

Sparks November 2023

December 6 Reception to Showcase Historic Photo Contest Submission and Announce Winners. More than 70 historic photos were submitted and have been judged in the El Cerrito Historical Society's first-ever Historic Photo Contest.

All of the photos will be shown and those deemed best by the panel of judges will be announced and prizes awarded at a reception to be held from **6-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 6**. The event will be held at the **Juku co-working and meeting space at 7019 Stockton Ave.**, across from the 7-Eleven store. The community is invited and light refreshments will be served.

The photos spanned decades of El Cerrito history, with the oldest from 1907 and others from every decade up to the 1970s.

After the Dec. 6 reception, the **photo exhibit will be open to the public for viewing from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 9 and 16.**

-- Jon Bashor

Enjoy nostalgic musical comedies as performed decades ago by budding thespians at El Cerrito High. High School musicals! What is more fun than that for theater nerds?



"A Wonderful Town" was a wonderful musical performed at El Cerrito High School in 1964, as this photo suggests. "That's Kathy Way leading the conga," Helen Ettlinger writes, "but my favorite part of this photo is Terry Shepherd, who is concentrating on her music at the piano in profile down front." Photo courtesy of Helen Ettlinger

El Cerrito High School was lucky enough to have a fantastic drama teacher in the early 1960s, Dr. Sam Elkind (Ph.D. 1963, Yale Drama School) who made high school so very much fun for those of us who were lucky enough to work with him.

Even for those of us who couldn't sing, "putting on a show" was a delight. In 1963 and 1964 we put on *real* musicals with casts good enough to merit recording for posterity. We were all envious of Berkeley High having a real theater, but we had the better teacher and a terrific set designer in the class of '64, Sallie Robbins.

Together with the Stagecraft class, they transformed the gym into Broadway by the Bay for four magical nights (two in '63 and two in '64) by staging "The Boy Friend" (which was Julie Andrews' first starring role on Broadway before "My Fair Lady"), and "Wonderful Town" (composer Leonard Bernstein and starring Rosalind Russell on Broadway).

Broadway had some great casts for these shows, but El Cerrito rose to the challenge. You can [listen to performances](#) of these wonderful shows on the historical society's website.

"The Boy Friend" was March 1963. Bob Logan played the lead "Boy Friend" and went on to make the chorus in shows on Broadway and touring with the National Touring Company of "Twentieth Century" with Rock Hudson.

But hidden away in the "Boy Friend" chorus was one John Fogerty who was to hit rock 'n' roll heights as the lead for the future Creedence Clearwater Revival. There was also a brief appearance as a tango dancer by the future Miss USA, Maria Remenyi.

The beauty of doing a musical is there are so many parts for all kinds of skills, from dancing to the orchestra to securing props and costumes and doing make-up. We all threw ourselves into it whole-heartedly whatever our roles were.

Dr. Elkind really knew what he had to work with when he picked "Wonderful Town" for the musical for Spring of 1964. In November, 1963, his Advanced Drama was the first class after lunch, during which we had received confirmation that President Kennedy had been assassinated (on a faculty member's car radio, no less, as that was all that was available for communication at school in those days).

Dr. Elkind comforted and calmed us as best he could under the circumstances. We had just finished the Senior Play ("The Madwoman of Chaillot"), so we were pretty much a tight unit by then. Linda Boblitt had established herself as a star in that lead role AND she could sing!

Since the score of "Wonderful Town" was by Bernstein, it presented a bigger challenge than "The Boy Friend" but we embraced it whole-heartedly. The sets were much more complicated, and you can hear the hammering during a scene change during an extended piece by the orchestra.

Elkind knew his history of theater and movies. He had us doing things I don't think any of us really "got" at the time, but certainly gave those performances depth.

Being the first baby boomers, we didn't know anything about 1920s musicals and could only see Astaire and Rogers on small black-and-white screens. We didn't know what we were parodying with the bits of stage business he had us doing in "The Boy Friend" or "Wonderful Town". Who (aside from some parents) knew Wayne Lynch was channeling Marlon Brando in "A Streetcar Named Desire" when he and Linda did a little sketch in "Wonderful Town"?

I'm pretty sure none of us had seen the movie, much less the play. Who knew all those people Sam Hedgpeth was singing about in "Pass That Football" (Andre Gide, really!?). Who even knew where Bloomsbury was or that Fred and Ginger had also danced on The Riviera? Thank you, Sam, for changing our lives.

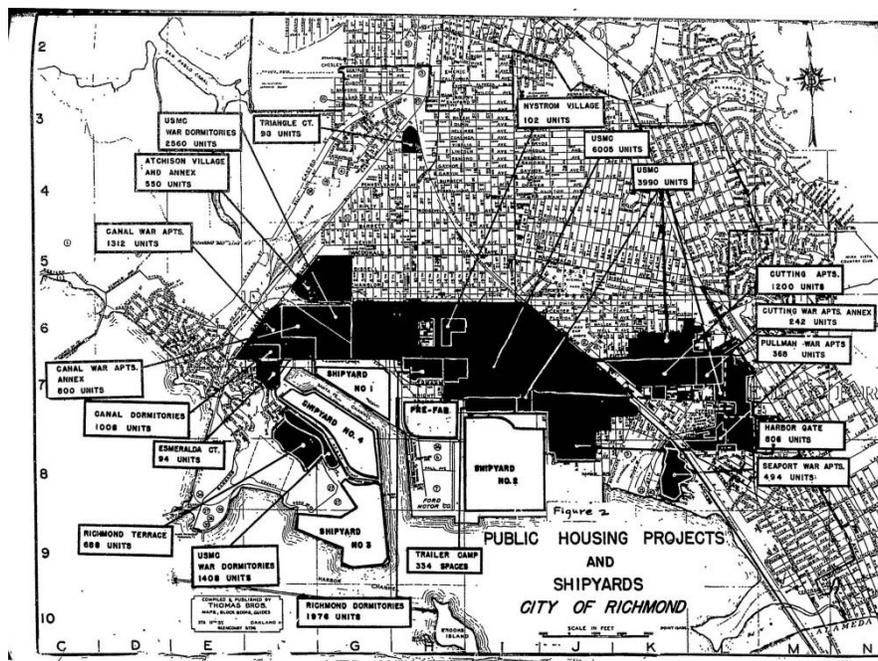
-- Helen Ettliger

(The El Cerrito Historical Society thanks Helen Ettliger for her dedication to her high school class of 1964. She was very active in the planning group for the class reunion, and in identifying players and others involved in the musical comedies. She supplied the society with a number of photos from "Wonderful Town." Some ran in high school yearbooks.)

Speaking of music, here's an old video tour of Creedence Clearwater Revival habitat for viewing on YouTube. Historical society member Sue Duncan sent along this suggestion: "I don't know if you've seen this [walking tour video](#) of the two houses in which the Fogertys grew up. It's pretty rough and has a few omissions, I think. The grocery store was the Louis store, there was an Ortman's Ice Cream store a few doors down from it, so John (Fogerty) wouldn't have had to walk to Solano to get treats unless that is what he did for a walk.

Also, it could have mentioned the corner building kitty corner from the Louis store was a drug store with a soda fountain, but maybe John didn't mention that in his autobiography on which this video is based."

When an Avalanche Hit Richmond. While you are listening to old musicals on the society website, consider stepping back in time a couple of decades more, to the days of World War II when war workers flooding into the Bay Area converted Richmond almost overnight from a small, regional metropolis to a boom town.



Thousands of units of war housing and dormitories surrounded the hastily constructed shipyards that made World War II Richmond a powerhouse in the war effort – and a difficult city to govern, From “An Avalanche Hit Richmond.”

Richmond's city manager James McVittie described in much more detail than many of us will need just what happened to the city, and to its environs, even touching on El Cerrito at times, in a 1944 report obtained for the historical society by Tom Panas, who copied a version of this city report that was in the Richmond Library.

“[An Avalanche Hits Richmond](#): A study of the impact of war production upon the city of Richmond, California, and an outline of measures necessary to provide the facilities for normal post war community service” reveals the effects of the massive population increase and the need for housing, schools and the like that McVittie and compatriots faced.

“Avalanche” deals with public works, sanitation, roads, and housing. McVittie urges that the war housing built during the war be removed before it would become a blight. (Indeed, this did come to pass – leaving many war workers, many of them Black, without access to any housing.)

The city got so crowded that the school district had to resort to two separate sessions a day. This left kids free for much of the day, disrupting their educations and giving them time for mischief.

“The phenomenal growth in population quickly overwhelmed the many agencies dealing with youth,” McVittie wrote. “Lack of sufficient facilities for school and recreational activities is a basic factor underlying most of the juvenile problems in the community. Community leaders are in agreement that the double shift in the schools is probably the greatest single cause of youth problems in the city. They are convinced that something must be done to alleviate the serious conditions which result when thousands of the community's children are free from essential control and left largely to their own devices for a large portion of the day.”

McVittie discusses what he saw as the need to expand Harding School in El Cerrito. “The one prewar temporary classroom now remaining on the site of the Harding school should be removed. In its stead a six-room addition should be made to the present building,” he wrote, and added: “Continued residential construction in this part of El Cerrito is inevitable as the City of Berkeley steadily overflows into adjoining territory.”

McVittie also wrote about the need for an additional elementary school in El Cerrito: “New Castro School in El Cerrito. Estimated cost \$45,000. Somewhere between the existing Fairmont and Mira Vista schools in El Cerrito a six-room primary school should probably be erected if postwar residential construction continues in this locality. An ample playground should be provided for it.”

-- Dave Weinstein

The society’s City Hall Shadi Room archive will not hold regular open hours in December. Our archive will not be open to the public at its regularly scheduled time on Thursday December 21 because City Hall itself will be shut from that day until January 2, 2024.

Our normal open hours are 3:30 to 5 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month. We are also open by appointment and welcome both scholarly and casual researchers. Drop us a line at echistorical@gmail.com to arrange a visit.

The Historical Society Board meets the second Thursday of the month at 5 p.m., these days via Zoom. Members of the public 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 **December 14, 2023 at 5 p.m.** (The 4:45 start time provides a cushion in case of glitches.) Topics will include: Preservation of historic places, archiving, publications, fundraising, our annual meeting, membership drive and more.

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

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

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82209702210?pwd=dVBpcWo3T2tESHdZZHc2d2pUQWFoUT09>

Meeting ID: 822 0970 2210

Passcode: 451307

One tap mobile

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+16699006833,,82209702210#,,, *451307# US (San Jose)

The Historical Society needs you – to join! To join or to renew your membership in the El Cerrito Historical Society, please click this link to [visit the join or donate page on our website](#).

