

Sparks August 2022

Tour Blake Garden on September 15 (RSVP required!) The Historical Society plans to host several outdoor events in the coming months, including tours of the Boy Scouts' Camp Herms in the El Cerrito Hills, and our popular tour of Sunset View Cemetery. Please attend our first.



Blake Garden has reflecting pools, grottoes – and a fascinating history. Photo by Dave Weinstein

A history and tour of Blake Garden, led by Meghan Ray and Kendra Hauser of Blake Garden. This event is free. Attendance is limited. Please RSVP!

Blake Garden took shape in the mid-1920s, when Kensington saw its first real development, as a 22-acre estate owned by brothers Anson and Edwin Blake, quarry owners and contractors. Anson's mansion, Casa Adelante, is today the Blake House, owned by the University of California. The gardens are used by landscape architecture students and feature more than a thousand types of plants.

We will tour the 10.5 acre garden for about 90 minutes, view the mansion from outside, and enjoy light refreshments in the garden after the tour.

Meet at Blake Garden, 70 Rincon Road, Kensington. 2 p.m. Thursday, September 15, 2022
RSVP to Dave Weinstein, 510-524-1737, davidsw Weinstein@yahoo.com.

Did you miss the 50th anniversary celebration of the city's Recycling Center? Watch the [video](#)! More than 80 people enjoyed hearing from people who founded the El Cerrito Recycling Center, which opened for business during pouring rain on August 5, 1972.

A handful and a half of people who were at the center on that day were at the birthday bash on Aug. 5, 2022, at the center. Some were among our speakers, including Ken Little, Gregg Cook and Allan Gardiner. Rich Bartke, who was mayor at the time, was also there both on opening day and at the anniversary, as was his wife and also a former mayor, Jane Bartke.



The anniversary of the Recycling Center attracted more than 80 people to the live event. Now you can watch the event on video. Photo by John Falconer

Speakers were brief, concise, and sometimes emotional. People who helped run the place in later years talked about the center as it grew over time. We honored Joel Witherell, a city official from 1973 to 1993 whose general oversight of recycling did much to ensure its success and continuity.

Special among our speakers was Sarah Steele, Joel's daughter, who brought insight into the thinking and living of a very special man.

Please enjoy [the video](#), and to learn more about the center, read this [history](#). And don't miss this great performance from the recycling center anniversary by city poet laureate and member of the Environmental Quality Committee Evelyn Mitchell. It is included in the full video, but folks enjoyed it so much we are giving [Evelyn's poem](#) this special focus.

Wonderful historical documents posted online about the Chung Mei Orphanage. Founded in 1923 and operating in El Cerrito from 1935 to 1954, the Chung Mei Home was the only such

home for Chinese boys in the country. It mainly served boys whose parents could not care for them, often due to poverty.

The home, which now houses Summit School, was deemed eligible to be on the National Register of Historic Places. Over the years the historical society has hosted several historical programs there that featured some of the “boys” who grew up in the school. Their stories are amazing, and emotionally compelling.



Dr. Charles Shepherd, who oversaw the Chung Mei Home, also lead the home’s Drum and Bugle Corps. Phil Chan donated this slide, along with many others, to the El Cerrito Historical Society

The society has also compiled important historic records about the home, and have recently placed some of them on our website, part of our mission to make the society’s excellent archive more accessible to researchers and others interested in local history.

Many of our materials, including those about the Chung Mei Home, are of interest far beyond El Cerrito.

A prize in our collection is the full run of the Chung Mei Chronicles, a publication put out by the Chung Mei boys and the home’s staff. It has remarkable material, including about the boys’ contributions to the World War II effort. A number of young men who had been residents of the home served with distinction overseas with the Armed Forces.

We have also posted online a remarkable collection of colored lantern slides donated to the society for former Chung Mei resident Phil Chan.

You can access these photos and the Chronicles [here](#) or [here](#).

In addition, the society has just received another important donation, thanks to the thoughtfulness and generosity of the now-closed, **Berkeley Baptist Church** which had a key role in the Chung Mei story. These will be catalogued, then digitized and made available online in good time.

Board member John Falconer reports: “Today I picked up three large photo albums which are a treasure. These are the original albums covering what appears to be every child at Chung Mei, from 1923 to 1953, with full body shots of each child, labeled with their names.”

“There are numerous other photos of camp outings, the original home in West Berkeley, the El Cerrito home, musical and theatrical performances, sporting activities, fund raising activities, etc. Various newspaper clippings, images of checks, and other ephemera are included, as are three large format glass transparencies of group shots.”

The Historical Society mourns the loss of Lori Dair. Lori, who passed away June 25 of ALS, played an important role in city affairs in the ‘90s and early 2000s, first with Sustainable El Cerrito, a group that hoped the ailing El Cerrito Plaza could be rebuilt following New Urbanist principles, and then as one of three founders of Friends of the Cerrito Theater.

Although Lori’s leadership of Friends lasted only a couple of years, it came at a crucial time – would the city commit money to save a former movie theater? The theater reopened in 2006 and is owned and operated today as Rialto Cinemas Cerrito.



It was October 27, 2006, and the Cerrito Theater was re-opening as a movie house after decades in the dark. (It has been used as Kiefer’s furniture warehouse.) Lori Dair, left, joined in the dancing. Photo by Dave Weinstein

Lori, who was born in 1956, helped found Friends of the Cerrito Theater in February 2002 with Dave Weinstein of the Historical Society and Pam Challinor. Her energy, political understanding, and friendships throughout the city were instrumental in saving the theater.

A memorial service was held for Lori in August, at one of her favorite spots, the Cerrito Theater. Many, many friends attended to offer support to her husband, Rob MacCoun, and two daughters, Madeline and Audrey.

Help us document and preserve the city's history by becoming a member of the El Cerrito Historical Society. Membership, a bargain at \$30 a year, is open to everyone and includes receipt of our printed newsletter, the Forge, our email updates and meeting notices. More importantly, it assists our mission to locate, preserve and educate people about local history. A membership form is online under "How you can help" at www.elcerritohistoricalsociety.org.

We also offer memberships at the sponsor level for \$75 and life memberships for \$400. We accept donations of any amount.

If you are a member, watch for the next Forge magazine, which features a profile of Pastime Hardware, one of our city's most historic businesses. We also look at the history of the Little Hill Lounge, and learn more about how Lori Dair contributed to the early efforts to preserve the Cerrito Theater.

The El Cerrito Historical Society produces two publications, the Forge, which is a print publication, which we aim to produce four times a year, and Sparks (from the Anvil), an email publication which we aim to produce monthly. Both hark back to one of El Cerrito's original settlers, William Rust, a blacksmith who worked at his anvil producing, among other things, sparks.

