root. James Root’s son built this house in 1919. Along with his father he opened the Mt. Diablo Dairy in 1931 processing milk on Linda Mesa Street. They made home deliveries of milk until 1945. Until recently his former house was the office for Indesign. The Austin Root house has now been purchased by a developer who is formulating his plans. The Historic Resource Commission of the Town is watching both projects with keen interest to insure that the heritage these old homes bring to the community is preserved

Museum News

September 14 – November 3: Indian Life Exhibit & Program

November 13 – December 29: Christmas Memories Exhibit

General

When the Museum is open, a trained docent is always on duty and can provide exhibit tours for visitors who drop in. Reserved tours are also available during open or closed hours by appointment. Large groups are encouraged to call ahead to assure that a docent is available specifically for your group.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is located on the southwest corner of Prospect and Railroad Avenues [P.O. Box 39, Danville, CA, 94526, (925) 837-3750]. Hours: 1-4 pm, Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-1 pm Saturday.

The information above was taken from the Museum’s informative website, www.museumsrv.org



William Mero Discussed Names, Place Names In Contra Costa County At September Dinner Meeting (Continued)

A story has been venerated for many years that San Ramon does not honor a saint but honors a herder from Mission San Jose that ran sheep in the area. An unsubstantiated tale is that the area may first have been known as Ramon's Valley. However, the name San Ramon was used on land grants as early as 1833.

Contra Costa County was an anglo adoption of Spanish names. General Vallejo in 1850 in the California State Legislature headed a committee to name the various counties. His recommendation was that Contra Costa County be called Diablo County. This was rejected by the State Legislature as much too profane. At this time Contra Costa County included Alameda County and much of Santa Clara County. The county was so large that people had a hard time getting to the courthouse in Martinez. It took over a day for many people. In 1853, Contra Costa County was divided.

Home town names were important to a lot of people. In the 1870's, Salvio Pacheco tried to name Concord Todos Santos (drunken Indian). But settlers from the East Coast decided that Concord was better.

Brentwood was named by John Marsh's ancestors for their home town in England.

Jersey Island in the Delta was named for Jersey Island, England. Jersey Island in California is famous for the bloody murders that occurred in 1919. In 1922 Jersey Island, California was again in the news when three men robbed a well known Chinese gambling house.

The Las Trampas Ridge borders the San Ramon Valley. Las Trampas means the trap. During the Mexican period, elk were trapped. There were thousands of elk in San Ramon area. Elk were first lassoed, which was very dangerous compared to lassoing a steer. Elk tallow was more desirable than steer tallow. It was whiter, firmer, and sweet.

Tassajara is a Spanish word that has Aztec roots meaning a place where pieces of beef or venison are dried (beef jerky).

Rodeo is on the water front and was the location of the Union Stock Yards (beef and pork).

Oleum, near Rodeo, was coined from the last letters in petroleum. In 1895 the Union Oil Company refinery was built and a company town was constructed. There was a railroad station there.

Hercules was the location of the Hercules powder plant.

MOCOCO stands for the Mountain Copper Company. This company smelted copper ore near Zinc Hill just east of Martinez from the early 1900's until 1966. This activity created some pollution in the Martinez area. The smelter was designed to process ore from Mt. Diablo.

There was a gold and a silver rush on Mt. Diablo.

Contra Costa County was a center of activity found all over California. There were range wars, Indian wars, and a logging industry. Almost everything that you can think of that occurred in California occurred in Contra Costa County. Researching these names reveals ghost stories and buried treasures associated with the names.

There are fanciful and poetic names associated with Contra Costa County. One is Bret Harte corners. Bret Harte was a tutor to the Abner Bryant family east of Danville in the early 1880's. Bret Harte wrote a short story about Father Jose Haro in "The Devil and How Mount Diablo Got Its Name", based on these experiences.

Mrs. John Strentzel named Alhambra. Arroyo Del Hambre was renamed by her as Alhambra Creek. The stream drains Alhambra Valley, flows through Martinez, and empties into the Carquinez Straights. Arroyo Del Hambre ("Stream of Hunger") probably suggested the name to Louisiana Strentzel who was familiar with Washington Irving's popular book. The name "Hambre" was supposedly given to the valley and stream by a hungry group of Mexican soldiers chasing a band of Indian raiders.

Orinda was a name supposedly chosen by Alice Marsh Cameron, Dr. John Marsh's daughter. Alice was interested in the 17th century poet, Kathleen Fowler Phillips. The poetess was known by her friends as the "Matchless Orinda".

There are some fun things about names. Tigar Alley in Danville is now Prospect Avenue. There are two stories. One claims the street received its misspelled name because it was as narrow as a tiger's stripe. The other is that the name came from a drinking establishment called The Blind Tiger Saloon.

On Mount Diablo, there is a Mount Olympia. The most probable source for the name is that it was taken from Mount Olympus, home of the Greek gods. However, there was a lot of trail work being done on Mount Diablo around Mount Olympia by the Concord/Mount Diablo Trail Riders Association. This was hot and dusty work. They commonly stashed Olympia Beer on the mountain to enjoy after a hard days work. The mountain was named after a Washington State beer company.

Havitur Way is a street name in Hercules. A developer, Shea homes, submitted several lists of proposed street names that were rejected by city officials. Frustrated, the developer offered Havitur Way as a sly jab at the city bureaucrats. Either the officials had a sense of humor or they failed to recognize the joke. The name was approved and exists today.

Kahwookum was one of the first names proposed for Mount Diablo. It is a Miwok name. The Miwoks had no written language and this was a phonetic interpretation. During the 1865-66 California State legislative session, Henry L. Dodge of San Francisco petitioned the legislature to change Mount Diablo back to this original Indian name. He felt the current name honored the devil. The petition was rejected.

Bolbones was the most common name proposed for the mountain. Bolbones was the name that the Spanish gave to the Indians living on Mount Diablo.

Little Mountain was another name for Mount Diablo that came along when the Americans invaded California while it was still under Mexican control. Kit Carson camped at the foot of Mount Diablo along with Fremont, whom Kit Carson was guiding. Kit Carson named it Little Mountain, but the name never became popular.

Coal Hill was the name change for Mount Diablo officially approved by the California legislature in the 1865-66 session. The Contra Costa County citizens hated this name and ignored this edict. Bill does not know if this resolution has ever been rescinded.

Monte Del Diablo (thicket of the devil) is a name for Mount Diablo that Bill discussed. Monte Del Diablo is a famous Contra Costa historical site located on the north side of Concord at Solano Way and Highway 4. Monte Del Diablo was a grove of willows used by the Indians as a burial sight. One story claimed that the Spaniards were once alarmed during a minor Indian confrontation in 1806 by strange and glowing lights in the willow thicket. The thicket gave its name to Salvio Pacheco's Rancho Monte Del Diablo. The Americans thought that monte referred to the mountain, rather than a thicket or grove.

Bill showed a map of the San Ramon Valley and asked which community is named after a horse? It was Blackhawk.

Blackhawk was a horse on the Black Hawk Ranch which was started by Ansel Easton and his son-in-law, William A. Ward in 1916. Easton imported the first thoroughbred race horse seen in California. Anson named the ranch after the horse.

Bill asked where Railroad Ranch was and what was the scandal associated with it?

The ranch was located in Diablo. In 1877, the property was purchased by a holding company owned by the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads. The real owners were the Big Four, Crocker, Hopkins, Huntington, and Stanford. For a while, the property was known as the Railroad Ranch. (Continued on Page 8)



Karen Stepper, William and Kathleen Mero, and Lee Halverson at the September 20th meeting