It is time to dust off your steins, dirndls, and lederhosen for an evening of fun Oktoberfest activities in the beautiful Shadelands Ranch Museum Biergarten! Stein Holding and Costume Contest, Dancing and More!

Saturday, September 30, 2023
5 PM - 9 PM
$60 per person
$450 for a table of 8 (contact WCHS Office for purchase)
This event is for 21 Years or Older!!

Ticket includes: Authentic German Dinner, 1 Drink Ticket & Dessert Booth
Drink tickets available to purchase during the event for $7.00
Traditional Oktoberfest communal seating in our lovely garden.

2660 Ygnacio Valley Road
Walnut Creek, CA
Parking available behind the museum
Prost!
Autumn has arrived here at The Shadelands Ranch!! As acorns and golden leaves begin showering our beautiful grounds, it’s a little bittersweet to say farewell to such an amazing Summer. The Walnut Creek Historical Society’s events and celebrations these past months have invited such excitement and community spirit to our venue & our museum that we can’t wait to continue the momentum!

As we reminisce and celebrate our accomplishments, we welcome Fall with open arms and look forward to a very busy and exciting 2023 Shadelands Holiday Season!

On Monday, July 24th over 80 WCHS Members celebrated the Walnut Creek Historical Society’s 3rd Annual Membership Appreciation & Diner Event. Guests enjoyed a delicious Italian dinner catered by Rocco’s Italian Ristorante and music by Walnut Creek’s hometown favorite musician Kelly Carney. The house was open for our guests to enjoy our “100 Years of Wedding Dresses” display. We were especially honored to have Mayor Cindy Silva, and Mayor Pro Tem Loella Haskew in attendance.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, we honored our dear past WCHS President Sheila Rogstad with a moment of silence. She was a vibrant member of our society for many years and will be missed by our entire greater Walnut Creek community.

Keeping with tradition, the Annual Mary Penniman Award was presented to a very deserving and extraordinary WCHS Volunteer. The award was presented by Priscilla Tudor to our Past President, prominent leader, and volunteer extraordinaire Lee Culver. Lee’s name will be engraved on the Mary Penniman Award perpetual plaque which is proudly displayed in the foyer of the Shadelands Ranch Museum.

The 3rd Annual Summer Market was another huge success! Sunday, July 30th provided the perfect weather and ambiance for 60 vendors and approximately 1000 guests to enjoy food trucks, live music, house tours, and delicious mocktails! A big thank you to our Office Manager Jackie Byrd and our Event Coordinator Christine Baltzley for organizing. A great time was had by all!!

The Walnut Creek Historical Society strives to maintain and foster our partnerships with other organizations in our community. We continue to be grateful for our strong relationship with the City of Walnut Creek and we’ve also enjoyed working with other community stakeholders.

The Walnut Creek Arts & Recreation Department invited the Shadelands Museum to participate in its first Volunteer Fair in Civic Park on Saturday, May 30th for a day of networking with other organizations and a venue to share our society’s volunteer opportunities with hundreds of community members. We appreciate Arts & Rec for hosting and Moira Anwar and docent Mary Granzotto for representing Shadelands at this amazing event.

On Sunday, June 26th our society participated in The Shadelands Business Park’s “Made in The Shade” festival. This was an opportunity for our society to share our mission and programs and showcase our museum and event venue. Jackie Byrd and Andrea Baldacci had a fabulous time interacting with hundreds of community members and sharing the fabulous display that Jackie put together for the event.
Presidents Message Continued:

We have also strengthened our partnership with The Walnut Creek Garden Club. WCHS Board Member Corinne Coffrini has been working with Club President Suzanne Williams to identify ways to assist the garden club with its efforts to maintain, improve and nurture our beautiful herb garden that the club established on our grounds over 20 years ago. Corrine and Suzanne also compiled a punch list and timeline for improvements in the garden. We are also very appreciative that Corrine has invited the Lakewood Garden Club to help with identifying projects and executing pruning and care for the roses and general landscape on our Shadelands grounds. Our weddings have never looked so magnificent!

The Walnut Civic Pride Foundation’s Community Service Day is just around the corner on Saturday, October 14th. We look forward to partnering with the foundation again—and this year are very fortunate to have the Walnut Creek Garden Club volunteering to work alongside the WCHS board to complete our service projects.

Walnut Creek Recreation will be hosting its 3rd Annual “Trunk or Treat” event in Civic Park on Friday, October 28th. The Walnut Creek Historical Society is excited to partner with this organization again and is looking forward to bringing some “Hotel Transylvania” fun and treats to the celebration.

Our Shadelands Pumpkin Patch will be open from October 1st through the 31st. Pumpkins, train rides, phot ops, and sweet treats! Fun for all ages!

And just as soon as the pumpkins and hay bales disappear the Christmas trees begin arriving!! Our museum doors open the Saturday after Thanksgiving to reveal a truly magical feast for the eyes.

Our house is completely decked out for the “Holidays at Shadelands” season filled top to bottom decorations and art & crafts from over 50 vendors. The faire runs from Saturday, November 25th through Sunday, December 10th open from 10am – 3pm.

Don’t miss the fun! Information on all of the “Holidays at Shadelands” activities are listed on our holiday calendar.

Lastly, on behalf of our Walnut Creek Historical Society Board, we would like to thank our members and our community for their continued support. We wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and look forward to seeing you soon!

By: Andrea Baldacci
Sheila Rogstad

January 19, 1935 - July 2, 2023

Sheila was one of our most dedicated volunteers, serving as historian, archivist, and Vice President on the Historical Society’s Board of Directors since the 1980’s. She supposedly retired a few years ago, but even in retirement Sheila still worked on WCHS projects at home and came to Shadelands to help out as often as she could.

Sheila was born in Los Angeles and married Judd Rogstad in 1958. She and Judd lived in Southern California, Reno, and in Florida before moving to Walnut Creek. They had 3 children, Tina, John, and Bill, and eventually 3 grandchildren. Sheila worked as a travel agent and belonged to Diablo Valley Quilter’s and Valley Stitcher’s Guilds before deciding to volunteer her time and expertise to various organizations: The American Heart Association, Planned Parenthood, Walnut Creek Civic Arts, American Association of University Women, her sorority Alpha Phi, and of course, luckily, to the Walnut Creek Historical Society.

At Shadelands Sheila had an opportunity to use her many talents as she organized and archived documents, artifacts, photos, and clothing, created special exhibits, helped people who were researching Walnut Creek, and transcribed 1,500 Penniman family letters. The Society greatly benefited from her knowledge of history and her commitment to preserving as much as possible for future generations.

On August 30th, with gratitude for her many years of service and friendship, we said goodbye to Sheila at a celebration of her life held at Shadelands. Guests saw photos taken throughout her days and listened to speakers talk about her contributions to the Historical Society and her giving nature. Sheila will be greatly missed by everyone who knew her.
Happy 120th Anniversary Shadelands Ranch

In 1902 Hiram Penniman and his wife Carrie decided to build a comfortable home on their Shadelands Ranch property. The family was living in a house on Piedmont Ave. in Oakland and Hiram was commuting to the ranch. By 1902 Hiram was getting frail and the commute was too much for him. Also, their daughter Mary was 42 and unmarried, and they wanted her to have some security. Construction began in 1902 on the 3,442 square foot Colonial Revival style house and was completed a year later for a cost of $7,442.00. Hiram, Carrie and Mary moved in 1903, 120 years ago!!

It is difficult from our 2023 perspective to imagine what the city of Walnut Creek was like 120 years ago. Fortunately we have the following description of the early days written by Eva Leech. Dr. Claude Leech and his wife Eva were among the first Walnut Creek settlers. One day several years after Dr. Leech’s death in 1934, Mrs. Leech reminisced about the days when she and the doctor came to town in 1897. She paints a vivid picture of life in Walnut Creek at the turn of the century.

“When Dr. Leech and I came here this town was so tiny there wasn’t another young couple in town, nor a single baby! (But) I loved the informality and warmth of small town life. This was a funny little town in ’98. Our streets were not paved. We had no sidewalks, no street lights. If you ventured out after dark without a lantern your progress was punctuated by bumping first into one hitching rack and then into another. We had any amount of adobe mud in winter and any amount of dust in summer. Walnut Creek had no lighting system (and) no sewage system.”

She recalled the excitement people felt about the arrival of the evening train. “We would hitch up the horse, and when we heard the whistle, get over to the station at top speed to see the train come up ‘around the bend,’ the engine puffing.”

Eva remembered the pace of living in Walnut Creek. “We had some leisure in those days, and time to take life sanely and enjoy our families and friends.”

Keep in mind, she wrote these words in 1940. They were printed in the book Walnut Creek, Arroyo De Las Nueces by George Emanuels in 1984. What might she have thought all those years later, and what would her reaction be today?

By Priscilla Tudor and Lee Culver
THE CALDECOTT TUNNEL

In the 1860’s only a handful of people lived in Walnut Creek. Along with the rest of Contra Costa County they talked about a tunnel through the hills since a stage coach from Lafayette to Oakland was a hair-raising two hour ride with many accidents on the steep slopes. In an attempt to solve this problem The Kennedy Tunnel was dug in the 1870’s, but the project was abandoned when the builders ran out of money.

Years later, Oakland merchants and county governments, eager to attract new residents and promote shopping in Oakland, helped fund the completion of the Kennedy Tunnel (officially the Inter County Tunnel) which opened in 1903. The new single bore tunnel saved travelers from the steep climb, and it was just wide enough for two buggies to pass one another. Wagons, however, had to signal by holding up a burning newspaper to let oncoming traffic know the tunnel was occupied.

There were no lights in the narrow tunnel for the first ten years. Some drivers carried lanterns. Then wires with light bulbs dangling were hung from the tunnel’s ceiling. When a small store selling sandwiches and soft drinks opened at the east end of the bore the owner was given free electricity in return for changing the burned out light bulbs. He did this by climbing to the top of the load on a hay wagon and having the driver stop at all the lights that needed replacement.

Drivers and passengers in slow moving buggies and wagons, and automobiles traveling at 14 miles an hour were, at times, the victims of holdups. Masked gunmen stopped vehicles and forced the drivers to the side of the road. They searched them for money and jewelry and then ran off, disappearing into the hills.

The height of the tunnel was increased by 3 feet to accommodate larger vehicles in 1915. However, ten years later it was obvious more had to be done. Alameda and Contra Costa Counties began talking and agreed to construct a new tunnel.

By 1936, when the first Walnut Festival was held and the Bay Bridge had just opened, work on the new tunnel, located at a lower elevation than the old one, was nearly complete. The following year The Broadway Low Level Tunnel was open and ready to receive what Walnut Creek thought would be thousands of people moving from Oakland and Berkeley to live in their City. But surprisingly, the town experienced slow growth. In 1908 the population was 400. By 1920 the number of people living in Walnut Creek had only increased by a hundred. Thirty years later just 2,000 people called Walnut Creek home.

But as automobile sales escalated and the tunnel expanded to allow 2 lanes of traffic in each direction, motorists found it an easy drive from where they worked to Walnut Creek. Finally houses sold and the population grew bigger. More businesses opened including much needed gas stations.

In 1960 the name of the tunnel was changed to the Caldecott, honoring Thomas E. Caldecott who had been mayor of Berkeley, an Alameda County Supervisor, and president of Joint Highway District 13, which was involved in the construction of the tunnel. That year also brought upgrades to the tunnel, and the Division of Highways purchased right-of-way to build another pair of bores. When the number of vehicles passing through the tunnel reached 50,000 a day a third bore was constructed which allowed reverse traffic flow in the middle bore during commute hours. It opened in 1964.
Continued from page 6.
The population of Walnut Creek and other Contra Costa cities continued to increase, and in 2013 the 4th bore opened. This new bore contained special safety features, seven passages from the 4th to the 3rd bore that allowed drivers to escape in case of an emergency. There was also a shoulder lane in the newest bore in case motorists had trouble with their car.

Walnut Creek and the East Bay have come a long way since 1870 when the idea of a tunnel was... well, just an idea. Imagine the commute without the Caldecott Tunnel. It would be a long, difficult journey no one would want to take. Those who came before us knew a tunnel was necessary, and we are thankful they did!

Lee Culver

Sources: State of California Department of Transportation, the Caldecott Tunnel; Walnut Creek, Arroyo De Las Nueces, Emanuels; Caldecott Tunnel, Wikipedia and Oakland Wiki; Cal Trans: Building the 4th Bore; The First Bore, East Bay Times; Walnut Creek, An Illustrated History, Rovanpera.
Member Appreciation

Monday, July 24th was a gorgeous evening with over seventy-five WCHS Members enjoying a night under the lights in the garden of Shadelands Ranch. Everyone loved the delicious pasta dinner catered by Rocco’s and musical entertainment by Kelly Carney. We are looking forward to next year's event on Monday, July 22, 2024!

Mary Penniman Award

The Mary Penniman Award is given out every year to honor a volunteer. The WCHS is very lucky to have such dedicated people who devote their time to this organization. This year’s recipient is definitely one of those people. Lee Culver has been the volunteer Historian at the museum for over ten years. She has spent countless hours organizing files, pictures, and artifacts, developing special exhibits, writing articles for the Newsletter, and answering the public's questions.

Thank you for all your hard work!!

A Night of History and Wine

On, Thursday, July 13 the Walnut Creek Historical Society hosted its first Night of History and Wine event. Twenty people enjoyed an evening of light appetizers and wine selected by Catie Ivers, Cork It With Catie. Ted Dobbs gave a very interesting presentation on the timeline of Ygnacio Valley. Attendees asked a lot of very insightful questions and made suggestions for future presentations. A tour of the house and the amazing wedding dress exhibit rounded out the evening followed by an opportunity to socialize. We are looking forward to hosting our next event on Thursday, November 2 at 6:00 PM. Tickets will be available on Eventbrite on October 1st.