

Paul Grunland – an appreciation  
By Dave Weinstein

Paul Grunland, a longtime member who [died in February](#) at age 93, never lived in El Cerrito but there was no bigger fan of the town.

He consistently spoke about how friendly El Cerrito was – and how well governed. He loved eating at Fatapples with his wife Peggy and friends, and shopping at Pastime hardware. He appreciated El Cerrito as a place where people who wanted to get something good done could often get it done. Over the years Paul got much good done.

Paul was involved with several El Cerrito Historical Society endeavors, speaking at programs, helping lead tours, suggesting many good ideas, creating awards plaques with his friend John Aronovici, and more.

Paul was also a founding member of El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, providing valuable advice about how to structure the organization financially. He co-led a hike in Kensington that took in the Unitarian Church, and was a frequent hike attendee.

One of Paul's goals, never accomplished, was to re-establish as a walking route the trail used by Spanish explorer Paul Fages in 1772 as he traversed the East Bay.

Paul was deeply involved with such Berkeley groups as the Berkeley Historical Society, Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association, and others. For years if you attended a historical event in the East Bay, Paul's presence was expected. He belonged to national historical groups as well, often traveling to attend tours.

The tours for the Berkeley Historical Society were legendary. For each he would compile a thick, sometimes 40-page handout composed of news clippings, photos, maps, memoirs and more.

For one tour, that took hardy participants scrambling over rocks at the rural, hilly boundary of Contra Costa and Alameda counties, Paul had gone there a few days earlier – to remove poison oak that would have gotten in the way. He was 85 at the time.

Paul was a dedicated skier and kept to the slopes until a few years before his death, often with his friend, architect Henrik Bull. They'd become friends, Paul told me, after Henrik heard the name 'Grunland' at a historic event and asked if, like himself, Paul was of Norwegian ancestry. He was.

For the Berkeley Historical Society Paul did oral history interviews, and shepherded some of these into book form, including "Conversations with Henrik Bull: Building in the Mountains and Other Places."

Paul, a veteran of World War II, was the opening general manager when the Emporium Capwell department store opened at the brand new El Cerrito Plaza in 1958. He spoke about the experience at a historical society program several years ago, and spoke again at the Movers and Shakers program we put on with the Chamber of Commerce last year.

Along with running Capwell, Paul played a leading role in the merchants group at the Plaza and earned people's respect, Herb Foley, who ran the clothier Foley & Bonne there, told the historical society.

"People particularly loved Capwells," Foley said. "The fella that was their manager, Paul Grunland, was an outstanding manager, a very, very good detail man. When you run a department store you've got to be a good detail man."

I first met Paul because he advertised his El Sobrante department store, Fowler's, in the West County Times, where I covered El Sobrante in 1984. Paul played an important role in El Sobrante's business community and was involved with planning issues as well.

At one point several of the reporters appeared in Fowler's clothing ads – myself in a velour pullover.

Paul was a pushy guy, but in the friendliest, most soft spoken of ways. He'd lean in close with an idea. Write a book about Charles Keeler, the Berkeley poet. Lead a hike retracing a historic route. And with each suggestion, of course, would come a promise to take part or help out.

As Aronovici, an El Cerrito historical society member and an active member of the Berkeley Historical Society, recalls, "He was always coming up with ideas. He would call me, 'John, we need to do this!' And he always wanted to honor people."

It is of course Paul who deserves much honor.