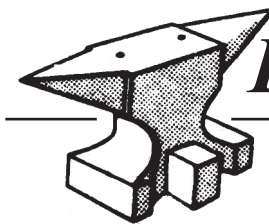


getting park bonds passed between 1954 and 1964, and the parks built, the eucalyptus grove below the foot of King Court was named “The Ken Smith Grove”. El Cerrito is now considered a city with admirable parks and open space given its size and population. It has the 2.5 mile linear parkway, an 80 acre nature area, 45 acres of owned parks and 18 acres shared with the school district, plus non-city open space in the country club and scout camp.

The Hillside Natural Area is the largest plot of city-owned open space. It is in the geographic center of town, like the hole in a doughnut with residential neighborhoods surrounding it. The name seems strange, since its most prominent feature is a large former quarry, which contains the Recycling Center, the city’s corporation yard, and facilities of Stege Sanitary District, certainly far from “natural”. But whereas it was originally slated to have playgrounds and ball fields, this property has been dedicated solely to open space, containing no developed amenities other than foot trails. Suggestions to re-name it the Hillside “Nature” Area have been rebuffed. (Are we sure we want to bring this up at this time?)

The Natural Area’s main section, around the quarry, was donated to the city by the former quarry owners headed by Forrest Brown, hence the name of the main North-South trail beginning at the top of Schmidt Lane, “The Forrest Brown Trail”. The Hillside Natural Area is in two parts, with a smaller piece north of Potrero. As this is being written, volunteers are working to purchase a ten-acre parcel of open land just south of Potrero, which would more closely connect the two current sections



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Our Next Event: ***The Anza Trail***

7:00 PM Wednesday, June 18
Arlington Park Clubhouse
1120 Arlington Blvd., El Cerrito

For our next program Hale Sargent of the National Park Service, will present a program on the Anza Trail.

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a volunteer, non-political, non-profit corporation that has as its purpose the preservation and appreciation of the history of El Cerrito. It does this by providing educational and research opportunities; by the collection of historic photographs, documents, artifacts and cultural objects; by advocating the preservation of historic resources in the city; and by encouraging others to help further these aims. Anyone may join; dues are \$25 (Household member), \$60 (Sponsoring member), and \$300 (Life member).

Parks in El Cerrito

by Rich Bartke

In El Cerrito's younger days, parks were not a community priority. There was plenty of open land, and the kids played in the fields and later in the streets, as there was very little traffic.

Our first two parks were the results of donations of land in the 1920's, and became Huber and Poinsett Parks. (You could mention a little bit about Huber and Poinsett. I have a little information on them if that would help.) Both were in what were deemed "unattractive" watersheds and remained undeveloped until the 1930's, when the federal Works Progress Administration ("WPA") funded some improvements.

By that time El Cerrito was home to two other grand parcels of open space which were not city-owned. The first was a golf course, originally the "Berkeley Country Club" founded in February 1920. Nine holes were in play by September of that year. The club later expanded to 18 holes, and became today's "Mira Vista Golf & Country Club". The other was a Boy Scout camp. In about 1929 George Friend bought the Bates & Borland quarry across Arlington from his home. In 1930 he donated it to the Boy Scouts, and by June 7 of that year "Camp Berkeley" was in business as a scout camp. It

has subsequently been named "Camp Herms". In 1937 during the Great Depression it was transferred to the city so that the WPA could finance construction of a swimming pool and other amenities, then transferred back to the Scouts.

El Cerrito was considered one of the few cities of its size in the nation to not have an established public park system. But in 1947 a ballot measure imposed 15 cents per \$100 assessed value to establish a park system and develop a park on Barrett, improve Poinsett, and develop 17 acres purchased by the City at Cerrito Vista into ball fields, tennis courts and playgrounds.

In 1949 the city established a citizen Park & Recreation Commission, but no Director was hired until 1957. (It would be great to mention

the "Pennies for Parks" drive by the children of El Cerrito.)

In the November 1954 special election, a 10 cent levy for 10 years was passed, to complete 10 neighborhood parks including Cerrito Vista, to establish Arlington Park, "purchase and develop the Chung Mei Home", (Are you sure there should be something about the Chung Mei Home.....I'm wondering about this..) and develop 10 tot-lots.

Not all of these were accomplished, but the measure did lead to the improvement of Poinsett, Tassajara, Castro, Huber and Cerrito Vista parks, construction of the swim center, and acquisition of land for Arlington, Canyon Trail and Hillside parks.

Park bond issues needed a 2/3 vote to pass. In 1958 and in 1959 park bond measures got over 63% but not over 66% so both failed.

Castro Park was dedicated on May 5, 1961, a joint effort by the City and School District.

The Citizens Conference on the Community's Future adopted a Master Plan for Parks and Recreation in Spring 1964 and recommended the issuance of General Obligation bonds, needing a 66 2/3% to pass. The proposal was to develop Harding Park, expand Canyon Trail Park, develop a Richmond Annex park, and improve Huber, Poinsett, Castro, Cerrito Vista and Arlington parks, seek land at the high school and Fairmont

school, preserve Hillside Natural Area and build a Community Center. It passed, and led directly to the exemplary park system now in El Cerrito.

By 1970 the land under BART's proposed tracks was developed into a trail using federal funds. On May 12, 1979 a Santa Fe train made the last 9 mile run from

Oakland to Richmond, which allowed for the removal of its tracks and widening of the linear park in the BART right-of-way.

Beginning in 1974 individuals have been honored by the planting of trees in their name

in the Memorial Grove area of lower Hillside Natural Area, and the posting of plaques, at the Forrest Brown trailhead at the top of Schmidt Lane. Approximately 60 people

have been so honored. As recognition of City Manager Ken Smith's personal efforts at



John Marsh's Great Stone House, ca 1870, courtesy of the Nat'l Park Svc