



Pinole **Historical** Society

E-News

PLEASE RENEW YOUR 2012 PHS MEMBERSHIP

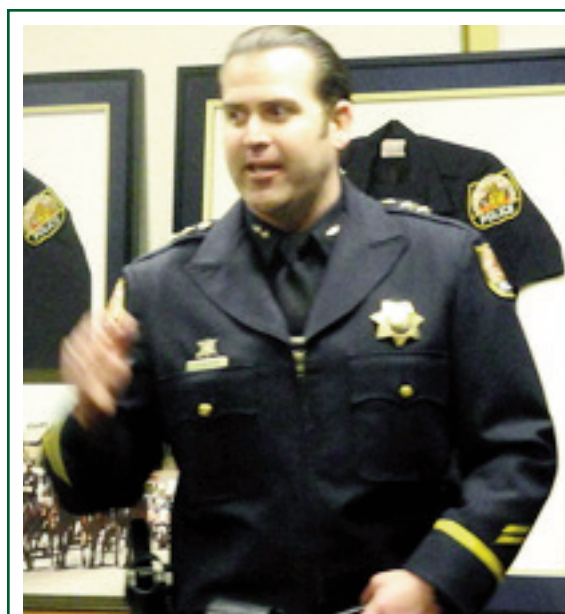
Membership renewals have been trickling in over the last few months. If you haven't already renewed (new members are also welcome!), please fill out the form on the last page of this newsletter and send us a check.

Dues remain only \$30 per person, are a very inexpensive way to support all the PHS activities and programs — and are **TAX DEDUCTIBLE**.

PHS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Can you assist the society with any of the following? Helping with any of these will be a much-appreciated contribution to the story of our city.

- Gathering oral histories on video and/ or audio
 - Writing articles for PHS Newsbriefs, our quarterly printed newsletter
 - Volunteering at our quarterly membership programs.
- Please be an *active* member of the society.



Police Commander Matthew Messier chronicled the history of law enforcement in Pinole at our Feb. 16 meeting. Read the Pinole Patch story on the next page.

PHS MEETINGS MOVED TO KAISER MEDICAL OFFICE BUILDING

We had very positive comments from people who attended our February 16 meeting in the Kaiser Medical Office Building's conference room on Pinole Valley Road. It's a beautiful facility.

Our remaining three meetings this year

will be held at Kaiser: May 17 (our annual meeting with election of board members and ratification of by-laws changes), September 6, and November 1. They are all Thursdays.

We hope to see you there.



Your email has been sent.



HISTORIC PINOLE

By Rob Shea Email the author February 19, 2012

Local Connections

Historic Pinole: History of Law Enforcement

Prohibition, bank heist, 1970s riot and more. Good ol' days and bad ol' days in Pinole.

From the days of chasing cattle rustlers, through the Prohibition-era gangsters to present challenges, Pinole Police Cmdr. Matthew Messier sweeps through the history of law enforcement in Pinole. He follows leads, probes clues, and digs relentlessly.

When he joined the department in 2001, Messier realized there existed next to nothing in an organized, documented history of the police department. He began researching and collecting photos, old uniforms and stories of police exploits, reaching back to before Pinole cityhood and continuing to the present.

"I made it a mission for me personally to try to acquire as much information and as much history as I could about the police department and law enforcement in this city," Messier told the Pinole Historical Society on Thursday in a presentation that lasted about 45 minutes. He shared anecdotes, artifacts and legends.

He started in 1867, when Sheriff Harry Morse, "one of the most famous California lawmen in the Old West," chased down "bandito" Narato Ponce.

Motivated by a \$500 bounty applied by the state governor, Morse found the suspect at a ranch in present-day Pleasanton. During a gunfight, Morse wounded Ponce, but he escaped. Morse and other

constables tracked him from the Black Hills of the county, then cornered him in a Pinole adobe near Pinole Creek. As the suspect raised his gun to fire at him, Morse shot him dead.



"Back then, when you were in law enforcement you were paid by the arrest," Messier said.

Between then and the time that Pinole incorporated as a city in 1903, incidents were not well-documented, he said. Researching city council minutes from the time, Messier found reference to a proposal to provide a marshal with a

uniform, a gun and a badge.

For years the marshals, which the county referred to as constables, patrolled Pinole, Rodeo and Crockett. The first constable, John Collins, owned the Klondike Saloon at 612 Tennent Ave., and lived in the upstairs of the building, Messier said.

Around that time, Pinole had 13 saloons to serve workers from the powder works plant in what is now Hercules, the Union Oil refinery in Rodeo, and the C&H refinery in Crockett, Messier said.

In 1918, Arthur "Jerry" McDonald, the ex-foreman of the Hercules powder plant, was appointed as constable. The next year, the sale of alcohol became illegal in the United States. Saloons turned into soda fountains. That era, along with the Great Depres-

HISTORIC PINOLE: HISTORY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

sion, saw the rise of gangsters, bootleggers, and bank robbers. One day it hit Pinole hard.

In 1929, McDonald was shot and killed during a robbery at the Bank of Pinole in Rodeo by the notorious Fleagle Gang. Jake and Ralph Fleagle and their accomplices were widely known for bank robberies, including a 1928 Colorado incident in which they killed several people.

“These guys were bad guys,” Messier said. “A lot of people don’t recall the Fleagle Gang but there’s a lot of Americana that surrounds the Fleagle Gang. There’s Disney characters, the Fleagle Beagles, that were modeled after the Fleagle Gang. There were songs written during this time about the Fleagle Gang. They were famous across the nation. They were the first really pro-active armed robbers. They were credited with 62 percent of armed robberies in the western half of the United States for the period of 1919 to 1932.”

After McDonald’s death, Gene Shea served as the last constable for Pinole until his retirement. He was succeeded by Hugh Young, whom Messier called the “father” of the modern Pinole Police Department. A former patrol officer for Contra Costa County, Young took over for Shea in 1943. He worked alone, on a motorcycle, and subsequently entered the Guinness Book of World Records for writing the most traffic citations, Messier said. Young became the city’s first police chief.

With the political, social and racial upheaval in the country during the 1960s and ’70s, the city entered a time when police chiefs served short tenures.

In 1974, officer John Sellers became the second Pinole officer to die on duty. He was shot and killed inside Antlers Tavern by a drunken 67-year-old man



Officer Floyd Swartz

with a pistol. In 1975, gang fights and a riot erupted in Old Town during the Fiesta del Pinole. The event has not been held since.

Only six years after the death of Sellers, the third law enforcement officer in the city’s history was murdered. Messier recounted the tragic death of Floyd “Bernie” Swartz during the manhunt of a killer at Pinole Creek. His widow, Kim Swartz, was pregnant with their daughter, Amber, at the time. In 1988, Amber was kidnapped from her front yard on Savage Avenue.

Messier noted that the longest tenure by a police chief is Ted Barnes, from 1980 to 1999. He has been succeeded by chiefs Jim Rose, Paul Clancy, and John Hardester, the

current chief.

For Messier, the present is still about reaching into the past. The Fleagle Gang comes to mind, as does the Tommy gun they likely used to down McDonald.

“I actually had it, in my hands, for almost a year, but they had to do a federal audit for assault weapons and they took it from me,” Messier said. “So, I’m still trying to get it back, but they want it because they used it after it was recovered for their SWAT team and there’s a lot of history they have associated with it, too. We’re kind of fighting over this gun right now.”

Three Fleagle Gang members, including Ralph Fleagle, were caught and hanged in Colorado. Later, Jake Fleagle was shot dead by deputies at a train station in Missouri. Legend claims the gang buried some of its loot in locations that include spots in California.

“There’s still people that actively hunt for this money that they think is buried in the hills,” Messier said.

History marches on.

— Reprinted with permission of *Pinole Patch*.

POLICE DEPARTMENT HISTORY PAGE ON CITY'S WEBSITE

See the new *Pinole Police History page* on the city's website. You will learn about Wild-West shootouts, cattle drives downtown, 1920s gangsters, World War II sabotage, Fiesta Del Pinole riots, and other historical events you had no idea had occurred!

Learn about Pinole's first lawmen, like saloon-owning Constable John Collins and rough-and-tumble Arthur McDonald, who was killed during a

shootout in 1929. See how the Pinole Police Department grew from one famous, ticket-writing motorcycle cop to a professional, modern police force. Read about the three officers who paid the ultimate sacrifice for this community when they took on violent criminals.

The new *Pinole Police History page* is full of great, colorful stories and fun pictures. You will feel like you're walking through time.



The screenshot shows the website's header with a navigation menu: HOME, RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, ABOUT PINOLE, DEPTS, CONTACT. A search bar is in the top right. The main content area is titled "PINOLE POLICE DEPARTMENT HISTORY".

Police Dept

- Welcome
- Police Directory
- Dept
- Goals/Ethics
- Reports & Stats
- Amber Alert
- Police History
- Fallen Heroes
- Crime Prevention
- Unsolved
- FAQ


Related Links:

- Pinole History
- Emergency Info
- Safety Tips
- Fire Dept
- Resident Info

PINOLE POLICE DEPARTMENT HISTORY

The first recorded law enforcement action in Pinole involved one of the Bay Area's most famous western lawmen. Harry N. Morse was the third Sheriff of Alameda County and one of the most famous gunfighters of his time. His exploits are well documented in John Boessenecker's book, *Lawman*. Few people know that one of Sheriff Morse's famous gunfights occurred here in Pinole before it was a town!

Below is an excerpt from the retelling of the Pinole shooting by William Mero that has been updated with more accurate information.



One of the most desperate gunfights in old Contra Costa occurred in 1867. Narato Ponce was a notorious East Bay thug, murderer and horse thief. The Governor of California, Frederick Low, placed a \$500 bounty on Ponce's head. During a bloody gun battle at the present intersection of Highway 580 and Santa Rita Road in Pleasanton, Ponce was nearly shot to pieces by Alameda County Sheriff Harry Morse. Ponce was wounded, but he escaped and fled into the Black Hills of Contra Costa County.

Law officers later learned that Narato Ponce was hiding somewhere in Pinole near the San Pablo Bay. The lawmen began systematically searching the scattered adobes dotting the Pinole Valley. At the upper end of the canyon was the adobe located next to Pinole Creek (near modern day Adobe Road). When officers found Ponce hiding in the adobe, he attempted to flee up the canyon. Gunshots were exchanged and Ponce was wounded in the right hand. Finally cornered, the killer stepped to the edge of the creek, and took careful aim at Sheriff Morse with a six-gun in his left hand. Incredibly Sheriff Morse squeezed the trigger of his rifle a split second before Ponce and killed the desperado, Ponce. The affair was warmly applauded by the entire law-abiding community of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.



ELS PINOLE

Very little of Pinole's law enforcement history survived from 1868-1903, however when the Town of Pinole was incorporated in 1903 we find the first reference to the town's law enforcement. The first Town of Pinole minutes, a 1903 document, record a motion made that the Town "Marshall be allowed dollars to purchase a pistol, badge, and outfit." Although other historical records refer to Pinole's early law enforcement officers as Constables, the Town of Pinole minutes refer to them as Marshals.

PHS INTERVIEWS ON CITY OF PINOLE WEBSITE

Miss one of our programs on Pinole Community TV?

Not a problem. The city's website now has a dedicated section devoted to PINOLE HISTORY on its "Videos Online" page.

You can view the numerous PHS programs right on your computer. Go to the city's

website www.ci.pinoles.ca.us/about/videos.html and scroll down to PINOLE HISTORY.

You'll find our interviews, Veterans Day programs, George Vincent's two walking tours of historic downtown Pinole, and the very fine PCTV-produced, 12-part series based on the Historic Walking Tour brochure. It's great TV!



For your generosity

Jim Payne became the first contributor to our video archives by giving us four reels of film from the Fiesta del Pinole parades from the 1960s. We will digitize these reels (and return them to Jim) and establish an archive not only on DVD, but on a YouTube channel dedicated to Pinole videos.

If you have home movies of earlier days in Pinole, or of any early or recent events, we'd love to digitize them for our our archives. The PHS accepts donations of many historic things, so if you are cleaning out that file or closet, give us a chance before you recycle. E-mail info@pinolehistoricalsociety.org or call (510) 724-9507.

Kimbra St. Martin donated several 1950s photos of her family's property in the Point Wilson area.

PHS BACK AT PINOLE FARMERS' MARKET APRIL 14

The Pinole Historical Society will be back at its booth at the Pinole Farmers' Market on April 14, continuing on alternate Saturdays through December 22. Our schedule is:

- April 14 and 28
- May 12 and 26
- June 9 and 23
- July 7 and 21
- August 4 and 18
- September 1, 15, and 29
- October 13 and 27

- November 10 and 24
- December 8 and 22

We have all of the area history books (we just ordered the El Cerrito book to complete our inventory), greeting cards, postcards, Fernandez Mansion magnets, and Old School magnets.

One or more of these items will be on sale at each farmers' market. They are great additions to your history library and make wonderful gifts for friends and relatives.

BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM PINOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We have an array of local history books for sale, including the new El Sobrante book, published on January 11, 2012.

There's an order form on the next page for your convenience.

The Pinole Historical Society promotes awareness and appreciation of history through preservation and education, and chronicles the city's heritage for current and future generations.

PHS SEEKING FAMILY FILMS FOR HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

Got film? The Pinole Historical Society is embarking on a major project to archive the city's history. We want to establish a permanent, digitized collection of Pinole's history.

Do you have film of past Holy Ghost parades, Pinole Valley High School Homecoming parades, Memorial Day or July 4 parades?

How about important athletic events, such as a high-school football, basketball, baseball, softball, or volleyball game?

Perhaps you have film of an important event that took place in Fernandez Park, or a ribbon cutting or an event that has a place in Pinole's history—such as the 1958 flood?

We're looking for any video or film you have—VHS, Beta, camcorder, DV tape, 8mm, Super 8mm, 16mm, 35mm, motion picture.



Nearly everyone has taken home movies. That makes everyone who has taken film a historian.

We want to collect, digitize, catalog, and preserve old movies on DVD (and whatever formats are to come) to exhibit, educate, and entertain.

The PHS will share these videos on a film archive that we will establish, similar to the The Pioneers Film Archive on YouTube created by the California Pioneers of Santa Clara (www.youtube.com/sccpioneers).

Film connects with the past in a unique way. It's immersive, educational, and entertaining. It's a way to get young people interested in history.

Got film? Please contact us at info@pinolehistoricalsociety.org. We'll return your film; we just want to borrow and digitize it.

SERVE ON THE PHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As we approach our Annual Membership Meeting on May 17, several Board of Directors seats are available and need to be filled by election of new directors and re-election of current directors. Terms are three years.

Any member in good standing may serve and may nominate himself/herself or be nominated by another member in good standing. Duties include atten-

dance at board and regular membership meetings and a willingness to accept and fulfill assignments.

Please send a brief statement of your qualifications and desire to serve to the Pinole Historical Society, P. O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564, by April 30. Nominations will also be accepted at the annual meeting.

Pinole**Historical**Society

P.O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564

www.PinoleHistoricalSociety.org info@PinoleHistoricalSociety.org

(510) 724-9507



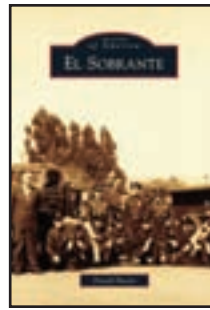
Pinole



Hercules



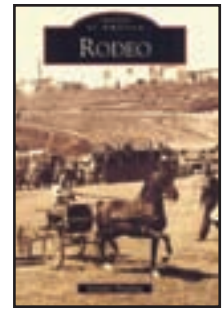
Richmond



El Sobrante



Crockett



Rodeo

LOCAL HISTORY BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM THE PINOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Pinole Historical Society has Arcadia Publishing books about our surrounding communities of Hercules, Richmond, El Sobrante, Crockett, Rodeo, Martinez, and Port Costa. And, of course, we have plenty of Pinole books in stock.

You may purchase one or more of these books from us at the Pinole Farmers' Market—we'll be there every other Saturday through the end of December.

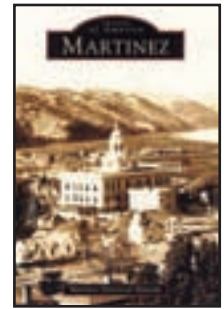
The Pinole, Hercules, Richmond, and El Sobrante books retail for **\$24**, including 8.75% sales tax. The Crockett, Rodeo, Martinez, and Port Costa books are **\$22**, including 8.75% sales tax.

Or, you may order one or more by mail and

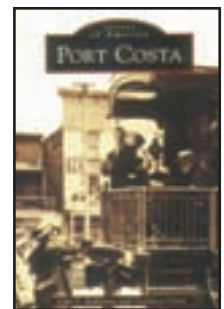
we'll ship them to you. Send your order to **Pinole Historical Society, P.O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564**.

The prices, including 8.75% sales tax and postage are:

- Pinole:** \$27
- Hercules:** \$27
- Richmond:** \$27
- El Sobrante:** \$27
- Crockett:** \$25
- Rodeo:** \$25
- Martinez:** \$25
- Port Costa:** \$25



Martinez



Port Costa

Name _____ Phone () _____

Address _____ E-mail _____

City _____ State ____ Zip _____

of Pinole books @ \$27 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Hercules books @ \$27 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Richmond books @ \$27 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of El Sobrante books @ \$27 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Crockett books @ \$25 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Rodeo books @ \$25 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Martinez books @ \$25 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

of Port Costa books @ \$25 (book, sales tax, postage) _____

Total amount enclosed \$ _____

**Please mail your check for the total amount due,
payable to Pinole Historical Society, to:**

PINOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 285, PINOLE, CA 94564



Pinole Community Service Day

**Saturday, June 2nd 2012
Fernandez Park**

Make a difference in Pinole!

Volunteer on a variety of half-day community projects throughout the City including landscape work at parks, visiting with seniors and helping at schools. Sponsored by the Pinole Community Services Commission. Pre-register for your choice of volunteer project or register the morning of the event. Every volunteer receives a free breakfast, tote bag and BBQ at Fernandez Park. Registration starts at 8am

And we are looking for projects! Any organization with a project idea is encouraged to submit it to Recreation Director Amy Wooldridge at recreation@ci.pinole.ca.us by March 16, 2012.



Info and applications:

(510) 724-9062 recreation@ci.pinole.ca.us
www.ci.pinole.ca.us/recreation



Pinole **Historical** Society

Help us preserve Pinole's history through:

- Exhibits at the Pinole Library
- Pinole history programs in schools
- Pinole Community TV programs
- Walking tours of downtown Pinole
- Veterans' Day event in Fernandez Park
- A proposed municipal museum

Annual memberships are only \$30

Please mail the membership application today!

Pinole **Historical** Society

2012 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(PINOLE RESIDENCY NOT REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP)

**PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION, AND SEND CASH OR YOUR CHECK,
TO PINOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 285, PINOLE, CA 94564**

MEMBERSHIPS ARE FOR THE 2012 CALENDAR YEAR (EXCEPT LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS)

NAME (each person): _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL (please!): _____

CIRCLE ONE: Annual (\$30) Life (\$150) Business (\$50) Sustaining \$(500)

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: [] Cash \$ _____ [] Check # _____ \$ _____

DATE PAID: _____