

History Happens As We Live It

If there is one thing we can count on, it's the fact that life here at the History Center – and everywhere – is constantly changing. Over the last couple of years, we have brought in new technology, new people, created new programs to make our archives and services accessible to more people, and seen the ranks of our volunteer staff expanding to the largest staff we've had since before the coronavirus pandemic.

At the same time, the building we have occupied for the last sixteen years has been placed on the market, so we will have to wait and see what the long-term future holds. The building itself is historic, dating from 1904, and its longtime owners, the Telfer family, won awards years ago for restoring it back to its original glory. The building started life as a funeral home and the County Coroner's office, as we have chronicled in past issues.

We don't think of these events as history while we're living them, but future generations certainly will.

On the other hand, some people seem to have an inkling that they are making history or helping to preserve it. Alamo photographer Albert Davies took countless images of Contra Costa people and places, and one gets the sense he knew these images had to be preserved for history. Our staff has been cataloging and digitizing these images, with invaluable fundraising assistance from the Alamo Improvement Association.

Several Contra Costa residents in the 1870s voted for the first time thanks to the Fifteenth Amendment giving African Americans the right to vote, and they knew it was history in the making, as documented in Marjorie Newton's article in this issue.



Kensington pharmacist Louis L. Stein (pictured above, in a photo from our archive), one of our founders, certainly had a sense of history, as his huge collection of historic Contra Costa items became the start of our History Center archive, also outlined in the pages of this issue. All of us here at the History Center are equally committed to preserving our shared heritage. The History Center thrives because everyday people pull together to do extraordinary things. We are thrilled to share the journey with you.

IN THE ARCHIVES

New archives documenting historic County records and decisions have been donated to us by the Contra Costa County government ... **see page 3**

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Bombing Of Japan In WWII And Japanese Emigration To Concord Explored In Concord Historical Society Event

Article And Photo By John Greitzer

The World War II firebombing of several Japanese cities and the ensuing emigration of survivors to the U.S., including Concord, was presented on June 14 at a well-attended event sponsored by the Concord Historical Society at the Concord Museum and Event Center.

The presentation was made by CHS Board Member Don Seta, whose mother survived the bombing of Wakayama, Japan at age 15, and later married an American serviceman and came with him to Concord. She attended the June 14 event. The session was introduced by CHS First Vice President Vivian Boyd.

Don presented some of the background information on the circumstances that led the United States to bomb Japanese cities including Wakayama, Kobe and Osaka in a firebombing campaign (Wakayama is about fifty miles south of Osaka). He also discussed the patriotic feelings of Japanese-American citizens who fought for the U.S. against Japan.

Some survivors of the Osaka and Wakayama firebombing emigrated to Concord, he said.

One interesting aspect of the presentation was the perspective of John Aiso, a Japanese American U.S. military official from Los Angeles who participated in a 1943 conference on "Problems After the War". At the conference, Aiso objected to the internment of innocent Japanese and Japanese American people after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but also was quoted as saying that "we have to rid Japan of its fanatical military rulers" and supported the war effort against Japan. Aiso was the head of the Military Intelligence Service Language School and was the highest-ranking Japanese American person in the Armed Forces during WWII. The John Aiso Library at the Defense language Institute in Monterey is named for him.

Don also showed the audience a brief portion of a 1988 animated Japanese film about the firebombing campaign, called "Grave of the Fireflies." While he only showed a few minutes of the film, its emotional impact could not be missed, with its vivid depiction of the effects of the bombing on a Japanese family.



Approximately 50 people attended the event.

After the presentation and question-and-answer session, the audience was invited upstairs to see the Concord Museum, which was a pleasure to see and is highly recommended.

We thank Don Seta and the Concord Historical Society for this very informative event.

Don Seta addresses the audience at the Concord Museum and Events Center. A frame from "Grave of the Fireflies" is onscreen.

Inside The Archives

Contra Costa County Donates 23 Historic Volumes To CCCHS

Article and photos by John Greitzer

Contra Costa County officials have donated 23 historic items to our archive, including records of Board of Supervisors' actions, wills recorded in the County, and records of the County's early school districts, among other treasures. These volumes generally date from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, though some items are of more recent vintage, as late as the 1970s.



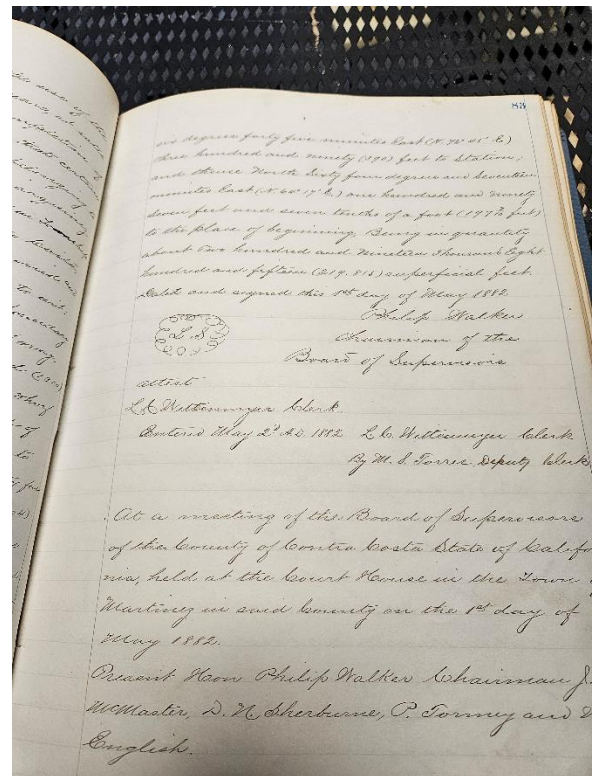
This serendipitous event began in May when CCCHS was contacted by the Office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, who very kindly asked if we would be interested in some of these volumes which they believed might be of historic value.

We gratefully took them up on their offer, looked through the volumes they were offering, and identified 23 specific items that we thought would make important additions to our existing collection of historic county records.

Four of us – LeighAnn and board members Lisa Gorrell, Tara Weber and myself -- transferred the books to the History Center on June 30. Fortunately, the History Center is only a block and a half from the County Administration Building where the books were stored.

We appreciate the outreach and assistance from County staff, particularly Jami Morritt, Senior Deputy County Administrator and Chief Assistant Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, and Ari Miles, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator.

One of the volumes, a Record of Wills, adds to the set of Record of Wills books that we already had in our archive. The other volumes are new to us, representing another set of historic records to expand our ever-growing collection of archives documenting the history of the County, its government, people, places and events. We are in the process of cataloging these new volumes so they will be available for research and review.



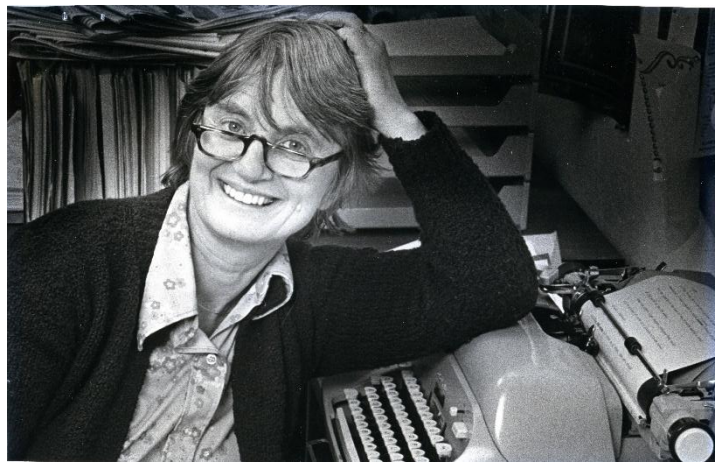
CCCHS Remembers Nilda Rego, Advocate For Local History And Popular “Days Gone By” Newspaper Columnist

By Marjorie Newton

The Contra Costa County Historical Society is saddened by the passing of long-time friend and “Days Gone By” newspaper columnist Nilda Rego. Nilda passed away on April 19, 2026, at the age of 99.

Nilda Rego and her husband Dan, who died in 2022, were long-time members of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. For more than a quarter of a century they contributed their time and efforts to the organization. However, the most important contribution to the Society is the Nilda Rego Collection, spanning over six decades from 1961-2016, consisting of sixteen boxes of searchable newspaper articles written by Nilda about Contra Costa County history.

Nilda was born in Berkeley on February 13, 1927. She entered the University of California at Berkeley and earned a degree in journalism. She and Dan married, had a daughter, and moved to Portland, Oregon in 1950. Five more children, all boys, were born over the next twelve years and the family returned to California in 1969, settling in Moraga.



Nilda in an undated photo from our Photo Archive

Nilda’s first job after moving back to the Bay Area was society editor for the *Martinez News-Gazette*. She began writing a weekly history column called “Days Gone By” for the weekly *Concord Transcript* beginning in 1987 and soon after for the *Contra Costa Times*, until her retirement in 2015. The columns were extremely popular among the newspaper’s readers and were eventually compiled into a three-volume series of books entitled Days Gone By.

Nilda was recognized by the Conference of California Historical Societies in 1991 for her accomplishments in documenting local history. They granted her their Award of Merit which was given to her at the CCCHS Annual Meeting in Alamo that year.

Nilda’s talent will live on in the work that remains for research and enjoyment. The book series, published by the Contra Costa County Historical Society, is available for purchase in the CCCHS Bookstore, either [online](#) or in person at the History Center. Her collection is searchable at the History Center by arrangement.

Thank you, Nilda and Dan, for your invaluable contribution to the Contra Costa County Historical Society and to the cause of preserving local history.

Nilda Rego (February 13, 1927 - April 19, 2026)

CCCHS Co-Founder Louis L. Stein Left An Invaluable Legacy

By LeighAnn Davis

Louis L. Stein was born in Berkeley in 1902 and spent his career in nearby Kensington, but his influence radiates far beyond the area where he lived. Stein lived at the intersection of practicality and passion, someone whose career as a pharmacist quietly supported a second, lifelong vocation: rescuing history before it disappeared.

From a young age, Stein possessed a collector's instinct. He was drawn to the ledger tucked in a forgotten drawer, the stack of railroad timetables destined for the trash, the family Bible left behind when a household moved away. He believed everyday objects, tied to ordinary people, held extraordinary value. He collected widely and carefully



Source: CCCHS Photo Archive

After earning his pharmacy degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1924, Stein opened the Arlington Pharmacy in Kensington in 1928. The pharmacy became a community hub where neighbors gathered and exchanged news. In its early years, the pharmacy included a soda fountain, a U.S. Post Office, and a lending library.

Stein's collecting was an act of stewardship. He understood that Contra Costa County's history was fragile, scattered, and at risk of being lost as families moved, businesses closed, and older generations passed away. He rescued letters and diaries, maps and land records, court files and tax assessment books, photographs, negatives and artifacts from pharmacy bottles to silverware from the John Marsh family.

The photo above shows Stein in 1961 atop a hill overlooking the Brenzel Ehlers farmhouse site on Bear Creek, with the hills of Walnut Creek in the background.

Stein worked alongside Judge A.F. Bray and others in establishing the Contra Costa County Historical Society in 1951. Two years later he purchased the 100-year-old Vincente Martinez Adobe in Martinez to save it from demolition. Thanks to his commitment, the adobe survives today as part of the John Muir National Historic Site. He also helped create the Pharmacy Museum at Columbia State Park, blending his professional expertise with his historical passion.

When the CCCHS History Center was established in 1984, Louis and his wife Mildred began donating their historic materials. These donations were foundational, marking the start of our archive. Stein gave future generations the ability to understand where they came from. He gave genealogists the threads to trace family stories. He gave students and authors the raw material of history. Most importantly, he gave the community a sense of identity.

LeighAnn Davis is the Executive Director of the Contra Costa County Historical Society. She gratefully acknowledges the efforts of volunteers Colin and Mitzi in digitizing the records of Louis Stein's donations to CCCHS and cataloging those many donations, which helped make this article possible and enabled CCCHS to better present the Stein Collection to researchers and the public.

Contra Costa Residents Celebrated The 15th Amendment Granting Them Voting Rights In 1870

By Marjorie Newton

The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified on February 3, 1870. Its purpose was to ensure that African American men, particularly former slaves after the Civil War, could exercise their right to vote. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1850. The Fourteenth Amendment, in 1868, granted citizenship and equal protection. However, in some states, legal loopholes and discriminatory practices prevented Black men from voting, resulting in the need for the Fifteenth Amendment. It needed approval from 28 states to become law (three-fourths of the states representing three-fourths of the population), but it was approved by all 37 states.

LOOK HERE! LOOK HERE!
SEE WHAT THREE-FOURTHS OF THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE DONE!
They have made me an Enfranchised
American Citizen!
AND IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDG-
ment of the boon, I would respectfully
announce to the public that I have provided,
at the Old Stand,
Main Street, Pacheco,
to furnish them (excluding Indians not taxed)
with conveniences for enjoying the comfort
and luxury of
Hot and Cold Water Baths,
And have also adopted a reduced schedule of
rates for
**Hair Cutting, Shampooing
and Shaving,**
as follows:
Hair Cutting.....Twenty-Five Cents.
Shampooing.....Twenty-Five Cents.
Shaving.....Twenty-Five Cents.
Hot Water Baths.....Fifty Cents.
Pacheco, March 12th, 1870.
GEO. SEGUI.

Contra Costa County, according to the 1870 United States Census, had twelve Black men and two Black women living within its borders.

Celebrating the enfranchisement were brothers George Segui and Joseph Segui, who were African-American natives of Florida. George Segui established his tonsorial (hair-cutting) emporium in Pacheco. His brother Joseph's barber shop was in Martinez. The *News-Gazette* of April 9, 1870 reported that George "fired the morning volley of 30 booms in honor of the righteous recognition of the manhood's right of his race." Shown at left is an ad George Segui placed in the *News-Gazette* celebrating passage of the amendment.

Joseph Segui was the first to register to vote in the county under the Fifteenth Amendment. The *Martinez News-Gazette* of April 16, 1870 describes Joseph as "a worthy resident for nearly, or fully, 20 years. His acquisition now of these rights will be gratifying to every man whose sense of justice is not perverted by prejudice."

Joseph Segui died in October 1892 at the age of 62, having worked as a barber in Martinez for about thirty years. George Segui, who had moved his family and business to Berkeley, died in June of 1907 in Alameda County. The privilege of voting had been

so important to these men, it was cause for a joyous celebration.

The right for women to vote had been included in the original draft of the Fifteenth Amendment, but that provision was dropped as the draft made its way through Congress. Women would receive the Constitutional right to vote via the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Notwithstanding the joy felt by the Segui brothers and others over the Fifteenth Amendment, it proved insufficient to provide unhindered voting rights to all Black citizens, particularly in some Southern states, which created strict criteria for voter registration that excluded many Black people. This led Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

President's Message

By Tara Weber

Happy Summer, and Happy 250th America! I hope everyone had a fantastic 4th of July and enjoyed the mild summer temps. Now is the perfect time to visit the History Center, then stroll around downtown Martinez or hike the nearby Carquinez Strait.

Our dedicated volunteers continue to do amazing work: the Finding Aid for the **L.L. Stein Collection** is **complete** and Phase I of the **Veale Collection project**, looking into the collection's condition and historical significance, is finished thanks to one of our Diablo Valley College interns. We also awarded three DVC students a \$1,000 scholarship for their submission to this year's CCCHS Essay Contest. Great job everyone!

Thanks to our members and donors who have contributed to our Summer Appeal thus far. Your generosity is remarkable and grows each year. Each dollar is appreciated and spent wisely. A special thank you to the Board of Directors at the California Foundation for Stronger Communities (CFSC) for the unsolicited grant of \$45,000. With this donation, CCCHS can expand its digital collections and improve online access. It also lets us expand public programs like our new "Archive Yourself" program and push forward with a capital campaign to acquire a larger facility to accommodate more workstations and our ever-growing collections.

If you or someone you know has a spare building to gift or sell, please call me or Leigh Ann! **(925) 229-1042**. Until next time,

Tara

CCCHS Membership Application

☐ New ☐ Renewal ☐ Gift Date _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____ Apt/Ste. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Newsletter delivery: ☐ Mail ☐ Email (PDF file) ☐ Both

I have enclosed a check in the amount of \$ _____

Please call CCCHS with your credit card information. (925) 229-1042

Member Benefits:

- Society's quarterly newsletter *Bulletin*
- Invitation to member only events
- Reduced rates for CCCHS-performed research at the History Center
- Reprint of c 1890 Contra Costa map
- Eligible to join CFCU (Chevron Federal Credit Union)
- 10% bookstore discount

Historian Level and Up: Benefits vary by level. Please visit cocohistory.org for a complete listing.

- Reprint of the 1882 book History of Contra Costa County
- Set of 4 notecards depicting Contra Costa County
- Complimentary admission & VIP seating at the CCCHS Annual Meeting & Luncheon for member and one guest
- Private Tour of the History Center for member (and up to 4 guests)
- CCCHS presentation to the business/organization of your choice

Annual Dues:

☐ Student	\$20
☐ Individual	\$50
☐ Couple	\$90
☐ Historian	\$150
☐ Mt. Diablo	\$300
☐ The 1951 Club	\$750
☐ Stein & Bray Founder's Circle	\$1500

Your membership is tax deductible as allowed by law.



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History inside.

Contra Costa County Historical Society

“Preserve, protect, and provide public access to the records and heritage of Contra Costa County.”

Upcoming Events

Saturday, October 17: Open House & Tour for American Archives Month

History Center, 724 Escobar Street, Martinez

We are located at 724 Escobar Street in downtown Martinez. Visitors are always welcome. For those who want to read or research a specific topic or document, we ask that you make an appointment in advance, so we can ensure the right staff person is on hand to assist you. Appointments can be made at info@cocohistory.org or by phone at (925) 229-1042. We are closed the last two weeks of December and reopen the first Tuesday in January.

We hope you can join us for these events.

History Center hours

Tuesday through Thursday, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

First and third Saturdays of the month, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

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