Mary Penniman Award 2020

Mary Penniman was a tireless worker at the 500-acre Shadelands Ranch. From the time Mary was two years old, she was always there to help her father out when her mother passed away. As soon as Mary could walk she was doing countless tasks on the ranch. In 1897 she completely took over the running of the ranch when her father Hiram Penniman was unable to do so. Throughout her remaining years, Mary continued to run the ranch until she passed away from influenza in 1909.

To honor the memory of Mary Penniman, the Walnut Creek Historical Society gives an award each year to a volunteer who has given tirelessly of themselves since they have been with us.

The volunteer we honored at the Annual Membership Dinner, Joe LaBrie, has only been with us since 2017, but what he has accomplished in a short period of time feels like he’s been with us forever. Joe isn't afraid to dig around in the basement crawlspace only to discover the Ygnacio Valley Road and Homestead Avenue wooden sign post from the 1940’s. Then, he built a stand for it to be displayed.

Last spring Joe spent weekends scouring flea markets and thrift stores looking for the tea cups, plates and silverware needed for our Garden Party Tea. On these hunts he discovered and obtained a deluxe leather bound first edition set of “The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft” from the 1880’s and promptly donated this discovery to the historical society.

And what can’t Joe build! Amazing tables and counters to aid in the volunteer traffic flow during our holiday teas. This is in addition to the countless hours combing through multiple file cabinets to condense valuable historical materials to two drawers. These are only a fraction of the contributions Joe has made to the Walnut Creek Historical Society.

Thank you Joe for his heartfelt dedication and countless volunteer hours to the Shadelands Ranch Museum and the Walnut Creek Historical Society! Congratulations!

By: Teresa Wenzel
Two Thousand and Nineteen has been a stellar year for the Walnut Creek Historical Society and it is because of the continued support of our membership that we are able to do the exciting work that we do.

Fifty plus attendees began the evening with the flag salute and a moment of silence to honor those members who are no longer with us.

Teresa Wenzel, Co-President started off thanking all the remarkable volunteers she has had the pleasure of working with in 2019.

A huge thank you goes to Mark Brown for serving as our Co-President for 2 years. Mark has served on our board since 2015 and has been an active, positive and supportive member our board, all the while holding down a full-time job. The Board hopes that Mark will continue to serve in the years to come.

Teresa announced the 2020 Executive Board Members and Directors and asked them to stand and be recognized. They are: Joe LaBrie, incoming Co-President; Sheila Rogstad, Vice President and Archivist; Barton Tolley, Treasurer; Judy Caponigro, Recording Secretary; Anina Dalsin, Legal Advisor; and finally our Directors: Mark Brown, Lee Culver, Priscilla Tudor, Jeff Peterson and Pam O'Donnell.

The work of the historical society would not happen without our tireless volunteers who manage and participate in the programs we offer. These are the docents who conduct house tours twice a week, those who conduct 3rd grade downtown history tours in the fall and spring, those who conduct tours for the general public on the 2nd Saturday of the month from March to October, those Living History volunteers who host local 3rd graders twice a week in the fall and spring to step back in time and relive what life was like in 1906 and those who volunteer in the History Room.

Teresa gave a special thank you to Rosemary Mazzetti, Patty Howard, Karen Majors, Priscilla Tudor, Judy Caponigro and all the volunteers who graciously donated their time to work over the 16 days of holiday teas. This is one of our biggest events of the year and would not be the success it is today without their commitment and dedication.

The Walnut Creek Historical Society has a fabulous staff that is a huge support to our board, volunteers and society. A huge thank you to Jackie, Moira, Christine and Andrew! Your attention to detail, organization, commitment and expertise are invaluable us!

Here are some of those tidbits from 2019!

This year 75 individuals volunteered countless hours at Shadelands and within our community. We are always looking for volunteers so if you know of anyone who is interested in volunteering send them our way!

**Programs**

388 individuals toured the house last year.

The 2nd Saturday General Public Tours hosted 219 participants

For the 2018-2019 schoolyear our 3rd grade Living History program hosted 31 classes and 735 students.

The 3rd grade Downtown History tours hosted 17 classes and 368 students

**History Room**

The History Room volunteers went on the road to host four presentations to the public. In addition to meeting with the public and helping them with research and inquiries, our volunteers sorted through 12 file cabinets and whittled that down to two file drawers of the most valuable historical material. WOW!

One of many interesting discoveries was a landscape design plan from 1971 when we became the caretaker for Shadelands. On this plan were about 100 trees, documented by species and circumference.
Of those trees only 18 remain. Three of those are orange trees in the front of the house. We even have photographic proof that those trees were there in 1906.

**The Gold Room**

The Gold Room had a very busy and productive year. Did you know there are 5,000 photos in our collection including 80 years of Walnut Festival photos and memorabilia? This year over half of the 5,000 were re-scanned at high resolution, backed up and uploaded to our online library.

Over 100 books, photos, clothing and other new items were catalogued into the museum's collection.

And through the summer and fall a beautiful collection of Edwardian white dresses were on display to the public at the museum.

**Senior Projects**

Barbara Bulanova and Rachel Harry of Northgate High School were mentored by our History Room volunteers for their senior projects. Barbara’s project was sorting and cleaning pottery shards that were found in the attic from the Privy Excavation Collection. Rachel’s senior project title was “Same Train, New Track” after her original title “Kiss My Caboose” was unfortunately vetoed....

**Eagle Scout Projects**

Grady Milligan and Will Nethercutt completed their Eagle Scout projects on the grounds of Shadelands.

**Scholarships**

We awarded a $2,000 scholarship to Caroline Francois of Las Lomas High School and Evan Starr of Northgate High School. They are attending Wellesley and UCLA respectively.

**Events**

Cindy Silva hosted a 2nd Saturday Spotlight at the Shadelands Ranch Museum in June. Forty people attended the event to learn more about our society and museum.

Thirty-two weddings and events were held in the beautiful backyard at Shadelands Ranch.

In June, a first for us! Despite the 96 degree heat, we hosted a Garden Party Tea and Vintage Fashion Show to a sold out crowd in the backyard of the museum. What an amazing community we live in. Just by putting the word out that we were looking for donations, boxes of treasures began showing up on the front porch like Santa was working overtime... We were able to obtain enough serving plates, tea cups and saucers, tea pots and flatware for 250 people saving us $1,000 in rental fees. We now have a “China Room” in a section of the basement at the museum.

And finally, the jewel in our crown, our holiday teas! This event which always sells out, hosted 1,443 guests over 16 days who enjoyed our secret blend of tea, scones, homemade lemon curd and delicious bites and desserts.

By: Teresa Wenzel

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**SAVE THE DATE:**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2020**

**Garden Party & Vintage Fashion Show**

**TICKETS ON SALE: April 1ST, 2020 9:00 AM**

$50 per person

Eventbrite.com or call 925-935-7871
What Color is Your Parlor?

“The house is a museum, when people come to see them…” So went the theme song from the 1960’s sit-com “Addams Family.” No worries - Morticia, Gomez and the rest of the family have not moved in sans housekeeping, but some of the interior surfaces of Shadelands Ranch Museum increasingly yearn for a refreshing.

Logistically, the ideal time for such work is January, bookended by the Holiday Tea and Faire and the beginning of the “Season,” that is, house tours, Living History, weddings and the Vintage Tea and Fashion Show.

The Pennimans called it the Library, but for decades Shadelands volunteers have referred to the large room on the south-east side of the downstairs as the Parlor. Painting it was the selected project for January 2020. Initially thought last painted in 1989, color photographs of the Parlor over the years led to the conclusion it was 28 years ago in 1992. That is when the color combination of deep rose on the walls and antique white on the ceiling and trim appeared. Preceding was antique white on everything applied by early WCHS volunteers between 1971 and 1972.

Navigating wall color selection threatened to be a diplomatic suicide mission. In the end it was not. There was no strong objection to the existing deep rose color. But there was a general sentiment that the tone should be lighter. The Parlor has a similar southern exposure as the Dining Room but because of the wrap around covered porch receives less sun light. About a dozen paint chips in the desired tone range were winnowed to four. Samples of those were brushed on two different walls. The final choice was “Monticello Rose” from the Benjamin Moore historic color collection (HC-63). In Western America architecture, it is fully consistent with the Victorian Period, roughly 1850 to 1900. Ceiling, baseboards and window casings were repainted in existing antique white.

As long as we were at it, cleaning and polishing everything within became part of the effort. Working from the top down; chandelier brass and sconces were cleaned, lace curtains carefully washed, cased furniture pieces oiled and polished, original 1903 wood and linoleum flooring hand scrubbed. The Parlor’s large Persian style rug was sent out for cleaning and repair. As the final touch, the bronze plaque just outside the front door designating Shadelands on the list of National Historic Places in 1985 was restored to original condition.

On two occasions during the painting and cleaning, the door bell rang, but no one was at the front door. Both City of Walnut Creek Building Maintenance and Denalect Alarm investigated, concluding no abnormalities.

Could it have been the spirits of Carrie, Mary and Bessie expressing approval of the Parlor refreshing? We hope so.

By J. H. LaBrie
WCHS introduced the Carrie Penniman award at the Annual Dinner. Carrie was Hiram’s second wife. They are responsible for the building of our beautiful Shadelands Ranch. When they married in 1866 Hiram had three children, William age 9, Robert age 7 and Mary age 6. Twelve years later Hiram and Carrie had a daughter, Bessie. Carrie was a devoted mother and lavished love and attention on her children. Both Hiram and Carrie placed a high value on education and vowed to send their children, even the girls, to college, highly unusual in that era. Carrie insisted on living in Oakland as opposed to living on the ranch as the schools were better. Because Carrie was committed to making sure young people had the best education possible, the board thought it appropriate to give the Carrie Penniman award to a junior docent who is in the process of getting an education and enjoys educating others about the history of Walnut Creek and of Shadelands. Aubrey Parkinson filled the bill perfectly.

Aubrey is a senior at Northgate and has been a house docent for two years. Her favorite thing about being a docent is giving visitors new information and seeing their reaction. She especially likes getting the kids excited about history. She feels that being a docent has increased her confidence and made her more flexible. As all docents know, you have to be flexible; you never know who will walk through the door or what questions they will ask.

Aubrey sets the standard not just for junior docents, but for all docents. She is dedicated, committed, conscientious, adaptable, and goes above and beyond. She is pleasant, enthusiastic, and always in a good mood. Aubrey volunteered for our first ever Garden Tea and Vintage Fashion Show. Talk about being flexible; she saw what needed to be done and did it. She was pulled from one task to another, kept smiling, and completed each job efficiently and perfectly. The tea chairwoman wished they could clone her. WCHS could not ask for a better volunteer or a more deserving recipient of the Carrie Penniman Award. Congratulations, Aubrey and THANK YOU.

By: Priscilla Tudor

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**Walnut Creek Shadelands Museum Is Looking for Docents**

If you love history and would like to help preserve and pass on the fascinating story of the Penniman family and of Shadelands, we want you on our team of house docents. Leading tours is both fun and rewarding; training is provided. Check out our website at wchistory.org for more information or to volunteer call 925 935-7871.

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**DOWNTOWN WALKING HISTORY TOURS**

Join us on a Downtown History Tour and you will visit historic sites that are part of our heritage in Walnut Creek.

**The next tours are March 14, April 11 & May 9**

These easy 90-minute walking tours on city sidewalks are offered on the 2nd Saturday of each month. Check-in begins at 9:00 a.m. at the fountain at Liberty Bell Plaza on the corner of Broadway and Mt. Diablo Blvd. The tour begins at 9:30 a.m. and is free. A booklet with historic photos of the sites visited may be purchased at the tour for $5.00. Registration in advance is not required.

For more details about the tours, call 925-935-7871 or go to our website at: wchistory.org
Grounders to the Rescue!

Quadruple “Jeopardy!” item: Question; “The gardens of this Walnut Creek, CA National Historic Place are graced by 117 rose bushes.” Answer; “What is the Shadelands Ranch House?”

That’s right. And all 117 of them need to be pruned every January, the coldest month of the year; not before, not later. As you like, call it part of nature’s in-your-face control of the universe or blowback for eating an apple in the Garden of Eden.

It’s a thorny issue. By mid January this year nary a one had been clipped. Then on a particularly cold morning as the fog lifted, we saw through one of the Museum’s back windows, not an apparition but just as good, four ladies expertly pruning the roses that surround the Gazebo.

Upon investigation we learned that these four; Diana Chandler, Lavon Bouse, Margo Peckham and Jo Baetti have been gardening together for years. Both with acknowledgement and hesitation they cop to the name “Grounders.” Most of their volunteer gardening work is at Civic Park. They saw that Shadelands had a particular need and they took the initiative.

Certified Master Gardener, Margo, suggested a dose of alfalfa pellets as a natural boost of nitrogen as warmer days approach. Since, 200 lbs. have been applied (about half a pound per rose bush).

Nature, do your thing.

Grounders, come back soon!

By J. H. LaBrie

VICTORIAN HOLIDAY TEA

For the last 37 years Shadelands Museum has been transformed into a holiday-themed tea parlor. The tradition began in 1982 when a group of volunteers started this event as a way to raise money for the museum. Back then not only did they serve delicious food; they made it themselves. What dedication!

Today, our teas have grown and we use a caterer to help us feed over 1,400 guests during the 16-day event. From November 30 to December 15, guests were treated to freshly-baked scones, homemade lemon curd, numerous savory bites and decadent desserts. Of course it would not be a tea without our bottomless cups of Shadelands Secret Blend. (Many of our guests try to get our recipe, but we are not spilling the tea leaves!) In addition to the standard tea, we also held three Champagne teas for a little added holiday spirit.

None of this could happen without our wonderful volunteers who plan, plate and serve. They worked tirelessly so our guests could sit back and enjoy themselves.

This year was special as we celebrated the retirement of Rosemary Mazzetti who was integral in creating the teas and ensuring their success. For every one of these 37 years Rosemary has been in the kitchen making sure everything runs smoothly. We will miss her in the kitchen but look forward to serving her tea when we begin again on November 28, 2020. We thank you Rosemary and wish you all the best.

By: Judy Caponigro
What do Shadelands Museum docents do when they are on hiatus while the house is closed for holiday events and maintenance? We turn the tables and become visitors at other interesting historic properties, of course!

Judy Caponigro, Ted Dobbs and I paid a visit to the Dublin Heritage Park & Museums. The park includes an 1859 church, the 1856 Murray Schoolhouse (now the museum), an 1870 “Sunday School Barn” and the 1910 Kolb House, a Craftsman bungalow. The venue was selected because the Kolb House is of the same era as Shadelands.

The house has Arts & Crafts furniture and a Klinker brick external fireplace. In addition to the Symphonion (Stella-style) music box and Edison record player, both operational, there are two Marxophones. These are fretless zithers popular in the 1920’s, which belonged to the Kolb daughters. The kitchen is set up to the recollection of how the two Kolb daughters remembered it from childhood. The family living area has lovely leaded glass and woodwork.

Our tour was facilitated by Tyler Phillips, Dublin’s Heritage & Cultural Arts Recreation Coordinator. He graciously included “behind the scenes” stops not usually made on public tours. He opened the bell tower door to reveal the steps and we got to enter the “Sunday School Barn” to feel its vibe.

All good docents know that we learn from our guests. In the case of this tour, Judy and Ted told Tyler about the ballast bricks used in the Shadelands fireplaces. All three engaged in a search for similar “frogged” bricks. Alas, the fireplace had been renovated and modern bricks had been installed. Judy showed Tyler some of the not-so-obvious features of the electric stove in the kitchen. Her mother had a similar stove that was purchased in 1949 and used until she sold her house in 2003. Judy learned to cook and bake with this vintage appliance.

The historic Dublin Pioneer Cemetery, resting place of its founding families, was very interesting. The signage did a very nice job of telling the story of their lives and their roles in the development of the town. John Martin came west from Ireland in 1844 and helped rescue survivors of the Donner Party. Tom Donlon, also from Ireland, was killed in a fall from the church roof while working on the church’s construction.

The tour ended with an invitation to the Dublin docents to come visit us at Shadelands.

By: Suzanne Hudson
Please check address, if there is a star next to your name it is time to renew your membership.

Please use Membership Renewal Form.

Check out our website at whistory.org

WCHS Membership Renewal Form
Please return form with your renewal

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