Hello Summer! It seems like just yesterday we were taking down the holiday decorations in the Shadelands Museum in preparation for our busy spring season. And what a busy spring season the WCHS had this year! Our grounds were filled with laughter, joy, and incredible energy as over 200 Walnut Creek Third Graders enjoyed the Living History experience and over 16 couples exchanged their vows under the grand oak in our beautiful grove.

We kicked off our summer with the Third Annual Shadelands Classic Car Show on Sunday, June 11th. Over 175 car owners enjoyed a bright warm sunny day showing off cars of all makes and models. The giant Jelly Belly Inflatable took centerstage once again on our grounds and attracted over 1000 guests. Attendees enjoyed delicious food, beer & wine, museum tours, raffles, and the presentation of our famous coveted handmade trophies. Walnut Creek Mayor Cindy Silva presented the Mayor’s Award to Charlie Baumgart’s bright red beauty, a 1950 Oldsmobile Holiday 88 and Rick and Louise Christensen’s 1929 Sterns Knight 7 Passenger Sedan won The Best in Show Award. Trophies were also given to owners of the Most Unusual, Best Classic, Best Muscle Car, Best Import, Best Paint, People’s Choice, and the Hagerty Award. A fabulous time was had by all!!

Brian Hirahara, owner of BH Development and President of the Walnut Creek Downtown Business Association, invited our WCHS Board to enjoy a fabulous lunch at Teleferic Barcelona in Walnut Creek for our June Board Meeting. Brian gave a brief presentation of the artifacts excavated when he developed the parcel at 1500 Mt. Diablo Blvd followed by a feast of tapas, paella, and sangria. The artifacts are on display on the second floor near the entrance of Teleferic Barcelona. This display is dedicated to our long time (now deceased) WCHS President, Primo Facchini. The Facchini family also attended the presentation and luncheon. Our society is grateful for Brian’s continued support of our society and his efforts to beautify our city.

Our staff is busy planning our Annual Membership Appreciation Dinner scheduled for Monday, July 24th followed by our Annual Summer Market & Barn Sale on Sunday, July 30th.

Fall is just around the corner! It’s time to dust off your steins, dirndls, and lederhosen for an evening of fun at the Shadelands Ranch Oktoberfest on Saturday, September 30th. Tickets will go on sale through our WCHS website on August 1st. This favorite annual community event is sure to sell out quickly so make your reservations early!! We look forward to seeing our members soon!

Andrea Baldacci
2023 Classic Car Show
Summer market
at Shadelands Ranch Museum

SUNDAY, JULY 30, 2023
10am to 3pm

✓ Arts, Crafts, Antiques
✓ Clothing, Jewelry
✓ Handmade goods
✓ Baked goods, food trucks &
so much more

SHADELANDS RANCH MUSEUM
2660 YGNACIO VALLEY RD. WALNUT CREEK

FOR MORE EVENT INFORMATION OR BECOMING A VENDOR
CALL 925-935-7871 OR GO TO OUR WEBSITE
WCHISTORY.ORG

Walnut Creek Historical Society
Walnut Creek Historical Society presents

A Night of History & Wine

Thursday, July 13
Shadelands Ranch Museum
05:00 PM

$25 per person

Presentation: Timeline of the Valley (1834 - 1955)
Shadelands Ranch House Tour
wine and appetizers

For More Information
925-935-7871
www.wchistory.org
Imagine life in California without fire departments. Early residents of Walnut Creek lived that way, doing the best they could putting out fires themselves, until 1883 when a volunteer fire department was formed. Before that homes caught fire, sometimes with loss of life. In nearby Lafayette a farmer lost his entire family when a lighted lamp turned over. Grass fires regularly burned hay and grain. The Walnut Creek House, the second oldest building and at the time, the only hotel in the village, burned down completely. And the Sherburne Mercantile, which served as Walnut Creek’s general store, was the victim of a fire that demolished the entire building.

The Sherburne fire caused citizens to finally decide they needed to raise money for fire fighting equipment and choose someone to be in charge. By then it was 1880 and the Rogers Hotel had been built on the corner of Main and Duncan Streets. William Rogers, the owner, became the Forman of the new Volunteer Fire Department.

The first equipment purchased was a single-axel cart and a one hundred foot long hose with a 4 foot brass nozzle at one end. A bell and a red lantern hung from the cart’s frame. It was ten more years before anything else was added to the Fire Department’s equipment; a hook and ladder truck with a pump operated by rocking an eight foot long oak bar became part of the firefighting inventory. The older cart and the new truck were pulled along to the fire by volunteers from the makeshift firehouse.

There were no fire hydrants—the firemen stopped next to someone’s well and pumped water out. Twenty-four buckets hung from the truck in case they couldn’t locate a well.

The firehouse was in the center of Walnut Creek’s business district on North Main Street. After 1900 firemen finally had a dependable water supply from a 15,000 gallon tank. A pipe ran the water from the tank to a line that traveled the length of Main Street, and eight hydrants placed along the way gave the volunteers access to the tank’s water.

In 1921, with fire still difficult to handle, a widespread blaze burned acres of grassy hillside land above Mt. Diablo Blvd. It threatened the homes and businesses in town. Oakland and Berkeley firefighters were called in, and luckily arrived within two hours, in time to keep the fire from spreading. In response to this near tragedy $3,000 was approved to enhance the Volunteer Fire Department and appoint Raymond Spencer chief. A few years later the first real fire station was built on Bonanza Street; Raymond’s brother, Guy Spencer, took over the job of fire chief. The County Board of Supervisors had formed the Central Fire Protection District, which purchased a parcel of land for $750 to build the station. They also bought an American LaFrance pumper engine at a cost of $7000!

That’s not to say there were no more fires to worry about. Rossmoor is a good example. In 1965, fire destroyed four homes. In 1974, a building with eight units burned down, and in 1978, when a television set blew up, three homes were lost. Many more fires in Rossmoor and the rest of Walnut Creek have taken place in the almost fifty years since 1978. But Walnut Creek has become fire protected, with trained professionals using the best available equipment to fight any fire. We’ve come a long way since City residents had to put out fires with buckets of water.

Lee Culver

Sources: Walnut Creek, Arroyo De Las Nueces by George Emanuels; Walnut Creek, an Illustrated History by Brad Rovanpera; Old times in Contra Costa by Robert Daras Tatam; Images of America, Walnut Creek by Catherine A. Accardi.
When I first started at the Shadelands Ranch Museum I was struck by the volunteers that were so dedicated to the mission and the history of Walnut Creek. One of those volunteers was Bill Hansen. He was a Board Member at the time and loved working with the Living History program with his wife Sandy. I learned that he had a long history in education, especially in Walnut Creek. He had a long career with the Mount Diablo Unified School District beginning in 1963 Clayton Valley High School as a history teacher and retiring in 1988 as the first Northgate High School Principal. He went on to work with Chapman University, East Bay campus, with their student teachers. He loved when he learned that I graduated from Chapman (Orange Campus). We used to talk about the school a lot. Whenever we saw each other he would always check in on my children and loved to hear the updates.

His memorial service was held here on April 15th and based on the number of his students that showed up he was a much loved educator.

Jackie Byrd
WCHS Office/Events Manager

On Monday, April 10 the Shadelands Ranch Museum hosted the Bay Area Historic House Museums (BAHHM) quarterly meeting. This is an opportunity for all the organizations to get together and share ideas and work together. We hosted over 30 people from all over the bay area. It has been almost eight years since we hosted this group at our beautiful museum. The program included a guided tour of the house, the grounds, and a boxed lunch ordered from Jacks Urban Eats. Joe LaBrie delighted the crowd with his presentation on the Penniman family and their connections to Scotty’s Castle and Frank Lloyd Wright!

Please consider naming the Walnut Creek Historical Society in your will, trust, or as the beneficiary of an insurance policy. The Walnut Creek Historical Society is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. When you include a gift to the Walnut Creek Historical Society in your estate plan, you ensure your support will help the Society to continue its work to benefit our community in the future.
Farewell to Moira!

On Wednesday, June 7th, Board Members and volunteers gathered at the Shadelands Ranch Museum to celebrate Moira Anwar on her new venture. Moira has been working as the History Room Archivist at the museum since 2016. In her seven years here she has put together many amazing exhibits, including the current Bridal Fashion: Than and Now that is going on right now. She has helped scan documents and photos that have been in storage for many years and then worked with Past Perfect (collections management software) to get all the photos online for everyone to enjoy. She worked with the Historians to pull together presentations so that we could spread the history of Walnut Creek to the community. There is so much more that she has contributed to our organization. Moira will be missed here terribly but we wish her all the best in her future!
2023 Events

Sunday, June 11
Classic Car Show

Sunday, July 30
Summer Market

Sunday, September 17
Bridal Faire

Saturday, September 30
Oktoberfest

November 25 – December 10
Holidays at Shadelands
Santa, Teas and Faire

Go to wchistory.org for more information