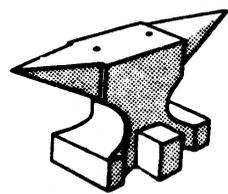


San Pablo Avenue

Historical and Cultural Pavers



El Cerrito's name comes from "Serrito de San Antonio" (Little hill of St. Anthony.) 1861 Carlton Watkins photo, LL Stein collection.



El Cerrito Historical Society

Santa Fe Railway Between 1904 and 1979 the Santa Fe Railway had a prosperous business in El Cerrito. About 30 businesses in El Cerrito used the Santa Fe to ship or receive their goods. Santa Fe once had a three-track yard in El Cerrito, two small named stations, and spur tracks that ran up Schmidt Lane and up Moeser Lane. BART built right next to the Santa Fe in the 1960's. *North entrance to Baxter Creek Gateway Park.*

Japanese Nurseries In 1900 the first nursery in what became a very successful Japanese nursery community was founded in El Cerrito. Almost all these nurseries were west of San Pablo Avenue, specifically between Potrero Avenue on the south and El Cerrito's northern city limits. The nurseries were severely vandalized while the families were interned during World War II and then many growers lost considerable property when the East-shore Freeway was built. But they persevered and prospered; the last Japanese nursery did not close down until 2006. *SW corner of Wall.*

The Avenue During the Mexican period the trail that would become San Pablo Avenue connected many Ranchos in the East Bay. By the mid-1800s it featured a stage line connecting Oakland, San Pablo, and Martinez. Today The Avenue remains the center of El Cerrito's commerce and transportation. *SW corner of Cutting.*

Summertime Fun Lafayette Park, a very popular weekend spot, was built around the turn of the century. It later became the Peek-a-Boo auto camp and cabins. Ramon and Baydon Kristavich's "Twins" service station was across the street. Bardon's Fruit Market was just south of here, while the Economy Market, Betsy's Kitchen, and the Big Boy Barbeque were across the street. The Peek-a-Boo was just south of here. *SE corner of Hill.*

Contra Costa Civic Theater Founded in 1959 by residents Louis and Bettianne Flynn (along with about 30 other volunteers), CCCT's first theater

was located just north of here. CCCT has been El Cerrito's premier community theater for more than fifty years. Today the CCCT is more than just a theater, with musical theater classes, vocal training, summer drama camp, and other related activities. *NE corner of Potrero.*

Stege Sanitary District Minutes of the County Board of Supervisors meetings in the early 1900s often included complaints about sanitation in the El Cerrito area. The Stege Sanitary District was formed in 1913 to address these concerns. Four years later the City of El Cerrito was formed, largely hewing to the boundaries established by Stege Sanitary. *Island at NW corner of Potrero.*

Streetcars In 1904 streetcars began running on San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito. You could ride a streetcar south all the way to Hayward or up San Pablo from the County Line to Grand Canyon Park (now Alvarado Park); out Macdonald Avenue all the way to the San Rafael Ferry; or out Potrero Avenue, up Carlson, and to or beyond Macdonald Avenue. The fare was 5¢. *SW corner of Potrero.*

Little Italy Italian immigrants and their children were a major ethnic community in El Cerrito up through the 1950s. Potrero and San Pablo was the heart of "Little Italy". Among the businesses in Little Italy were Morotti's store, Mr. Tezzi's Italian "cooperativa", Ceci's Dry Goods, Louie Nicoli and Lou Favero's "Louie's Club", the Poloni's bakery, Moro's hardware, John Grondona's Crab Shack, the Eckmann's butcher shop, Bert Bertolotti's barber shop, and a number of other enterprises. *Island at SE corner of Potrero.*

The Holy Ghost Festa was started in Portugal by Queen Izabel to celebrate the end of a famine in 1296. Today Portuguese-Americans carry out this springtime tradition with a parade, selection of a festival queen, and traditional Portuguese food. The St. John the Baptist Church congregation built Portuguese Hall on Portola Drive to support this festival. *Across San Pablo from the NW corner of Carlos.*

Quarries Not long after the turn of the century El Cerrito became a center of the rock and stone business. Along with some smaller ones, there were two major quarries in town. The Hutchinson Quarry and crusher was at the east end of Schmidt Lane. Bates and Borland had a quarry just east of Arlington Park and a crusher at the present site of Cerrito Vista Park. The last quarry closed in the late 1940s. *Across San Pablo from the NE corner of Madison.*

Industrial Core The businesses near the Santa Fe Railway line formed an "Industrial Core" that employed hundreds of people. These businesses included seven lumberyards, the Pagliero family's Technical Porcelain and Chinaware Company, several fuel and feed stores, two monument companies, a slaughterhouse, a few furniture stores, and about 10-15 other businesses that relied on the railroad. *NE corner of Madison.*

City Hall Our original City Hall stood here from 1926 to 1961. It housed the City Administration, the Fire Department, the Police Department, and a small jail. The City Council Chamber was located upstairs and this space was also used for parties and dances. The fire chief also lived there in the early days. *NE corner of Manila.*

El Cerrito Public Library With an inventory of fifty books El Cerrito's first public library opened in the Rust post office in 1913. In 1917 it moved into the Breneman House and in 1925 into a space on Fairmount Avenue before expanding and relocating to Stockton Avenue in 1949. The building on Stockton Avenue was the first new postwar library in the Bay Area. *NE corner of Stockton.*



The quarry above Arlington Park ~ 1920. Johnson family photo

Arts and Culture in the City The fine arts have always had a place in El Cerrito. The El Cerrito Art Association and the Arts and Culture Commission continue to engage our thriving art community. *Across San Pablo from the NE corner of Stockton.*

Fairmont School was originally built around 1903 and was El Cerrito's second school. Fires claimed many structures in early El Cerrito and the school burned down in 1924. A new school was built in its place one block from here at Lexington and Stockton. This school was in turn rebuilt during the postwar boom. *SE corner of Stockton.*

El Cerrito Music Scene El Cerrito's and Richmond's population quadrupled between 1941 and 1945 due to the massive influx of wartime shipyard workers. These workers brought with them country, blues, and western swing music. This musical melting pot remains strong and has helped foster several well-known artists. The famous Creedence Clearwater Revival band began as El Cerrito High students led by John Fogerty. *SW corner of Columbia.*

Farms and Dairies Our town was once made up of farms and dairies. The many creeks coming down from the hills and the mild weather made for excellent dairy farming; there were about 25 dairies in El Cerrito. Those same conditions also made for good dry land farming: thousands of cattle plus acres and acres of grain were once raised in this area. *SE corner of Eureka.*

Master Craftsmen Two French families lived close by here in the early 20th century. Both Mr. Laleux and Mr. Allinio were highly regarded artisan plasters. Mr. Allinio played a significant part in the construction of the Palace of Fine Arts, the Curran and Geary Theaters, Hearst Castle, the original fountain at Marin Circle, and other important projects. In addition, Mr. Allinio was a renowned aircraft designer and aviator. *Across San Pablo from the NE corner of Lincoln.*

Violet Wong's Dining Room After running the kitchen in well-known spots such as the "it" Club and the Six Bells, Violet Wong went on to become a culinary pioneer in El Cerrito by introducing Chinese-American fusion. In 1945 Violet and her husband Albert Wong opened Violet's Dining Room. They offered everything from chop suey to apple pie. *Across San Pablo from El Dorado.*



John Grondona's "Farmers Produce Market". ECHS collection

it Club At Central and San Pablo stood Walt Gatto's famous "it" Club. Clara Bow, the famous girl with "It" in the 1927 movie, was a personal friend of Mr. Gatto and he named the club after her. Some of the entertainers who performed at the it Club included Red Foxx, Gypsy Rose Lee, Sally Rand, The Vagabonds, Frank Fontaine, and Johnny Mathis. *NE corner of Central.*

Six Bells and Cerro Square Vic Figone ran the "Six Bells" restaurant near here for many years. The original Six Bells was across Central Avenue from here. Mr. Figone was a community leader and was involved in countless charitable causes and activities. In later years his friend and Yankee baseball great Billy Martin opened Cerro Square here. Yankee legends Maris, Mantle, Larson, and others were known to stop by. *NW corner of Central.*

The Cerrito Theater opened on Christmas Day in 1937; admission was 30¢. Architect William B.

David included Art Deco elements and fanciful murals in the theater. The theater closed in 1966 but 40 years later it was restored and reopened by the City of El Cerrito. *SE corner of Central.*

First Mayor The citizens of El Cerrito voted to incorporate on August 23, 1917. Philip Lee helped lead the effort and also raised funds for essential services, such as fire and police protection. Mr. Lee was the City's first mayor. His home and business were just east of here. *NE corner of Fairmount.*

Rust This part of El Cerrito was named for early resident and blacksmith Wilhelm Rust, an immigrant from Germany. The Rust post office was located near here. The highest point in El Cerrito, just north of Arlington Park, was named William Rust Summit in 1988. *NW corner of Fairmount.*

El Cerrito's Nightlife Everyone up and down the West Coast who had an interest in games of chance knew about wide-open El Cerrito. In El Cerrito and the nearby unincorporated area, people could play slots, craps, hi-lo, roulette, and other games while enjoying fine food and entertainment. Moles inside the police department made it very hard to pin serious charges on anyone as there was never much useful evidence found when the police raided a place. *SW corner of Fairmount.*

The Little Hill On March 27, 1772 the Fages party anointed today's Albany Hill "Serrito de San Antonio". This ancient mass of sandstone was scraped off an ocean floor that sank beneath the North American continent during tectonic plate collisions in the age of dinosaurs. The same process was simultaneously creating the hills at Point Richmond; Brooks Island; and the hills across the Bay at China Camp. Until 1937 Albany Hill was called Cerrito Hill. *SE corner of Fairmount.*

El Cerrito Hills The hills to the east began rising less than two million years ago. As they rose small creeks such as Cerrito Creek (which is underground just south of here) picked up material



Santa Fe's California Limited headed to Chicago; it's just cleared Cutting. At one point 20 passenger and 10 freight trains a day ran through El Cerrito where BART runs today. John Ilman photo

from the hills. As the creeks dropped this material a gentle floodplain was formed at the base of the hills. Trees were uncommon on the plain and, except in the ravines, on the hills. *NW corner of Carlson.*

Cerrito Creek divided the huge Peralta and Castro land grants and helped shape El Cerrito's land use. Cerrito Creek once flowed into marshes just southwest of here and the creek and former wetlands influenced the location of San Pablo Avenue. A slaughterhouse and a garbage dump were among ways early residents put these "useless marshes" to work. Today we work to restore such wetlands, recognizing their value to wildlife and clean water. *SW corner of Carlson.*

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You can download the Paver Audio tour from:
<http://www.el-cerrito.org/m/index.html>