The Life of Robert Noble Burgess

By James Moore.

Jim Moore, a Walnut Creek Historical Society member, has written a comprehensive book about his grandfather, Robert Noble Burgess – a man instrumental in helping to build Walnut Creek and the town of Diablo. “RN,” as he was known to his family and associates, was also an early owner of much of the land that today is a part of Mt. Diablo State Park. In Walnut Creek, he built the Lakewood subdivision.

The book is a meaningful contribution to written local history. Carefully researched, copiously documented, it is a candid account of Mr. Burgess’s financial ups and downs. It details much of what brought him success and then the demise of his empire.

Jim Moore describes the book in these words:

“The Burgess story is a story of a young man’s ambition, energy, talent, pride, hubris, overconfidence, and collapse in the geopolitical, social, and financial contagion surrounding World War I. This book is both a study of America and California. It is a study of character, of ambition, of will and of a life that reflected the larger spirit of the times in which it occurred. It is a story about a commitment to a life of hard work and self improvement, of success and failure, and of tremendous drive and need to achieve.”

Jim will be attending our October 6th Membership Appreciation Event from 4 PM—6 PM at the Shadelands Ranch Museum, making brief remarks about the book. Please come out and meet him. The book is on sale at the Society for $25.

Congratulations, Jim, on adding this important perspective about one of our local pioneers.
Newspapers of Walnut Creek

*A Good Newspaper is a nation talking to itself. Arthur Miller*

In 1882, the population of Walnut Creek—known at the time as The Corners—was about 300 people. There were a few businesses, a one room schoolhouse, and two doctors. The first churches were just getting started, and the volunteer fire department was a year away from being founded.

Printer G.B. Leavitt came to town that year and decided to start the first newspaper. This meant he would write copy, set his own type, run the press, find advertisers, and sell subscriptions. He called the paper The Walnut Creek Independent. The name came from the Spanish name for the creek, Arroyo de las Nueces, or Stream of the Walnuts. Over time the town was called The Corners, then Walnut Creek Corners, and finally Walnut Creek.

Subscriptions for the new paper cost $3.00 a year. Subscribers received 8 pages weekly of news, gossip, and activities. Advertisers included Mrs. Vicker on Main Street, meals for 25 cents, and H.S. Shuey who purchased an entire column to list all the merchandise for sale in his store. Leavitt’s first paper was published March 24, 1882 and his last issue came out 4 months later. Although local businesses advertised regularly, Leavitt was not able to make enough profit keep the paper going.

In 1894, E.R. Vanlandingham and W.C. Lewis formed a partnership to publish a newspaper, The Walnut Creek Sentinel. Twelve years had gone by and now Walnut Creek’s population was 475. A good number of merchants advertised in The Sentinel, including the town’s first dentist, Dr. Symons, whose clinic was next door to The Sentinel’s office on Main Street. Like The Walnut Creek Independent The Sentinel was an 8 page weekly which came out on Fridays. But unfortunately, also like The Independent, the Sentinel was unable to stay in business. The last issue was published just 4 months after the first.

In 1910 and 1911 electricity came to Walnut Creek, and along with it electric rail service. Central School District built a new and bigger school building, and the Women’s Improvement Club became Walnut Creek’s first service organization. Their goal was to raise funds for a public library.

With a population of about 500 Walnut Creek needed a newspaper. George C. Compton decided to publish The Contra Costa Courier. He wanted it to be about the happenings in town, but also to promote civic projects and advocate for progress and growth in Walnut Creek. However, as with the other newspapers, advertising and subscriptions were not enough to support the paper.

In Danville the local newspaper, The Danville Journal, also struggled, until 1917 when Colonel William White from Alamo saved the day by buying the Danville Journal and The Courier and merging them into one. He constructed a building on Main Street and named his new enterprise The Contra Costa Courier-Journal. Colonel White kept the paper going until 1921 when he sold it to his staff of 2, Mr. and Mrs. Silver. Mrs. Silver published the paper for 3 years after her husband died. Then, in 1943, she sold to David Newsom, business manager of The Richmond Independent.
Meanwhile a rival newspaper began in Walnut Creek. Lyman Stoddard published the first of his weekly papers without a name. He held a contest to name the paper, and the winner called it “The Walnut Kernel”. The Walnut Kernel eventually became a 7 column, eight page paper, which stayed in business until 1972.

David Newsom kept the Courier-Journal going until 1947 when he sold to Dean Lesher, a lawyer and newspaper owner. Within a few years Lesher built a bigger building on Mt. Diablo Blvd. and renamed his paper The Contra Costa Times. When Lesher first purchased the paper he had 8 employees, and by 1984 The Times employed over 1,000 people. A new building on Shadelands Drive was built and Lesher acquired a number of small, neighboring, newspapers. Between 1958 and 1984 he added 14 papers to his holdings.

Lesher died in 1993. The paper was sold and is now owned by the Bay Area News Group. It’s called the East Bay Times.

The population of Walnut Creek has grown to 70,000. In keeping with what’s currently expected from a newspaper, The Times is available to subscribers online. No one knows the future of newspapers in Walnut Creek, but for most of the last 137 years our City has supported a newspaper and kept residents informed about local, national, and world news.

Lee Culver

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**Member Appreciation Event**

**Sunday, October 6, 2019**

4 PM—6 PM

**At the**

**Shadelands Ranch Museum**

**Rsvp by September 30th**

Call 925-935-7871 or email wchistorysrmm@gmail.com

**DOWNTOWN 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 last tour of the year is October 12th.

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.

Tours will resume in March 2020

For more details about the tours, call 925-935-7871 or go to our website at: wchistory.org
Helen “Sandy” Hansen, beloved Living History Co-Founder and Volunteer passed away on July 23, 2019. As one of the Living History Program’s most dedicated volunteers, Sandy’s smile and easy way with rambunctious third graders will be sorely missed. Sandy and her husband of 70 years, Bill Hansen, together volunteered in many of the activities at the Shadeland Ranch Museum.

The WCHS Living History Program began in 2006. The goal of our Living History Program is to provide a “hands on” history experience for all third graders in Walnut Creek. According to the founders, the third-grade curriculum includes a student’s first exposure to history and focuses on the history of their community. Sandy Hansen and her colleagues, many of whom are retired teachers, designed a golden opportunity for students to experience ranch life in Walnut Creek in 1906 and learn to “compare and contrast” the life of third graders in 1906 with theirs in a bustling, modern and technological 2019 Walnut Creek. In the 2018-2019 academic year the Living History program brought third graders from 31 public and private schools and 1,051 students in Walnut Creek to the Shadelands Ranch Museum for a memorable “hands on” day of learning.

Sandy Hansen earned her teaching credential from San Francisco State College and enjoyed a long career that included teaching at Holbrook, Mt. Diablo, and Walnut Acres Elementary Schools. Both Bill and Sandy were committed to the education of Walnut Creek students as Bill was the first and very revered principal at Northgate High School.

Besides volunteering at the Shadelands Ranch Museum, Sandy was also active with the Assistance League of Diablo Valley and their Wayside Inn Thrift Store and the CA Retired Teachers Association.

According to WCHS Living History Chair, Mary Granzotto, “You could always count on Sandy to say yes when help was needed.”

Sandy leaves behind her devoted husband Bill, her daughter Jill, son Lon, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

A celebration of her life is planned for Sunday, September 29th from 1-3 PM at the Shadelands Ranch Museum.
The Walnut Creek Historical Society’s 1906 Living History Program is starting its 14th year this fall. This program is designed for third grade students from Walnut Creek. The classes are invited to visit Shadelands Ranch for a day (9:30 - 1:30) to learn about what life was like on a prune ranch in Walnut Creek over 100 years ago. The students and their chaperones tour the house and grounds, eat the lunch they brought and stored in our original ice box, play games from the period, hear from our wonderful storyteller, and then end the day with chores - rug beating, laundry, weighing walnuts, and a crazy quilt craft project. We use the house and grounds most Mondays and Thursdays in the fall and spring - thirty-plus days per year.

The 1906 Living History program was created by a terrific team of WCHS volunteers - Dorothy Couden, Priscilla Couden, Bill and Sandy Hansen, Mel and Audrey Veregge, and Ed and Maryalice Montgomery. Our founders have retired and passed the program on to new volunteers. As with any volunteer program, we are always looking for new people. Some of our docents just do house tours in the mornings, others come only for a couple of hours in the afternoon to help with chores. If you like 8 and 9-year-olds, enjoy history, or just want to help the historical society with community education, we would love to have you join us. You can visit to get a look at the program before you make a commitment and then sign up for as much or as little time as fits your calendar.

Please contact the Shadelands office - 925-935-7871. or Mary Granzotto - 925-876-8862 with any questions or to set up a visit.

Living History Storyteller gets a sweet surprise.

Carolyn Kraetsch, WCHS Member and Living History Volunteer Storyteller, dazzles the third grade classes with her fable about the Raven who saves the animals by gathering water. She always brings her fox puppet to help tell the story and the children just love it. On a recent trip through Washington, Penny Farfan, another Living History volunteer was in a coffee shop and stumbled across a Raven puppet and knew she had to buy it for Carolyn. On the first fall class field trip Penny surprised Carolyn with her gift. She is so excited to add the puppet to her presentation.
A new emphasis in the last few years for museums and historic houses is to have exhibits relating to the community. The Oakland Museum changed all their exhibits. We, at the Walnut Creek Historical Society, will be creating an exhibit about the Japanese workers who were working on most of the area farms. Using our photos, letters and facts from our files we will be displaying the information in the alcove by the upstairs hall as well as putting it in the Ygnacio Valley Library. The docents as well as the Living History group have always mentioned our Japanese workers.

There were thirty one Japanese workers on the local farms. The ones at Shadelands were Kananda, Murakishi, Watenabe and Ide. Recently Lee and Sheila discovered a project that Audrey Veregge, past historian, had done about ten years ago with high school students searching Managers Ed Moyer’s letters, mentioning Ide. We were able to help Ide’s granddaughter find information about her family when she visited a few years ago.

We will keep our members posted on when the exhibit will be opened up to come and visit!

Sheila Rogstad

“The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft” Now at Shadelands

Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832—1918) was an early settler of Walnut Creek. He was the grandfather of Phillip Bancroft Jr., husband of Ruth Bancroft who passed away in 2017 at the age of 109! To Walnut Creek residents, the family name is immediately associated with the Ruth Bancroft Garden & Nursery. It was on that property and surrounding 400 acres that H. H. Bancroft was founder and owner of a fruit and nut farm adjacent to Hiram Penniman’s competing Shadelands Ranch.

To the rest of the world, H. H. Bancroft was better known as a prolific San Francisco publisher.

In September, the Walnut Creek Historical Society received a surprise gift; a first edition, deluxe leather bound set of “The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft” (39 Volumes, published between 1883—1890) Over 100 years later it is still generally regarded as the seminal work on early history of the Pacific Coast region of North America, from Central America to Alaska. Proudly, the set is now part of the reference library at Shadelands Ranch Museum.

By J. H. LaBrie
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.
WCHS Membership Renewal Form
Please return form with your renewal

NAME: _____________________________________________________________________

MAILING ADDRESS: ______________________________________________________________________

PHONE NUMBER: ___________________________ EMAIL: ___________________________________

PLEASE CIRCLE ONE:
Individual $25    Family $45    Student $15    Lifetime (over 55) $300

PAYMENT OPTIONS: Check # ____________

Visa/MC/AMEX card # ___________________________ Exp. Date: _________ 3 Digit code _____

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Date: ____________ Payment amount: ____________ Check#/CC approval Code: ____________

☐ QB  ☐ PP  ☐ ML  Office initials: ____________