Orinda Historical Society Newsletter

February 2008

P.O. BOX 82, ORINDA, CA 94563 (925) 254-1353

Museum Location
Lower Level of
Orinda Library
26 Orinda Way

Museum Hours of Operation
Monday, Wednesday,
& Friday 3-5 p.m.
Also by Appointment
24 Hour Answering Machine
925-254-1353
www.orindahistory.org

Upcoming Events

- **February Board Meeting**
  Wednesday, February 20th, 3 to 5 pm at the OHS Museum
- **March General Meeting**
  Wednesday, March 12th, 7 to 9 pm at the Orinda Community Church
- **April Board Meeting**
  Wednesday, April 16th, 3 to 5 pm at the OHS Museum

ORINDA

The Orinda sign is getting wheels! Cash donations would be appreciated to help make a trolley for the large green Orinda sign that once lit up Orinda Village. Our goal is to wheel the sign in this year's 4th of July parade.

Holiday Dinner was a Big Success

Over 100 guests were present at the OHS annual holiday party held December 5th at the Orinda Community Church, making it the best attended OHS holiday dinner ever.

Joe Cleary at the OHS Dinner

At the event, long time Orinda resident and artist **Joe Cleary** fascinated guests with his account of how he created one of his most famous works, *Mother River Memorial,* which is located in New Orleans. Joe also talked about his interest in art and brought some of his paintings and sculptures for display. There were many other Orinda artists in the audience. This town is full of talent!

The meal was delicious, the beef tenderloin seemed to melt in your mouth, thanks to **Wendy Shay** from Herb & Spices Catering with her home-grown staff of Miramonte graduates who served the food.

"We couldn't have been more pleased with the dinner," said OHS President **Lucy Hupp Williams**, "Many thanks to all the people who helped, including the **Reverend Frank Baldwin** and his church staff, **Widgie Hastings** who filled in for Jerry Vurek and videotaped the dinner, **Kent Long** who photographed the event, **Erik Andersen** who provided technical expertise, **Kay Norman**, **Sarah Douglas**, **Betty Karplus**, **Susan Ross**, **Dan Holmes, Sue Littlehale, Rudi Thomas, Carol Lu Zischke**, **Carl Weber**, and **Buz Williams** who helped with setup & clean-up. We couldn't have done it without all of your support!"

Volunteers Honored at OHS Dinner

The Orinda Historical Society honored three of its long time members at thed holiday dinner. **Charles Blue**, **Helen Vurek**, and **John Holmgren** were each given the 2007 Orinda Historical Society award for their long lasting contributions and support.

John Holmgren, Helen Vurek, Charles Blue & Lucy Williams at the OHS Holiday Dinner

Charles "Chuck" Blue was a charter member of OHS when it started in 1969: He served as president of the organization and at 92 he still provides support for the board. Part of the very survival of Orinda can be credited to Chuck for serving as chairman of the Fire District for over 20 years and as a volunteer fireman. Chuck was also active in the development of the Orinda Community Church.

Helen Vurek has been a resident of Orinda

Continued on page 2

Volunteers Needed To:

→ **Create OHS Window Displays**

→ **Clip newspaper articles about Orinda events, obituaries etc.**

→ **Schedule people to work at the museum during open hours**

Call the OHS Museum at 254-1353 if you can help.

Rotary Grant

The Rotary Club of Orinda has awarded a generous grant to the Orinda Historical Society for the preservation of old audio tapes. The Rotary funds will allow for eighty old audio tapes in the OHS collection to be converted into audio CDs. Thank you to the Rotary Club for making this important project possible.

Thank you to Rose Bolin, the owner of Treible's in Orinda, for generously providing the printing of this newsletter.

Thank You

Recent Donations to OHS

- A book by Gregory Dabel donated by **Gretchen Dabel**.
- Oil painting of the Nelson (" the old yellow house") home, donated by the artist **Dick Reeves**.
- Newspaper articles by Josh Stanley donated by Josh's son **Paul Stanley**.
- **Annalee Sneider** gave a news article and information on the building of Meadow Pool.
- Gateway Valley documents donated by **Amelia Wilson**. and **Carol Moll.**
- The 2007 Acalanes Alumni Directory, 50th Anniversary Miramonte Mirador, & a 2007 CalTrans Caldecott Tunnel Environmental Impact Report from **Erik Andersen.**
- Various historical photos including Orinda's Willows restaurant donated by the **Walnut Creek Historical Society**.
- Artifacts from the Bob Paterson estate including Orinda photos and files were donated by **Will Robinson**.
- **Carolyn Stokes** donated a Family/Teacher/Mentor guide book.
- **Kay Norman** donated a book, *Images of America - Lafayette*.
- Photos showing the Nike Missile Base circa 1972 and a plot map of Fairway was given by **Jayne Weyeneth.**

Volunteers Honored *(continued from Page 1)*

since 1939. As a longtime volunteer and an activist in many facets of the Orinda community, Helen was one of the founders of a WPA child care program at the Orinda Park Pool, and helped establish the Orinda Dramateurs and the Democratic Club. At 98, she actively volunteers for the Orinda Historical Society.

John Holmgren has made an extraordinary contribution to public awareness of the history and geography of California. As the longtime editor of California State Automobile Association's monthly *Motorland* magazine and a daily travel show host on CBS radio, John conveyed to Californians the extraordinary opportunities for enjoying the state and understanding its history. An Orinda resident since 1950 and now 86 years old, John Holmgren has long been locally involved, giving travel talks, leading tours to historic sites, and volunteering with the Orinda Historical Society.

OHS Board Members 2007/2008

President: Lucy Hupp Williams
(650) 349-3382

Vice President: Erik Andersen
(925) 254-8444

Treasurer: Betty Karplus
(925) 254-4970

Recording Secretary: Carl Weber
(925) 254-8473

Archivist: Kent Long
(925) 258-9771

Assistant Archivist/Database:
Dan Holmes
(925) 254-3360

Membership: Sarah Douglas
(925) 254-1128

At-Large: Charles Blue
(925) 254-2324

At-Large: Susan Ross
(925) 254-3720

Displays: Open

Tours: John Holmgren
(925) 254-5677

Newsletter: Teresa Long
(925) 258-9771

School Liaison: Kay Norman
(925) 254-9536

Videographer: Jerry Vurek
(925) 253-7995

Book Review by Dan Holmes

Richard G. Beidleman ***California's Frontier Naturalists.*** Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. 484 pages. This book is also available at the Contra Costa Library (the Lafayette branch has a copy.)

Despite having a strong interest in California's early naturalists, their perception of nature, and the face of the landscape they found, I did not look forward to reading this book. It seemed unlikely that it could be truly engaging. How wrong I was!

Richard Beidleman's volume is a delight for many reasons. Perhaps the most significant is that the author conscientiously provides an engaging multi-dimension context to each of his characters, eras, and topics. He brings the subjects to life by discussing each naturalist's origins and ultimate fate, and by providing detailed insights into their personalities, physical abilities, and motivations. He explains the historic and contemporary scientific context of each of the naturalists' findings – be it conceptual or individual species or particular localities. This makes their findings meaningful and fun to read.

For example, the author does us the great courtesy of enlivening the history of species collection by selectively providing such tantalizing modern-day tidbits as comments on current endangered species or a species present-day range of distribution. He quietly challenges some popular beliefs about whether certain particular species are indeed exotics or natives. He also seems to have carefully threaded the pathways between common and scientific names, both historic and contemporary, in such a way as to address every level of reader respectfully.

Natural and social California went through vast changes during the year from 1786 to 1891 covered by this book. By passing through this period, we see amazing changes in the lives of the collectors and the meanings of their findings. Beidleman explains these in a lively and engaging style. He provides fascinating descriptive details related to the various aspects of explorations including weather, personal conflicts and affections, the difficulties of financing research, logistics, landscapes, collaboration and opposition, accidents, bureaucracies, social settings, transportation, crime and rebellion … aspects from all across the scope of history. The illustrations and California Landmarks map are very helpful.

As a fourth-generation Californian with a strong background in natural sciences, I encountered many familiar figures in this saga and enjoyed every moment of reading about their lives. Many individuals also came to life for me from an oral history I had conducted years ago for The Bancroft Library in which Emeritus Professor Herbert Mason, from the Jepson Herbarium at Cal, affectionately reminisced about his botanical heroes and heroines.

The only criticism I have is a feeling that the story of John Muir seems abbreviated, although certainly his contributions were acknowledged. Perhaps the author felt that other biographies cover him sufficiently… and they do. But I missed the depth of description I had come to anticipate with each new chapter.

Finally, and this is not meant as a criticism, it sure would be wonderful to have a detailed map showing the wanderings of these intrepid travelers.

I have recommended this engaging volume to many colleagues from across the natural sciences and history. Consequently I recommend it to the reader; I doubt if you will be disappointed.

Daniel O. Holmes is a Geographer and Librarian. He is on the Board of the Orinda Historical Society and is a fourth generation Californian.

The Story of the Orinda Community Church's Two Crosses

The Orinda Community Church had its modest beginnings in a small Sunday school class held in Fred Elkinton's garden in the early 1930's. Over the years the church grew and in June 1959, a new sanctuary was completed. At this time two large crosses made by Al Harmon and his son were mounted, one on the exterior and one on the interior of the church. The large white cross attached to the bricks on the outside of the sanctuary still towers majestically above Orinda Village. In summer of 2007 the external cross was repainted to protect it from further damage from sun and weather.

Orinda Community Church 2008

The following is **Al Harmon's** article, which first appeared in the church's newsletter *Neighbor* in 1991. It describes the making of these two crosses. Thank you to OHS board member **Betty Karplus** for supplying this article and editing it for publication.

This is the story of the two large crosses belonging to the Church of the Right of Way, known today as the Orinda Community Church-United Church of Christ. The church was built on the "right of way" of the California and Nevada Railroad which used to run through the patio location many years ago. The railroad ran from Oakland in the 1880s. An 1887 Oakland Tribune article shows the route of the tracks through "Bryant," now Orinda.

Al Harmon worked in construction for 62 years. He worked on the remodeling and the repair of each of the church buildings as they were moved onto the church site. That was 33 years of volunteer work for OCC. When the building which now houses the chapel and the music room became too small to hold the congregation, Al was Senior Deacon and worked on the building committee for the current sanctuary. The architect of the sanctuary was named White. He and his staff in San Rafael drew up the plans and supervised the construction. Lathrop was the contractor. Chauncey Blossom was the minister at the time (1957). Al Harmon's shovel was used to break the ground for both the sanctuary and later for the Orinda Senior Village.

Of all the construction that could be done without cost to the church, the most important and expensive was that of the two crosses planned for the interior and the exterior of the sanctuary west wall. Designed to be 22'high, 8'feet wide and weighing 200 pounds, they would have been very expensive to have made because of the work, necessary in shaping the wood. Al followed the shape the architect had drawn on the plan, but all the design and construction was his. He first made a 2' high model of the crosses that was used in the Sunday School for years.

The two crosses were constructed of Port Orford cedar, a clear beautiful wood, which was laminated, glued and screwed together, each layer of wood shaped to fit above the other. The body of the cross was one piece, the arms another piece, carefully shaped and sanded with a belt sander. Al found the cedar very aromatic and a great pleasure to work with. He chose that wood because it reminded him of the Cedars of Lebanon.

Al Harmon and his son, Al Junior, built the crosses in 3 weeks in their garage at 4 Oak Lane. They took great pains with the fitting of the body and arms of the crosses. When it came to putting the various parts together, they fastened together with a perfect fit.

Al gave the masons who built the brick the chancel steel hangers to build into the wall. He screwed eyes into the crosses to connect them to the hangers. The cross with the best wood was selected to hang on the interior sanctuary chancel wall. The second cross was painted and was affixed to the external wall and faces over Moraga Way and the city.