

# San Leandro Historical Society

Newsletter

March 2021

*The mission of the San Leandro Historical Society is to build awareness and appreciation of the history of our unique and diverse city and to support the preservation of historic sites and the historic legacy of San Leandro.*

## *Alta California* by Nick Neely

Saturday, May 1 at 2:00

General Meeting at 3:00

In 1769, a Spanish exploring party led by Gaspar de Portolá walked from what is now San Diego to San Francisco. In 2016, Nick Neely followed in their footsteps, then wrote about his journey in “Alta California: From San Diego to San Francisco, a Journey on Foot to Rediscover the Golden State.” In this FREE virtual event, author Nick Neely will talk about his 650-mile trek and what he discovered about the Spanish explorers, the Native Americans they met, and what has happened in the intervening 247 years.

Visit [www.sanleandrohistory.org](http://www.sanleandrohistory.org) and click on Events and Meetings for a link to register on EventBrite.

## Membership

**Welcome** new member Catherine Enriquez. **Thank you** to these members who have renewed for 2021: Mary Asturias, Carmen Avelar, Mary Beth and Dennis Barloga, Martha Barrera, Colin Busby and Melody Tannam, Brad and Pat Caftel, Alice Chin, Susan and Dennis Criswell, Henry and Joanne Deadrich, Diane Delucchi, Karen Diaz, Loren and Jacqui Diaz, Alice Doolittle, Adele Dow, Anne Duey, Sallie Enderlin, Al and Kathe Frates, Steven and Phyllis Gee, Evelyn and Juan González, Pete Gontier, Surlene Grant, Terry and Michael Guillory, April Hansen, Marcy Helm and Mark Smallen, Mitch Huitema and Tim Holmes, Barbara Hyde, Pearl Johnston, Tak and Meg Kato, Charlene and Earl Kehret, Susan Kleebauer, Patti and Sam Larsen, Joanne Lothrop, Marie Lothrop, Arlene Lum, Diane and Frank Madrigal, Whit Magor, Barbara Mathews Brooks, Gerry Mellen, Dottie Moura, Kirby and Tervina Moy, Erin Ouborg, Donald and Linda Pollard, Isabel Polvorosa, Ken Pon, Alicia Prael, Carol Price, Robert and Emily Rich, David and Vadine Salsedo, Melitta Santos, Alice Sarafian, Teri Schlesinger, Tammy Schultz, Cindy and Rick Simons, Patricia and Lawrence Singer, James Skiles, Laurie Spencer and Mike Wood, Jessica and Joseph Stark, Cary Ann Symons, Donna Tedsen, Barbara Vester, Martin and Polina Vitz, Daniel Walters, Frank Wilson, Marilyn Winkler, Chris and Jeff Wise, Shelia Young, Michael Zee. **Don't see your name on this list? Won't you please rejoin for 2021?**

## Historical Society News

**African-American Museum Exhibit.** The San Leandro History Museum is closed because of Covid, but the Historical Society continues to partner with museum staff to research the history of African-Americans in our city for a new exhibit. Please help us bring dry facts to life by sharing your photographs, documents, or stories of Black lives in San Leandro.

**Historic Little Brown Church News.** We have bids for painting the interior walls, stripping and refinishing the wainscoting and the large double doors, and refinishing the floor. We are very excited to be able to get this restoration and maintenance accomplished! Would you please consider a donation? Your donation will help us make our historic building beautiful, as well as keep our event and general fund strong. Your name will be added to the Little Brown Church Donor Plaque for a donation of \$100 or more.

**Thank you to Chad Pennebaker** for all his work in getting bids and preparing the building for the projects. And thanks to everyone whose donations over the past few years to the Little Brown Church fund have allowed us to start these projects!

**Thank you to Luella Santos** for her ongoing volunteer garden work that makes our courtyard beautiful. And **thank you to Chad and Jean Pennebaker** for removing the dead cherry tree.

**Architectural Committee News.** Chair Erin Ouborg set up a meeting with herself, committee member and San Leandro Library Historical Commission liaison Maria Magallon, and Cindy Simons with Interim Library Director Bill Sherwood. We had a good discussion about the goals of the committee and the ways in which we can support the City and Library Historical Commission in architectural preservation matters.

## THE HISTORY FILES: SAN LEANDRO DIVERSITY

The History Files in the September 2019 Newsletter gave a brief explanation of housing discrimination and redlining in San Leandro. How was it possible that suburban communities in the East Bay between 1960 and 1970 expanded rapidly in population, but that nearly all those new suburbanites were white? In the City of Oakland, Black population increased from 12.4% in 1950 to 22.8% in 1960. Yet in the same time period, San Leandro black population went from 0.1% (20 people) to essentially 0.0 % (17 people). Redlining, putting financial services out of reach based on race or ethnicity of a neighborhood, was certainly one means. This article expands on the subject of the means used to prevent people of color from living in San Leandro and other suburban communities in the East Bay.

Quoting from a book titled “**Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California**”:

*Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Southern Alameda County Real Estate Board steadfastly refused to share its property listing with Oakland’s integrated board of realtors, effectively denying information about available properties to prospective minority buyers. Agents and brokers, if approached by black clients, would steer them away from white neighborhoods, show property at inconvenient times or in less desirable locations, or simply fail to keep appointments. Lenders, too, discriminated against black buyers, admitting that a “large factor” in loan eligibility is “the location of the property. Banks frequently will refuse to make loans on some houses in certain areas, forcing applicants to go elsewhere where lending rates are higher and more points are required.” Local city officials, determined to do their part, refused to change zoning ordinances to promote the development of low- and moderate-income housing or revise building codes to accommodate less expensive constructions. The federal government, as more than one study concluded, also bore major responsibility for the creation of all-white suburbs. Indeed, residential segregation through southern Alameda County “was determined in large measure by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) supported subdivisions built and marked on a discriminatory basis.”*

Here are some specific examples from San Leandro (please note that the current San Leandro Improvement Association is a new organization formed in 2013 and has NO connection with the 1945 SLIA).

- A letter went out to homeowners from the San Leandro Improvement Assn. in 1945 saying, “San Leandro was planned, and has been maintained as a strictly white residential City...HOWEVER, on three occasions lately, attempts have been made by non-caucasians to occupy properties within a short distance from your home.” The letter went on to encourage homeowners to participate in their program to replace the race restrictions now expired or ineffective, because “you owe it to yourself and to the neighborhood which makes your home a desirable place in which to live.”
- A *New York Times* article titled “Death Threat Halts Sale of Coast Home”, March 18, 1955, with a quote from an unidentified San Leandro woman who told the homeowner, “If you sell your home to Orientals, you will not live to sign the deed.”
- For the museum exhibit research, museum staff and historical society members talked to one San Leandro realtor who confirmed that the Southern Alameda County Real Estate Board did not share property listings with Oakland’s integrated board. He also related his experience showing a Black family a home for sale in San Leandro in the early 1970s. He took an Oak Knoll Naval Officer and his wife to view a property in the Bal area. Neighbors saw the Black couple and put pressure on the homeowner, who withdrew his home from sale.

Today, San Leandro is 37.7% Caucasian, 34.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 27.3% Hispanic Latino, 10.7% African American, 1.0% American Indian, and 9.6% Other.

If our city has achieved diversity, why do we bring up ugly incidents of the past now? We think the new exhibit should celebrate the joys and achievements of Black life in San Leandro, but it is also important to present an accurate and honest history of the integration of San Leandro. Understanding the past can inform the future. Understanding the means of discrimination and understanding the harm caused by discrimination can help people today create laws, regulations, and practices that prevent discrimination. Understanding the past can help us create a more just and equal future. And, even though Fair Housing laws that prohibit discrimination are effective, discrimination can and does still happen.

While research has provided material to underpin the new African American exhibit now in planning for the San Leandro History Museum, having personal stories, photographs, and documents will bring those dry facts to life. Please contact us if you have an experience, photograph, or document to share.

Some homeowner’s associations in San Leandro are proceeding to alter their CC&Rs to strike out racist language. Please contact your homeowner’s association to see what you can do.

As a historical society, we want to know our past, celebrating and honoring the people who came before us, yet understanding the injustices—preserving the past to enrich the future.

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P. O. Box 1046, San Leandro, California 94577

www.sanleandrohistory.org • sanleandrohistory@gmail.com • 510-969-0975 • www.facebook.com/SanLeandroHistory