

Sparks May 2023

Stop by the historical society booth during the July 4 WorldOne festival. As always, the historical society's booth will be on Pomona Avenue near the Contra Costa Civic Theatre. Members of the board and other members will be there all day to answer your questions about El Cerrito history, to challenge you with our history quiz, and to publicize our events and other doings. The festival runs 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Cerrito Vista park and is the city's biggest event of the year. See you there.



This mausoleum is an Italian Renaissance Revival treasure containing a variety of rare and beautiful marble to memorialize the final resting place of Civil War veterans and local notables, and is a repository of decorative art. Photo by Dave Weinstein

Tour Golden Gate Mortuary, the former Sunset Mortuary. 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 an architect and premier west-coast importer of stone, 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. 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.



Dogs and masters gathered at Point Isabel Regional Shoreline in August 2017 to enjoy a total solar eclipse in the Bay Area's best off-leash park for dogs. Photo, Dave Weinstein

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.



Chris Strachwitz attended the society's program about Creedence Clearwater Revival in 2017. Photo by Dave Weinstein

The society mourns the loss of Chris Strachwitz. Chris, one of the foremost collectors, preservers, and celebrators of roots music ever, was internationally known, and particularly well known in El Cerrito.

As founder of Down Home Music, he could often be found in the store. His record label Arhoolie Records, which started in 1960, was based in the same complex. Over the years Chris recorded and promoted artists producing in such categories as Zydeco, blues, polka, Mexican American, jazz, and so much more.

He liked his music raw and real; anything he thought too slick – and that included Motown, my friends -- he derided as Mouse music.

Chris died May 5, at 91. The Arhoolie Foundation says there will be a memorial in the future.



Chris Strachwitz onstage at the Rialto Cinemas Cerrito during the screening of 'This Ain't No Mouse Music' in 2014. With him are members of the marching band. Photo by Jeff Lichtman

Over the years Chris took part in several events involving the historical society or relating to historic times and places in our city. Back in 2002, when the society was helping Friends of the Cerrito Theater in efforts to reopen a shuttered furniture warehouse as the movie theater it once had been, Chris supported the effort, attending an open house at the Cerrito Theater and speaking on its behalf.

And do you remember when the theater screened a film about Chris, 'This Ain't No Mouse Music' back in 2014 and an aggregation calling itself the Saint Strachwitz Benevolent Society Orkestr of El Cerrito led a [New Orleans style parade](#) from Down Home to the theater along San Pablo Avenue?

Chris also attended several historical society programs, including one about Creedence Clearwater Revival.

The society notes the passing of Daniel Ellsberg. Ellsberg, whose release of the secret Pentagon Papers revealed governmental lies about the Vietnam War and profoundly changed how Americans view their government and how that government would operate in the future, was a longtime neighbor, a resident of Kensington.

For more than 50 years Ellsberg continued to be a forceful and insightful commentator and activist, fighting militarism and speaking on behalf of freedom of the press and of whistleblowers, including Julian Assange.

Ellsberg died at age 92 on June 16 of pancreatic cancer.

Check out the society's new Instagram page. Volunteer 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 @echistorical society or you can preview the page on a laptop or other device here; <https://www.instagram.com/echistorical society/>," 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.

Tour San Pablo Avenue with a lively audio guide. Have you noticed the historic pavers found along El Cerrito's main street, San Pablo Avenue? They describe such historically important places, events and historical themes as our city's Little Italy, Lafayette Park, the old Six Bells tavern, the Cerrito Theater, the home of our first mayor, and much more. You can download a hard copy of the Historic Pavers brochure from our [website](#), and can listen to the [audio tour](#) as well.

"While this is nice to have on a PC," board member John Falconer notes, "it is really nice to have on a phone, as you can carry it and listen as you make the walk."

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 **July 13, 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.

El Cerrito Historical Society is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

Time: Jul 13, 2023 04:45 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83420392678?pwd=aUd2QkRNY1dZV1ZrMUUxYVNiNml0UT09>

Meeting ID: 834 2039 2678

Passcode: 726054

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