
MATCHLESS

Newsletter of The Orinda Historical Society

WHY MATCHLESS?



Alice Marsh Camron 1852-1927

Back in the 1840s, the city we now know as Orinda was an anonymous thirteen square mile rural area nestled within the four Mexican land grants of Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados, Rancho Acalanes, Rancho El Sobrante and Rancho Boca de la Cañada del Pinole — given by a grateful Mexican government to its military heroes.

Fast forward to 1850: California has now become the USA's 31st State and the Mexican land grants are changing hands fast. In the late 1870s, wealthy Alice Marsh Camron and her husband, real estate developer William Camron, purchased 2,500 acres, and called their subdivision Orinda Park. The name arose from Alice's favorite 17th century Welsh poet, Katherine Philips, known to her friends as **Matchless Orinda**, a soubriquet that Alice then adopted for herself.

By 1883 William Camron had squandered all of his wife's considerable inheritance, and they were forced to sell their beautiful homes in Lake Merritt and Orinda Park. Four years later, two brothers from San Francisco, Jose and Miguel de Laveaga, paid just over \$50,000 for 1,178 acres of Orinda Park and by the turn of the new century had dropped the word "Park".

After William deserted her, Alice divorced her husband and moved to San Francisco where she and daughter Amy ran a boarding house. Alice never returned to Orinda, but for those of us who have chosen to make this historic city our home, Orinda is indeed matchless!

.....

WELCOME TO THE ORINDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY!

*As the world slowly went into lockdown last year, and we sent one another a flurry of amusing memes and emails, very few of us appreciated just how long this would all last... the funny emails soon dried up! We still don't know for sure when "normal life" will resume but we hope to re-open the OHS Museum doors by Fall. In the meantime, if you have any queries, please call us on **925-254-1353** and we'll get back to you just as soon as we can. For those of you who have had to battle with Covid-19, either for yourself, your friends or your family, we send our sincerest sympathy and hope that all will be well.*

.....

ORINDA'S NEWEST HISTORIC LANDMARK



A 1920s lamppost that once stood in the Triangle, where Orinda Way meets Camino Sobrante, was honored as Orinda's latest landmark during last December's City Hall zoom meeting attended by Bobbie Landers, Chair of Orinda's Historic Landmark Committee (HLC) and Dr. Chiyo Shidara, the lamppost's newest guardian.

Formerly belonging to Hacienda Homes, the cast iron lamppost was rescued by local artist Joe Cleary in the early 1970s, when the offices where it stood were demolished. Joe moved it to his front yard at 94 Tarry Lane — where it remained for almost half a century until his passing in 2019 at the age of 92.



The HLC had already begun the process of landmarking this precious artifact during Joe's lifetime, but its future remained uncertain until Dr. Chiyo Shidara bought the Cleary home and happily agreed to retain the lamppost.

If you should find yourself strolling through Sleepy Hollow, look for the quotation on the lamppost's plaque: *"give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown"*. The line comes from a poem written by English academic Minnie Haskins in 1908 and used by King George VI during his 1939 Christmas broadcast to inspire a nation recently plunged into the dark days of WW2.



The Cleary lamppost is the 38th landmark to be dedicated by the City of Orinda. You can discover the others in the HLC booklet *Historic Sites of Orinda*. First published in 1991 and revised in 2001, only a few copies are still available at the OHS Museum — but a reprint is in the works.

THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

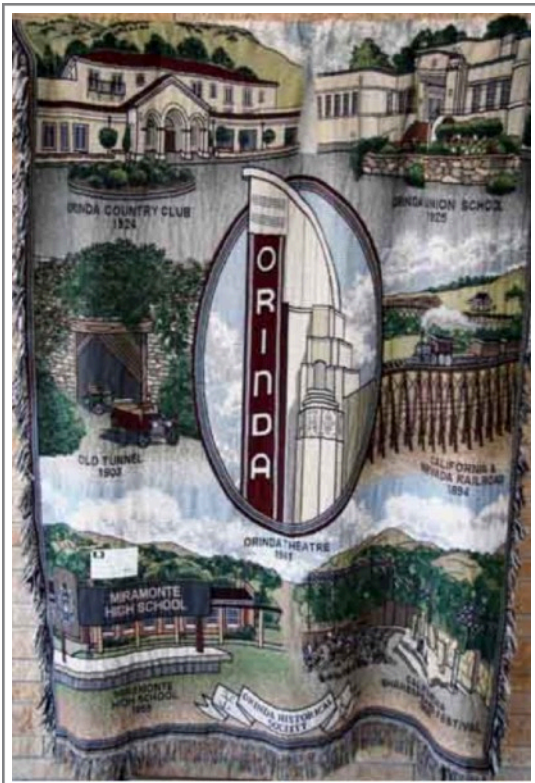
If there's one word we've heard over and over again these last twelve months, it is **unprecedented**. Prior to 2020, it was a fairly uncommon expression, but by the end of last year, use of this particular word had increased by more than 57,000%.

Apparently "unprecedented" first appeared around 1795 and was popular again during the wars (1812 and Napoleonic) that consumed Europe and the US in the early 19th century. It was much used as the horrors of WW1 morphed into those of the 1918 flu pandemic, and again in the mid-1940s as WW2 wound down and the United Nations was born.

Choosing from submissions like "dumpster fire," "apocalyptic" and "pandemonium", dictionary.com ultimately elected "pandemic" as its 2020 Word of the Year only to find that "unprecedented" — the People's Choice — had beaten "pandemic" by a small margin.

Meanwhile, the BBC came up with a whole new category they called *Words of an Unprecedented Year*, which included: *bushfires * covid-19 * working from home * lockdown * support bubbles * key workers *furlough * BLM * and *moonshot*.

All of which pretty much define 2020!



UNIQUE AFGHAN BLANKET

\$65

Depicting many of our favorite scenes — Miramonte High School, the Orinda Theatre, California Shakespeare Festival, Orinda Country Club, the California & Nevada railroad, the Old Tunnel and the Orinda Union School — this 100% cotton, full color, tapestry blanket, measuring 48" x 65" is machine washable/ dry cleanable and will make a great gift for friends, family and..... yourself!

See it in the window at the Orinda Historical Museum at the library's lower level or call OHS on 925 254-1353 to find out more

WE HAVE A NEW WEBSITE!

With very many thanks to Birgit Rickert at resultsmarketing.biz for her expertise and patience in creating our new website:

<http://orindahistory.org/>



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

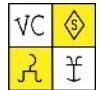
I'd like to introduce myself as your new OHS President, and to thank Terry Murphy for holding the fort for so long after the wonderful Lucy Hupp retired from the job. Terry has agreed to stay on as Vice-President. I'm also very fortunate to have Bob Thompson continue as Treasurer and Reg Barrett to guide me on so many aspects of running the OHS, in addition to his work as our Membership Secretary. And behind them are Kay Norman, Kathy Barrett, Teresa Long, Betty Karplus and Laurie Smith — all long-time Orinda residents and passionate about keeping our local history alive.

I know the Orinda Historical Society has been a little quiet lately, but we're working in the background to have the Museum up and running once we all feel it's safe to gather again. In the meantime, if you have any Orinda history questions we can help you with, or would like to add to our collection of artifacts, books or documents, please give us a call on 925-254-1353, email information@orindahistory.org, or contact us via our brand new website — <http://orindahistory.org/> and if ever you'd like to become one of our volunteers, we'd love to hear from you and welcome you onto the team.

~ ALISON BURNS



PLEASE JOIN US!



Annual Membership Contribution

_____ \$20.00 Individual

_____ \$100.00 Sponsor/Business

_____ \$30.00 Family

_____ \$350.00 Lifetime

_____ \$15.00 Under 15/Over 65

_____ \$500.00 Tres Ranchos Circle

*Make checks payable to Orinda Historical Society and mail to
Orinda Historical Society, PO Box 82, Orinda CA 94563
All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.*

NAME.....

ADDRESS

EMAIL PHONE

Thank you for joining OHS. Your contribution helps us continue to collect and preserve historic treasures from Orinda's past, as well as educate the public about events in our history. Membership also provides an opportunity to attend programs and participate in tours and events

We would also be very grateful for any time you can spare as a volunteer!