



# El Cerrito historical society

P.O. BOX 304, EL CERRITO, CA. 94530

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## *The Forge*

No. 4

The Official Publication of the El Cerrito Historical Society - Verne Odlin, Editor

**OUR NEXT MEETING WILL BE AT THE EL CERRITO SENIOR CENTER SUNDAY OCTOBER 16<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm**  
*(Please note that this is change in the time and day of the week since we are changing to daytime meetings.)*

### **PROGRAM NOTES:**

- (1) The program for Sunday Oct. 16 will be a special presentation by Chung Mei home alumni – see president's message for details.
- (2) Note that on Friday Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> we will be having a special event at 5:30 pm at the El Cerrito Library celebrating our new book.

**Editor's note:** I have seen an advance copy of our new book. It's GREAT – a book you must have in your possession!

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We have a very exciting program on tap for our October 16th meeting. That afternoon, a group of Chung Mei home alumni will be giving a video presentation and leading a discussion about the Chung Mei home and it's sister establishment for girls, the Min Quong home in Oakland. More about this interesting program can be found inside this newsletter.

Arcadia Publishing has informed the Board that our book about El Cerrito will be (published) the week of September 5th. What this means in practical terms is that the book will be appearing on the shelves of local merchants that week. We are planning a special event on Friday, September 9th at the El Cerrito Library to officially mark the book's publication. The event will be at 5:30 PM in the afternoon (after the library closes) and everyone is invited. A flyer for this event is enclosed.

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## *The Chung Mei Home*

**The Chung Mei home** (Chinese American) was opened on October 7, 1923, by Dr. Charles R. Shepard, a Baptist minister, as a shelter for orphaned or abandoned Chinese-American boys. Dr. Sheperd had been an educator and missionary for a number of years in China so he spoke the Chinese language very well. The original Chung Mei home was located in an old wooden building in West Berkeley, at 3000 Dwight Way. By the early 1930's it was clear that the home had outgrown this location and more space was necessary.

After failing to find a suitable facility that they could afford to move to in Berkeley, it was decided to relocate to a rural area and to build a new facility from the ground up. The site selected was in El Cerrito, at the intersection of Hill and Elm Streets. This property had formerly been the dairy of the Heidle family. Just up the hill was the Canepa nursery, where for many years the Canepa and Ricci families maintained a number of hothouses to produce cut flowers for sale.

The new Chung Mei home opened in El Cerrito on June 30, 1935 with a grand celebration. The building was designed to house 75-100 boys and 68 boys moved in on that day. Even today the Chinese and Spanish style of architecture is obvious. Inside the building the Chinese heritage of the boys was carried forward in the design and architecture. The Chung Mei boys were very hard working. In fact, through the proceeds from their wood yard, their musical performances and their plays, they paid the entire \$10,500 cost of the land for the home. The boys also paid a part of the construction cost, the balance being paid for by a number of generous individuals and community organizations.

The Chung Mei home in some ways resembled a military school. Life there was fairly regimented and the boys were highly disciplined. They had a well-known drum and bugle corps that performed frequently. Old-time residents remember how the boys marched in formation to and from the public schools they attended. The Chung Mei home closed in 1954. After it closed, the home was turned over to the Western Baptist Bible College and then later it became Armstrong Preparatory School. Today it is the campus of the Windrush School.



I would like to thank everyone who came to our July meeting and picnic last month. The weather cooperated, we had plenty of food and desserts, and about 20 people dropped by for lunch at Huber Park. Together this all worked out to a very pleasant afternoon. Special thanks go out to Joyce and Verne Odlin for doing advance setup work and for reserving a spot for us in the park.

Your Historical Society now has now been catapulted into the electronic age. Betty Buginas, the force behind the El Cerrito Wire web site, has very graciously agreed to host the Historical Society's website. You can find us at [www.elcerritowire.com/history](http://www.elcerritowire.com/history) on the Internet. Currently featured on the web site is the article about airports that the Historical Society authored for El Cerrito Magazine.

Also on the web site is one of my favorite pictures of El Cerrito. This picture shows the Stark family in front of the tramway that led to the rock crusher that used to be where Cerrito Vista Park is today. I would wager that about 99 and 44/100% of the citizens of El Cerrito have no clue that this structure ever existed (nor that a Santa Fe spur ran up Moeser Lane to collect the thousands of tons of crushed rock the Bates & Borland company shipped out). Any of you who have suggestions on ways to make more of our citizens aware of the community is history, please let me know! I hope the web site is a start.

Tom Panas, President

### **About the society**

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a non-political, non-profit organization and has only one agenda: to locate and preserve local history - of course focused on the history of El Cerrito.

The Historical Society is always looking for old photographs and memorabilia that can be copied and added to the Society's collection of historic materials. Of course, outright donations of photographs and other El Cerrito memorabilia are always greatly appreciated. Memberships in and donations to the Historical Society are encouraged.

The Historical Society meets once a quarter and publishes its newsletter, The Forge, once a quarter. The Historical Society also has an ongoing effort to collect oral history from as many old-timers as possible. Please contact the Historical Society if you or someone you know can contribute oral history, photographs, or memorabilia to the Society's collection. Without your help, we cannot preserve the history of El Cerrito.