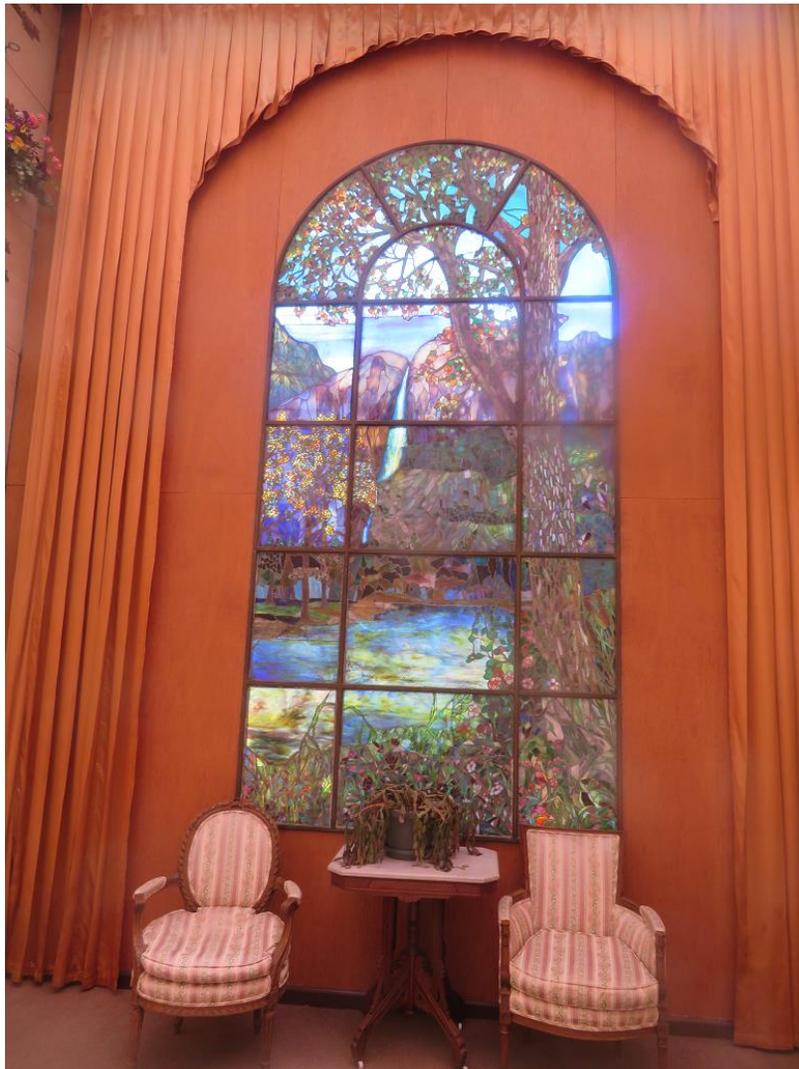


Sparks August 2023



A Tiffany-style window is one of the many artistic touches that enliven the interior of Golden Gate Mortuary, which was built starting in 1927 as Sunset Mortuary. Photo by Dave Weinstein/El Cerrito Historical Society

Tour Golden Gate Mortuary, the former Sunset Mortuary, on Friday August 18. One of the oldest businesses and grandest buildings in the El Cerrito-Kensington area, the former Sunset Mausoleum, built in 1927, has a colorful history that continues to this day.

Founded, designed and owned by a premier west-coast importer of marble, the mausoleum was later presided over by the late Dr. Gene Scott, Ph.D., whose 24-hour-a-day televised teachings variously amazed, electrified, and enlightened people from the mid 1970s through the early 1990s. Mausoleum manager Ken Garkow and historical society president Dave Weinstein lead a tour.

Our free tour will be 3:30 to 5 p.m. this coming Friday, August 18, 2023. Golden Gate Mausoleum sits above Sunset View Cemetery, which is a separately owned business. Enter the cemetery at 101 Colusa Avenue and drive slowly uphill. There will be light refreshments. Info: davidsweinstein@yahoo.com.

Watch for our upcoming movie, a tour of Sunset View Cemetery led by Tom Panas. One of the society's most popular events is a tour of Sunset View cemetery that Tom leads every few years.



Videographer Mike Freeman prepares a shot while Ken Duffy holds the mike and Tom Panas prepares to speak for a movie about the history of Sunset View Cemetery. Photo by Dave Weinstein/El Cerrito Historical Society

More than a tour of gravesites and spectacular landscapes, with equally spectacular views of the Bay, the tour is a sort of history of El Cerrito and its suburbs, including Berkeley. Tom talks about leaders of the Berkeley business community and of the university who are buried here, about our city's Italian and Japanese-American communities, and points out gravesites of Civil War veterans and even of a famous TV star.

Now we have captured this tour for posterity thanks to El Cerrito videographer Mike Freeman, who volunteered his time and talent to direct and film what will be a roughly 45-minute movie. Assisting on the shoot were Ken Duffy, Dianne Brenner, Ed Crowley, Mary Barkey, Dave Weinstein and a volunteer who asked not to be acknowledged.

Check out the latest **Forge**, our quarterly historical journal. If you're a member of the society then you have received this publication in the mail. If not, pick one up at several drop-off spots in town, including the library, City Hall, and the community center.

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+ How African dance led to self-understanding – page 3



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El Cerrito Barber Shops Provide a Timeless Experience

By Jon Bashor

When Charlie Murray opened the El Cerrito Plaza barber shop in 1959, it joined a handful of similar shops stretching along San Pablo Avenue and at the eastern end of Fairmount Avenue. And while the shops were ostensibly there just for haircuts, they also served as informal gathering places for the men and boys in the neighborhood.

Back then, many guys got their hair cut every two weeks and appointments were largely the province of beauty salons, so traffic was steady. Customers walked into the barber shop, took a seat and waited until the next chair opened up. What set the Plaza shop apart from the others was that it boasted eight chairs and eight barbers to tend to tonsorial tasks, not to mention a stuffed polar bear and stuffed brown bear in glass display cases.

"There were a lot of barber shops on San Pablo Avenue – one on every block practically," recalls Phil Playle, who owns Phil's Barber Shop at the top of Fairmount Avenue.

According to a list of city businesses compiled by the El Cerrito Historical Society, they included the Modern Barber Shop, Chuck's Barber Shop, the Vogue Barbershop (from 1934), the Sanitary Barber Shop with the slogan "A smooth shave, a new man", which also dated to 1934 but



The late Bert Playle cuts a young boy's hair in his Three Sportsmen Barber Shop near the top of Fairmount Avenue (courtesy Phil Playle).

was renamed Sharkey's Barber Shop in 1937 (and was located on San Pablo Avenue near Potrero Avenue next door to Sharkey's Club), and Angelo Bertoli's Barber Shop.

Playle also recalls Bert's Barbershop on San Pablo Avenue, which moved a ways down the street and was renamed Hollywood Barber Shop. Owner Frandio "Bert" Botolotti also got a new nickname, Hollywood Bert. "Clipper Dick" cut hair at a shop next to where Pastime Hardware now stands. Wally Violet, a 1957 graduate of El Cerrito High, owned Wally's Barber Shop next to the post office.

The Grand Barber Shop, down Fairmount and around the corner on San Pablo, had four chairs, while Bert Playle's barber shop at the top of Fairmount was more compact, with three chairs, and was known as The Three Sportsmen Barber Shop. Leon's Haircutters, at San Pablo and Moeser Lane, wouldn't open until 1965. Today, the three barber shops are all that remain in town. In many ways, they haven't changed much, but in others they have kept up with the times, for better or worse.

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The latest Forge newsletter delves into local barber shops as contributors to the greater community, and features a memoir from a member of the city's Black community.

In it you'll find a lively history of our town's barber shops by Jon Bashor, and a touching memoir by Mina Wilson about growing up as a young Black woman in El Cerrito and confronting and overcoming prejudice that threatened her self-understanding.

You can also download the Forge from our website, from the "publications" tab.

Attend our Point Isabel History Walk. For thousands of years a low hill and natural shoreline, Point Isabel has been home to the Ohlone, a dock for Victor Castro's rancho, a commercial ferry stop, a site for illegal prizefighting, dynamite factory, frog farm, dump for toxic trash, and more. Tour leader Mary Barnsdale, a leader of Point Isabel Dog Owners, is writing a history of the Point, which is best known today as an off-leash area for dogs to play.

The walk is 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, October 21, 2023. Meet by the Sit and Stay Cafe, at the end of Central Avenue/Isabel Street, the bayside parking lot of Point Isabel Regional Shoreline. Free.

A recent donation. Sharon Bonini Steele has donated to the society three large format photos showing firefighters with the El Cerrito Fire Department in front of their trucks in front of old City Hall. The photos are from the 1920s and 1930s. We thank Sharon, whose father, Don, was an El Cerrito fire captain.

Check out the society's Instagram page. Nick Brooks is working with other society members to get out the word about El Cerrito history through social media, posting some of the many thousands of historical images in the society's archive.

“If you have Instagram downloaded on your phone you can find us @echistoricalociety or you can preview the page on a laptop or other device here; <https://www.instagram.com/echistoricalociety/>,” Nick writes.

This effort is a work in progress; check back to watch our Instagram postings grow. So far they are drawn from a wonderful collection the society owns from the old Chung Mei orphanage for Chinese boys, whose distinctive campus is now operated by Summit Public School.

The Historical Society Board meets the second Thursday of the month at 5 p.m., these days via Zoom. Members are encouraged to attend. Meetings rarely take more than an hour. Occasionally we need to change the date of a meeting. Our next meeting is **Sept. 14, 2023 at 5 p.m.** (The 4:45 start time provides a cushion in case of glitches.) Topics will include: Archiving, upcoming events, public outreach, a membership drive, and more.

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

Time: Sep 14, 2023 04:45 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85378109733?pwd=NXNkUlpFbFprNTF3ZTlCR2dzQ0R0Zz09>

Meeting ID: 853 7810 9733

Passcode: 847822

One tap mobile

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