

Sparks September 2023

Please enter the society's historical photo contest. Do you have photos of life in ElCerrito from before 1973? Share them with our community! Share your old photos of people, events, local landmarks, and El Cerrito businesses through the years.

Photos can be either high-res digital or prints. They must have been taken in El Cerrito and before 1973. Prizes will be awarded and all entries will be added to the ECHS collection and credited to the applicant.

The contest opens Monday, Sept. 25 and ends Wednesday, Oct. 25, 2023. Go to [the entry form on the society's website](#) to take part.

Images from everyday life, children's parties, family barbecues, events at the park, images of people who have contributed to the community, pictures of shopkeepers inside their stores, church events, all are of historic importance and will be treasured by the society!

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.



A dog races across a field at Point Isabel, which was named for the daughter of Don Victor Castro, whose adobe was on the site that has become El Cerrito Plaza. Photo by Dave Weinstein

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.

Visit the exhibit ‘Tiki Dreams’ at the Napa Valley Museum to learn how California – and El Cerrito – helped create a worldwide phenomenon. “Tiki Dreams: From Far-Away Fantasy to Pop-Culture Phenomenon,” explores how California tiki bars and artists, starting in the late 1930s, created a movement and lifestyle that spread worldwide and continues to this day.



Tepco produced pottery and other ceramic products in a wide range of styles and themes, from plain Jane to cowboy to Tiki, as seen here from ‘Tiki Dreams.’ Courtesy of Otto von Stroheim and the Napa Valley Museum

The display, at this always lively museum at the Veterans Home in Yountville, “includes a major display from TEPCO that was coordinated by El Cerrito Historical Society and loaned by Lynn Maack,” says Otto von Stroheim, curator of the show with Baby Doe von Stroheim.

The museum writes: “Tiki is an art, design and cultural movement dating back to the pre-WWII era, when visionary California restaurateurs created lavish Tiki Rooms evoking mysterious exotic lands, and which saw growing interest when soldiers brought home souvenirs from the South Pacific, and commercial air travel to Hawaii became common.”

“Much of the history of the Golden Age of Tiki was written in the Golden State, in tiki lounges from Southern California’s Don the Beachcomber to iconic Bay Area outposts like **Trader Vic’s** and the **Tonga Room**.”

The [show](#) has proven so popular it has been extended through December 31. There will be events throughout the exhibit, including a December 2 Tiki marketplace. The von Stroheims are leading lights of the tiki world, hosting frequent Tiki Oasis events that attract thousands.

El Cerrito’s role in the development of the tiki look is not well known, but the exhibit makes clear the artistry of the people who worked in El Cerrito for TEPCO – Technical Porcelain and Chinaware Co. – which produced tiki ware for such high profile clients as Trader Vic’s.

TEPCO occupied a site on Manila Avenue, where the DMV building currently stands.

Casting light on TEPCO’s origins and artistry is a March 17, 1964 article from the Ukiah Daily Journal, an interview with TEPCO’s founder, who was 82 and living in Redwood Valley north of Ukiah.

“In the 38 years before (John) Pagliero started his ceramic shop in 1920,” reporter Gay T. Neep wrote, “he worked for the Pacific Pottery Co., forerunner of American Standard, fashioning toilet bowls and other plumbing equipment...”

“But at night he worked at his home, making little statues, fancy dishes and other bits of art. The ceramics sold. Soon he bought a building in Albany and employed five men.”

“... In 1930 he bought a small pottery plant where the present factory now stands. He built this up to its present size, employing 175 persons and making hundreds of dishes per day with each going through 42 hands before being shipped out.”

Over the years the historical society has put on programs on the history of TEPCO; at least one attracted a crowd of former employees. For more, check out this [report from KQED](#).

The Rodini house is nearing completion. As part of a project to build a new residential project at 1715 Elm Street, the city required the developer to preserve an existing historic home, the Rodini house from the early 20th century, one of the oldest remaining homes in the city.



The Rodini house is a small Victorian cottage. The society succeeded in convincing city officials to ensure its preservation while new residences were built alongside. Photo by Dave Weinstein

Now the home has been restored. The developer was required to lease the building to the city. It will be made accessible, and the goal has been to make it available for public use. The historic society hopes to add value to this historical amenity through exhibits, interpretation focusing on the city's Italian community, and more.

It is not clear how (or when) the city will divvy up opportunity for use of this building, whose exterior was restored following the rigorous secretary of the Interiors standards for historic buildings.

The society would love to see many members of our community enjoy this space and continue the traditions that the Italian community enjoyed from the early days of our town: socializing and conviviality, learning and creating.

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 @echistoricalsociety or you can preview the page on a laptop or other device here; <https://www.instagram.com/echistoricalsociety/>," Nick writes.

This effort is a work in progress; check back to watch our Instagram postings grow. So far many 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.

Tragic theft decimates collection at the Alvarado Adobe Museum. This [historical museum](#), operated by the San Pablo Historical and Museum Society in a recreated Colonial-era adobe owned by the city of San Pablo, has been burglarized. Much of its irreplaceable collection was stolen, including rare Indian artworks and other artifacts.



This Native American shell bracelet is among items stolen from the Alvarado Adobe Museum. Courtesy of the San Pablo Historical Society

The [San Pablo Historical Society](#) is asking anyone in the field of antiquities or historical materials to be on the watch for the stolen items.

“The theft happened sometime during the weekend of August 5,” Janet Pottier, a longtime leader of the society, reports. “They broke a back window of the Adobe. The Adobe alarm was not working as the construction crew had disconnected the electricity to the Adobe and when it was restored the City could not get the very old alarm system working again. (It has since been replaced.)

“Our Native American artifacts, which were in a locked case, were stolen by breaking the front glass of the cabinet. Most were taken, as well as a Pomo basket in another cabinet.

“Also stolen were our mannequin of Delfina Alvarado wearing a handmade dress, various mantillas, dolls, a rosary, and cross donated to us by the Portuguese Community. Various other items were also taken.

“The items were removed in a cart and taken to the creek bed. The San Pablo Police have an open case 23-3322 but to date have not located any of the objects.”

The Adobe museum has been a treasured place in the East Bay for those interested in history and culture, teachers and school children, and others. We deeply hope these treasured items can be recovered.

Golden Gate Mausoleum tour proved popular and enlightening. About 45 people attended this society tour of the former Sunset Mausoleum, built starting in 1927 and hosted by the mausoleum and its new owners, some of whom also attended.



On August 18, a Friday afternoon, about 45 people enjoyed a tour of the Golden Gate Mausoleum in Kensington, many of whose surfaces are sheathed in a wide range of marble. Photo by Dianne P. Brenner

It is a beautiful place, vast and enlivened with stained glass and other artworks. Many people of historical significance have found their final resting places there.

Watch for an upcoming history of this building and business and community institution in an upcoming copy of our journal, The Forge.

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 **Oct. 12, 2023 at 5 p.m.** (The 4:45 start time provides a cushion in case of glitches.) Topics will include: Preservation of historic places, including the Rodini house; archiving, upcoming events, public outreach, a membership drive, and more.

Topic: El Cerrito Historical Society's Zoom Meeting

Time: Oct 12, 2023 04:45 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84090716279?pwd=ZkFLUGU1Tmo4WFB1amx0d3VlZHZlZz09>

Meeting ID: 840 9071 6279

Passcode: 414550

Dial by your location

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