

Pinole Historical Society Newsbriefs

Winter 2018



The ferry Hercules, 1908

P.O. Box 285, Pinole, CA 94564

www.PinoleHistoricalSociety.org

info@PinoleHistoricalSociety.org

FIND THE LOST CITIES OF THE EAST BAY ON FEBRUARY 2

Author John Robinson will explore the history of the long-lost cities of Tormey, Selby, Oleum, Valona, Eckley, Port Costa, and Vallejo Junction, among others, in his February 2, 2018, program, "The Lost Cities of the East Bay."

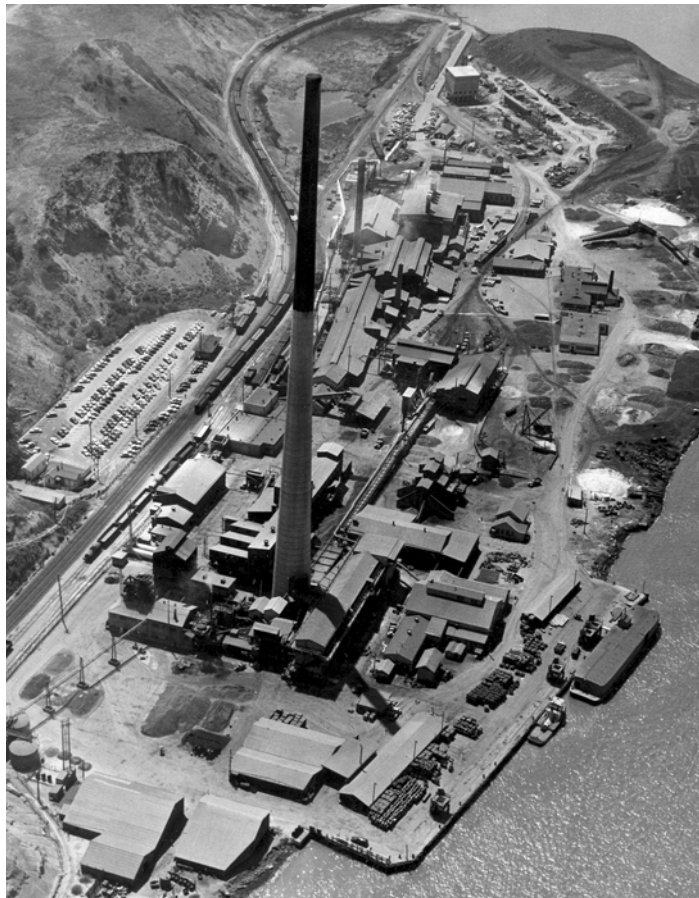
The public is invited to this FREE event in conference rooms 2A and 2B of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, 1301 Pinole Valley Road. Refreshments will be served

"The title of my talk is 'Lost Cities of the East Bay', but the focus is the south side of the Carquinez Strait from the Port Costa Brick Works in the east to Point Pinole in the west," Robinson says.

"I use the word 'cities' for brevity; these places were never cities, or even towns. At best they were villages, a collection of ferry and train stops, hotels, stores, company houses, and, mostly, saloons, that sprang up around the factories and plants of the early twentieth century."

Robinson's talk will include photos and comments about:

- The Port Costa Brick Works;
 - Waterfront Port Costa during the age of the ferries;
 - Eckley as a brick works, a fishing resort, and now a regional park;
 - Vallejo Junction, a ferry terminal west of Crockett that brought people to South Vallejo and was mentioned in a Robert Louis Stevenson story;
 - The Selby Smelting Plant;
 - Tormey;
 - Oleum, a tiny community that sprang up around the Standard Oil Refinery near Rodeo;
 - The Hercules Powder Works; and
 - The Atlas Powder Works at Giant.
- "Most of these places are long gone, or were absorbed into larger communities," Robinson says.
- "But, they all are interesting footnotes to our local history."



Selby Smelting and Lead Co., near Crockett.

Published quarterly by the Pinole Historical Society

WHERE TO FIND NEWSBRIEFS

Pick up *Newsbriefs* at these locations:

AccuTech Auto Care, A.D. Dern Insurance, The Alley Cafe, Antlers Tavern, Bank of the West, Bay Park Retirement Residence, The Bear Claw, Big O Tires, Blue Sky Sports, Cafe Soleil, China House, Cindy's Shear Cuts, Coldwell Banker Bartels Realtors, Crocketts Premier Auto Body, East Bay Coffee Company, George A. Egan, CFP, The Embers, Farmers Insurance (Carol White), Garden of Gems, Good Butter Bakery, Grocery Outlet, Happy Sashimi, Headquarters Salon, Hercules Fitness, Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, K & L Automotive, Kendall Financial Services, Ladies Workout Express, Letcher Bros. Auto Repair, Marrah Molina Therapy, Mechanics Bank, Douglas Oliver, D.D.S., Oliver's Hardware, Attorney Donald E. Patterson, Pinole City Hall, Pinole Creek Cafe, Pinole Hearing Aid Center, Pinole Library, Pinole Paws, Pinole Police Department, Pinole Senior Center, Pinole Senior Village, Pinole Valley Community Church, Promo Zion, Realty World (Viktor Manrique), Ristorante Due Rose, Joel Ross, M.D., Sam's Dog House, Sequoia Real Estate, Chiyo Shidara, D.D.S., Sprouts Farmers Market, State Farm Insurance (Mark Bucklew), State Farm Insurance (Rick Chalk), St. Joseph School, Sugar City Building Materials, Sunshine Floor Covering, Taqueria Sanchez, Tenax Law Group, 10th Inning Baseball Cards, The New Deli, The Red Onion, The UPS Store, Tina's Place, TMF Accounting Services, Top Floor Salon, Albert M. Tsang, D.D.S., West Contra Costa Transit Authority, Windermere Rowland Realty, Wilson & Kratzer Mortuaries, and Zio's Pasta Pronto.

It's also posted on the PHS website (click on NEWSLETTER in the menu bar).

FOR ADVERTISERS: 2,000 printed copies of *PHS Newsbriefs* are distributed every quarter, generating readership among thousands of Pinole and West County residents. Hundreds more receive the newsletter directly from the PHS via its database and website.

If you're interested in advertising, contact Jeff Rubin at info@PinoleHistoricalSociety.org or (510) 724-9507.

PHS CALENDAR

ONGOING

February 2 program: "The Lost Cities of the East Bay." Author John Robinson remembers Eckley, Selby, Oleum, Torney, and other long-lost communities of West Contra Costa County. The public is invited to this FREE event from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in conference rooms 2A and 2B of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, 1301 Pinole Valley Road. Refreshments will be served.

February 14, March 14, April 11: Monthly Board of Directors meeting. The public is invited to attend and speak on any of the items discussed at these meetings. Pinole Senior Center, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

PHS booth at Pinole Farmers' Market. We're taking a few months off. We'll return April 14.

PinoleHistoricalSociety

Board of Directors: Jeff Rubin, President; George Vincent, Vice President; Mary McMains, Treasurer; Jo Ann Gannotti, Secretary; Norma Martínez-Rubin, Carol White. **Directors Emeritus:** Marcia Kalapus, Jack Meehan. **Newsletter Editor:** Jeff Rubin.

2018 PHS MEETING DATES

February 2: "The Lost Cities of the East Bay."

May 4: "What's in a Name?"

September 7: Program to be announced.

November 2: Program to be announced.

All meetings are held from 6:30-8 p.m. in conference rooms 2A and 2B of the Kaiser Permanente Medical Office Building, 1301 Pinole Valley Road.

For more information, call (510) 724-9507, e-mail info@pinolehistoricalsociety.org, or visit our website at www.pinolehistoricalsociety.org.

PHS VIDEOS ON CITY OF PINOLE WEBSITE

Miss one of our history programs on Pinole Community TV? Don't despair. The city's website 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.pinole.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!

The historical society has recorded interviews with several prominent Pinole citizens. Among the videos on the city's website are interviews with Ed LeFebvre, Charlotte (Fernandez) Shea,

former fire chief Alex Clark, and former mayors Jack Meehan and Tom Cutino.

PHS program videos include:

- School Bell dedication.
- Japanese-American internment.

- Bars, Barbers, and Characters.
- A Flood of Memories.
- School Bells and Ink Wells.

We thank Bob Kopp, who recorded most of these events for the society.

President's Message

Jeff Rubin, President, Pinole Historical Society

MUSEUM UPDATE AND 2018 PROGRAMS

In the last issue of *Newsbriefs* I talked about the society's goal of broadening its program offerings to include talks not only on Pinole's history, but also on the history of neighboring communities, and the Bay Area in general.

The response to our John Robinson's program, "Finding the Bay Bridge Troll," last September was so well-received that we invited John to return with an intriguing program, "Finding the Lost Cities of the East Bay." There's a synopsis on the front page of this newsletter.

John will speak to our members and guests on Friday, February 2. I hope you are able to attend; John is very knowledgeable and a lot of fun to hear.

Returning to local history, George Vincent, our vice-president, society co-founder, and historian, is scheduled to present "What's in a Name?" on Friday, May 4.

This program will explore the people – and inanimate objects – behind Pinole's street names. George grew up with many of these people, so expect some very funny, never-before-heard stories.

We are also planning programs by:

• **Tom Barnidge**, the retired Contra Costa Times columnist;

• **John Keibel**, author of *Behind the Barbed Wire: The History of Naval Weapons Station Concord*. I saw him present this program in December and enjoyed it very much.

• **Amelia Sue Marshall**, author of *East Bay Hills: A Brief History* (see page 6). She will likely speak to us in the fall.

We are also going to ask a representative of the U.S. Geological Survey to speak to us about earthquakes in the Bay Area, specifically in the East Bay. The tentative program title is "What's Shakin', Pinole?" (Thanks to Norma Martinez-Rubin for the title).

MUSEUM UPDATE

There was significant progress in the last quarter of 2017, most significantly the receipt of the Pinole History Museum's 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service.

Continued on page 4



Jeff Rubin

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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.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Continued from page 3

This designation will enable the museum to solicit tax-deductible donations, which will begin soon.

The Pinole History Museum Board of Directors (separate from the society's board of directors) is planning for the restoration of the interior of the Faria House and

turning it into "a contemporary museum in a classic home."

The City of Pinole, the museum's partner in this project, has presented markups of the Faria house floor plans to several architectural firms in the Bay Area.

We are waiting for proposals from the architects so we'll know

how much the project will cost, how much money the museum will have to raise, and how long it will take before the museum opens.

These are exciting times for the Pinole Historical Society and the Pinole History Museum.

I hope you share in our excitement and anticipation.

Pinole has such an interesting history. The society has enjoyed sharing it with you through programs, library exhibits, history walks, interviews with notable citizens, and other events.

We are so looking forward to sharing it with you in the Pinole History Museum.



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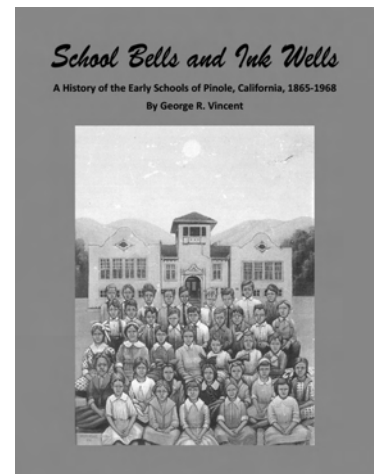
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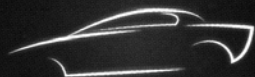
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PHS SELLING NEW BOOK ABOUT EAST BAY HILLS

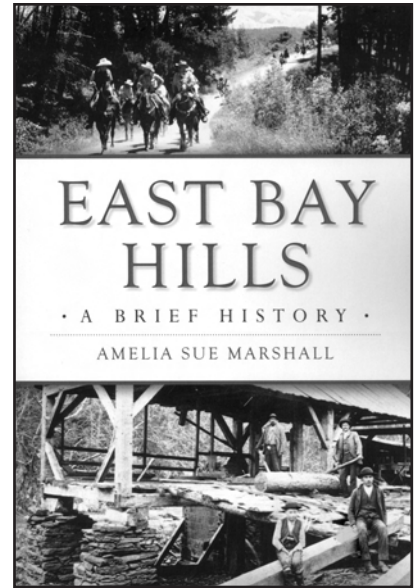
The Pinole Historical Society has a limited number of copies of the new book, *East Bay Hills: A Brief History*, published by Arcadia Publishing. Here's a description of the book:

Like the mist rising from San Francisco Bay encircles the towering redwoods, the little-known legends of the East Bay Hills enrich a glorious history.

Follow the trails of Saclan and Jalquin-Yrgin people over the hills and through the valleys. Ride with the mounted rangers through the Flood of '62. Break into a sealed railroad tunnel with a pack of junior high school boys. Learn how university professors, civil servants and wealthy businessmen planned for years to create a chain of parks twenty miles along the hilltops.

Author Amelia Sue Marshall, a board member of the Oakland Heritage Alliance, explores the heritage of these storied parklands with the naturalists who continue to preserve them and the old-timers who remember wilder days.

You will find this book listed on the book-ordering form in this newsletter.



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In memoriam

MARIE LORRAINE PEREIRA

December 25, 1919 — December 27, 2017

Age 98

Lorraine celebrated her 98th birthday at her Pinole home, where she passed two days later. She was a 70-year member of St. Joseph's Church.

Lorraine was born in Vallejo and attended St. Vincent's School. She worked at Mare Island Naval Hospital. During the Port Chicago explosion in 1944, she assisted in the base recovery helping the injured. She later worked 28 years as a bookkeeper for Three Brothers' Hardware in Pinole.

After her retirement she did charitable work, crocheting blankets for Children's Hospital in Oakland and volunteering at Juan Crespi Middle School.

Lorraine enjoyed membership in Portuguese organizations such as the SPRSI, LUZO, and UPPEC. She was also an active member of St. Anthony's Society, Redmen, and Pocahontas. Lorraine married Lawrence Pereira in 1944. He died in 1966.

Lorraine loved the Pereira family's ranching history in Pinole Valley as well as Pinole's history. Her wit and always friendly smile will be missed by all who knew her.



Marie Lorraine Pereira

— George Vincent



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Back in the day

George R. Vincent

REACHING WAY BACK

I grew up in the Pinole of the 1940s. This time of year, I reminisce about memorable events that fixed themselves into my youthful memories. Some are pleasant and some very unpleasant.

I fondly recall the 1947 Christmas tree and bonfire rallies the cities of Pinole and Hercules held for their children.

This after-Christmas tradition was eagerly looked forward to as the "kiddies' big event." Both municipalities and their civic organizations sponsored these events.

There was a large community turnout, comparable today to the colorful lighting of Pinole's Christmas tree to open the hol-

iday season. Hercules people assembled near the old box factory by the bay. Pinole's rally was held down in the civic square. Years later, both were combined into one and held at Fernandez Park.

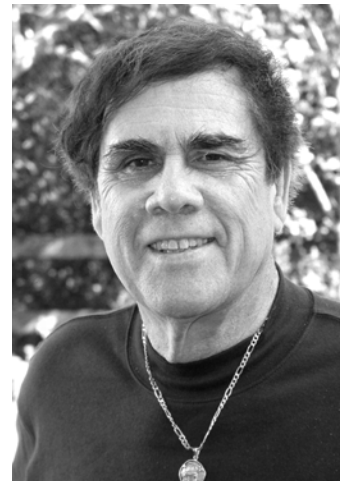
After Christmas, kids gathered discarded Christmas trees from all over town and stored them on the old tennis court next to the civic center. I remember kids dragging huge trees behind their bicycles. We even stole trees from our Hercules competitors so we could have a bigger bonfire.

The big night came when the Pinole Fire Department lit the huge pile of trees in blazing

glory. We enjoyed a massive bonfire and wiener roast, which was followed by games and dancing. It was a grand community celebration to the end of Christmas. Today, we would probably have broken air quality and recycling regulations.

A more ominous event during World War II shook up my young life on a December morning in 1944. A thunderous explosion rocked our Tennent Avenue home, blowing in the front door, shattering all of our windows and causing my sister to let out screams louder than the blast itself. Our Christmas tree and all our decorations were destroyed.

The nitro plant at the



George Vincent

nearby Hercules Powder Company had blown up, sending shock waves all the way to San Francisco. Not a window in Pinole was spared; two workers were killed and 25 injured.

The dresser mirror in Miss Alice Lindhome's house in Pinole exploded in her face causing severe eye injuries. Mary Moses and Doris Molica, who worked at the Hercules Clubhouse, suffered life-threatening

Continued on page 9



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REACHING WAY BACK

Continued from page 8

injuries when the roof caved in. Miss Moses had a skull fracture and Miss Molica severe head lacerations.

All police and fire departments rushed to the scene and roped off the plant. A stream of cars driven by frightened wives and



Loading dynamite in the 1930s.

families of Hercules workers rushed by our home on their way to Hercules to see if their loved ones had survived.

Young Charles Hutt, 15, peddled his bicycle all the way from Richmond to see if his father, who worked at the nitro plant, was all right. Unfortunately, his father had been killed.

And where was I when the disaster struck? My mother was giving me a bath in a large tub in the kitchen. The tub was under the dish cabinet, and the doors flew open, showering me with dishes and salt-and-pepper shakers.

Continued on page 10

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Hercules Powder Works acid area and wharf. (Photo courtesy Steve Lawton).

REACHING WAY BACK

Continued from page 9

We lived with broken glass for a long time. The Hercules Powder Company paid for all damages and repairs. We got a better front door with a little peephole compartment to look out.

I learned that day that our powder-company neighbor had a dangerous side. So many of our family and neighbors worked there that the tragedies of future explosions always impacted the close-knit, small community.

Many fathers and friends died in another explosion in the 1950s. We had to cancel our Boy Scout meeting in respect to them.

I will never forget the looks of terror and desperation on the faces of wives driving by our house, praying their



Workers at the Hercules Powder Works Pipe Shop.

husbands and sons were still alive. The guards at the gate stopped them from the disaster site and it was a heart-breaking scene of tears and anguish while they waited.

It was always a risk

working at the Hercules plant. My grandfather, who worked at the acid plant, had to quit due to severe face burns. My father and uncle both worked near the dangerous dynamite bunkers, and during World War I,

my mother loaded powder into artillery shells at the plant.

Most of the residents of Pinole and Hercules were dependent upon and wed to the Hercules Powder Works in some way.

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The Pinole Historical Society thanks you for your many years of support as we work to preserve the history of the city, bring history programs to the community, and establish the Pinole History Museum.

Here are some of the things your membership dues allow the society to accomplish:

- Conduct Pinole history programs for fourth-graders in Pinole's schools, and for our members, service organizations, non-profits, and the public;
- Lead walking tours of historic downtown Pinole;
- Video-record interviews with Pinole citizens;
- Publish a quarterly newsletter (2,000 copies) distributed at more than 60 locations, featuring stories about the history of Pinole;
- Publish a monthly E-news, distributed via e-mail, featuring upcoming history events;
- Organize the annual November 11 Veterans Day Memorial and Flag Retirement Ceremony in Fernandez Park;
- Staff a Pinole Farmers' Market booth from April through December; and
- Coordinate an annual essay contest in Pinole schools. All participants receive certificates, and the grand-prize winners in each school receive a gift card to a local store.

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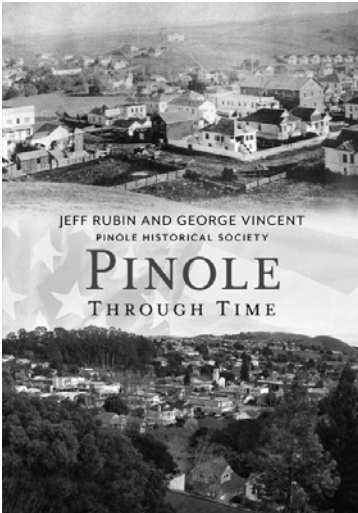
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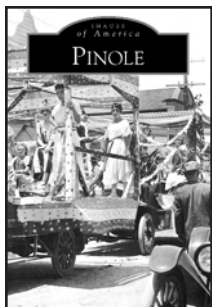


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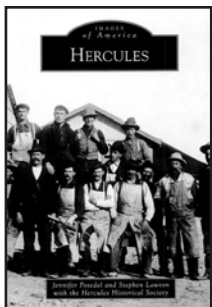
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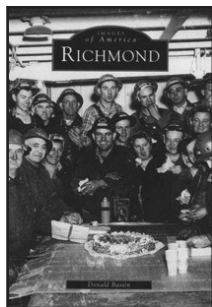
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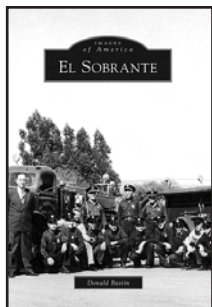
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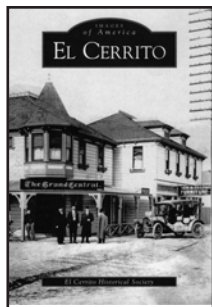
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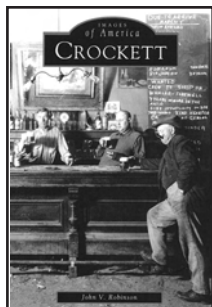
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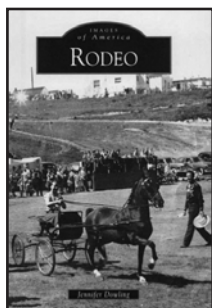
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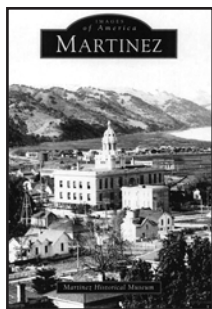
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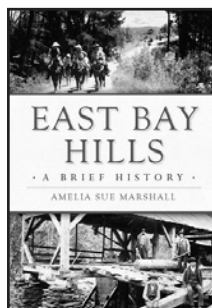
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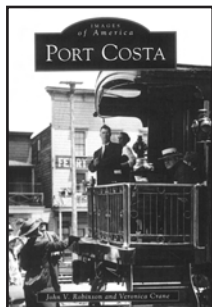
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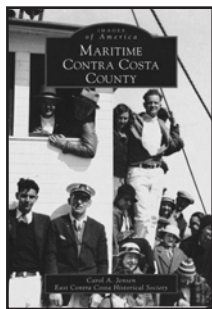
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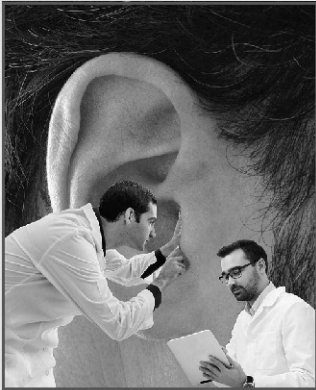
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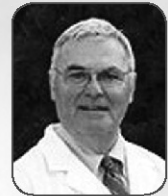
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Pinole **Historical** Society 2018 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(PINOLE RESIDENCY NOT REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP)

PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION AND SEND THIS FORM TO PINOLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 285, PINOLE, CA 94564

MEMBERSHIPS ARE FOR THE 2018 CALENDAR YEAR (EXCEPT LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS)

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