

UNION CITY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Founded by Myrla Garduque Raymundo, MBA

3841 Smith Street, Union City, California 94587, Tel. (510) 324-3298

Three Components

(1) Museum & Artifacts, (2) Oral History (3) Preservation of Historical Homes

Museum meets on the first Monday of the month at the Museum at 7 PM

VOL. 5 NO. 6

www.geocities.com/ucmuseum/

May 2004

Myrla Garduque Raymundo, Founding Editor/Writer

MISSION STATEMENT

The Union City Historical Museum is a non-profit organization committed to the preservation, maintenance and protection of, and the education of the public about the architectural, cultural, natural and historical heritage resources of the City of Union City.

MUSEUM ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

The Museum Election of Officers and Directors will be held on **May 3, 2004**, at the Annual Membership Meeting at the Museum starting at 7:00PM. All members are urged to attend and vote. A slate of officers and directors will be presented, but nominations will also be taken from the floor.

HISTORIC DECOTO DISTRICT

**JOS PEARCE CANNING
COMPANY, DECOTO, CA**

By Myrla Raymundo

Jos. Pearce

Excerpt from the San Leandro News,
Friday, September 27, 1935:

Cornerstones of Decoto by J. S.
CLARY, Editor

“California as a whole has an added business advantage by having in its midst, a firm whose commendable policies and inherent honest dealings have gained for them an ever-increasing business.

The prosperity of Alameda country is greatly increased by Jos. Pearce Canning Co., located in Decoto, and their chosen field of endeavor brings new capital in the community. Through the extended trade channels of this active firm many dollars are brought into this section.

They started their business career upon a solid foundation, boosting all things, advancing business by operating the service upon a fair margin of profit, fair and honest business methods at all times. Excellent service to every patron has established for them a patronage that has extended to every direction from Decoto. All of these business assets have been the reason for their success, and with these methods in mind they have always been successful in business. Mr. Jos. Pearce and his associates have always been consistent boosters for all things adding to the growth and prosperity of the community; knowing that a firm that did not possess solid business methods would soon wither and die.”

The above excerpt shows how important and successful Mr. Jos. Pearce’ business in Decoto was at the time.

Joseph P. Pearce is the father of Dorothy Pearce Hubbard, one of the Union City Historical Museum’s lifetime members. She was kind enough to tell the story of her father, who started his canning industry in 1930. The Pearce cannery is the principal means of employment for hundreds of residents at Decoto and surrounding towns during that time.

In 1929, a lot of men lost their jobs. Hobos from all over the country rode the train. They lived under the Pearce warehouse and Jos Pearce used to give them canned goods for their sustenance.

Jos Pearce first worked at the Hunt Canning Factory in San Jose. During World War 1, he was employed at Hayward Hunts, and then he started his own canning factory. In 1930, he could

not pay the people in cash so he gave them script instead of cash.

Peaches came from Modesto and Merced and tomatoes, from Alvarado, Decoto, Hayward, Fremont, Centerville, Niles, and Warm Springs. Peaches picked during the day and night came by rail at 4 am. Jos. Pearce also packed fruits during the war.

There were 350 men and women working for Jos. Pearce. All of the factory men came from Hayward and the women came from Hayward and Decoto. The men picked up the women on their way to work. They fixed the machines in the morning and then they were ready to work.

The season was over in November so they cleaned everything and got ready for spring. The men and women all came back for the spring season.

Jos. Pearce dressed up as Santa Claus on Christmas day, filled stockings for the kids and gave bonuses to his workers, even if a worker only worked for a day.

On January 4, 1937, a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the Joe Pearce Canning Company. Chief Roland Bendel of the Decoto Fire Department, assisted by the Niles and Centerville departments confined the blaze to the old warehouse and prevented damage to the portion of the building containing the canning machinery. 35,000 cases of canned goods were destroyed, along with the 130-foot square corrugated iron building. The loss was partly covered by insurance. Firemen worked for nearly three hours before the fire was extinguished.

The canning factory stopped operation in 1945. The people from not only the Decoto area, but also from neighboring cities, will remember Jos. Pearce.

Some of the bright labels from the cans were preserved beautifully and donated to the Union City Historical Museum for display and as permanent historical relics. A Jos. Pearce Canning company wooden crate is also now on display at the Museum.

Dorothy Pearce Hubbard and her husband Bill gave this Editor the story about Dorothy's father and the very famous canning company during those times.

Dorothy, now 80, was born in Hayward on October 22, 1924. She and Bill Hubbard, 82, and born in Templeton, California, were married in 1950. They have been married for 54 years and have no children. They lived in the same house where Dorothy was born. The house is now 100 years old.

**Dorothy Pearce Hubbard & Bill
Hubbard**

HISTORIC ALVARADO DISTRICT

DON BRUNE'S FAMILY HISTORY

By Myrla Raymundo

Mr. Don Brune and Mrs. Ann (Balestreri) Brune live in the historic Alvarado area. Ann gave this writer a great story about the Brune family of Alvarado.

The story is told that Don Brune's family on his mother side first settled in Alvarado, California in 1874

Don's Great-Great Grandparents:

Don's great-great grandfather on his mother's side was Manuel Foster, who was born on November 1, 1829, in the Azores, Portugal and passed away on October 28, 1912, at the age of 82. Don's great, great grandmother Isabel Foster was born August 4, 1852, and passed away at the age of 59 on September 3, 1911. Both are buried at the Holy Ghost Cemetery in Fremont, California with their daughter Viola (Foster) Binns, who was born in March 1895 and passed away on June 28, 1916, and their two grandchildren Veronica and Minnie Da Villa.

Don's Great Grandparents:

Don's great grandparents were Antone A. DaVilla and Mary DaVilla Foster. Antone DaVilla was born on 1866 in St. George Island in the Azores and passed away at the age of 82 on July 16, 1948. He settled in Alvarado in 1882, and from there engaged in a number of business enterprises. In the early days he was one of Alvarado's leading business and civic leaders. He owned and operated one of the first barbershops in the town, He originally had built the first business

block. He also owned and operated The Peerless Saloon. He sold wines, liquors and cigars.

John DaVilla, was Antone A. DaVilla's brother from Alvarado, California. He was born in 1876 and passed away in January 1940. They had two sisters.

Don's Great Grandma:

Don's great-grandma Mary (Maria) DaVilla (Foster), daughter of Manuel and Isabel Foster was born on August 9, 1874, and passed away at the age of 88 on July 16, 1962. Mrs. DaVilla lived in Alvarado. The family owned an ice-cream parlor located on Union City Blvd (Levee Street before). Mrs. DaVilla also worked at the Post Office behind the bank. Mrs. DaVilla's granddaughter Alvina Brune (Santos) remembers as a child going to the train station with two big bags of mail to deliver. Mrs. DaVilla would put the mailbags on a large hook. The train didn't stop only slowed down to pick up the mail; the steward would reach out with a large hook and grab the mail. Mrs. DaVilla's grandson Jess Jacinto remembers going in his grandmother's car to deliver the mail. He said, "My grandmother would bring a gun with her to make her deliveries."

Mr. and Mrs. DaVilla had six daughters, Isabelle, Clara, Minnie, Mae, Veronica, Genevieve, and one son, Morris, all born in Alvarado.

The daughters:

Isabelle Da Villa, born on November 12, 1894, and passed away at the age of 86 on November 28, 1980. Husband John Menezes, born in 1881, passed away in 1953 at the age of 72. They had two daughters, Alice and Alberta, both born and raised in Alvarado. Alice was postmaster at the Post Office located behind the bank on the corner of Smith street and Union City Blvd. She also served as an accounting clerk for the City of Union City.

Clara DaVilla was born on 1896 and passed away in 1989 at the age of 93. Clara married Joseph Jess Jacinto. Mr. Jess Jacinto was born on 1893 and passed away in 1952 at the age of 59. They owned the store on the corner of Horner and Vallejo St. in Alvarado. They had two sons and one daughter, Hubert, Jess and Betty Ann, all born and raised in Alvarado.

Minnie DaVilla was two years old when she passed away and was buried at the Holy Spirit Cemetery in Fremont.

Veronica DaVilla was born in October 1907 in Alvarado, and passed away at the age of 6 months. She was buried at the Holy Spirit Cemetery in Fremont.

Genevieve (Gen) DaVilla was born February 25, 1912. Gen's husband Joe Dutra was born 1908 and passed away in 1982 at the age of 74. They owned the Bear Cat Tavern in Fremont and also owned the building on Smith St. in

Alvarado, which is occupied by the Post Office of today. Mrs. Gen Dutra was postmaster since July 1936 and worked there until the 1940's. She was involved in many activities relating to St. Anne Catholic Church in Alvarado. They had one son, Robert (Bob) David Dutra born September 10, 1938; he was born and raised in Alvarado.

Morris DaVilla was born on May 19, 1915. He married Mary Pearl and had two daughters. Great Uncle Morris also had two stepchildren from his wife Mary's previous marriage. Antoinette (Toni) Davilla, Bonnie DaVilla, stepdaughter Beverly Pearl and stepson Joe Pearl. Mr. Morris DaVilla was murdered by Robert M. Osborne in a robbery, while he was bartending at the Bear Cat Tavern. Morris' brother-in-law, Joseph Dutra, owner of the bar, found Mr. Morris Davilla in a pool of blood behind the bar. A bullet that entered his left nostril and lodged in this skull had killed him.

An article in the newspaper stated that, "Robert M. Osborne, 51, admitted on the witness stand that he fired the bullet that killed Morris in the Bear Cat Tavern in Centerville." The defendant was charged with shooting Mr. Morris DaVilla. He pleaded for a second degree murder charge because he was in the last stages of tuberculosis, was unemployed, had been drinking heavily prior to the shooting, and gave himself up when he learned he was sought by police.

Mary (Mae) Elizabeth DaVilla (Don's grandmother) was born on October 20, 1903, and passed away at the age of 99 on February 2, 2003.

Antone (Tony) Santos (Don's grandfather was born in Lisbon, Portugal, on October 10, 1889; and passed away at the age of 69 on September 11, 1959.

Mr. Santos was 19 years old when he came to live in Alvarado. He also served in the Portugal Military and in the US Army. He was drafted August 5, 1917, to the National Guard of California and served three (3) years.

Mr. & Mrs. Santos met each other while working at the Salt Mill in Hayward, CA. After they were married they ran a couple of businesses on Union City Blvd in Alvarado, one called "Pool" and the other an ice cream parlor/restaurant. In 1927 they built the first gas station on Horner Street in Alvarado and called it U-Auto Stop Service Station.

Mr. & Mrs. Santos purchased properties next to the service station, on Watkins St., on Vallejo St., and three homes in 1942 (once owned by Mr. LaPlanto) down on Horner St. (Horner St. was once called V Street. One of the houses on Horner Street (4167 Horner St.) was the first designated schoolhouse in Alvarado, built in the 1850's. Mrs. Santos' mother Mary DaVilla attended school there sometime in the late 1800's. The schoolhouse was torn down on November 18, 1998.

At the time Mr. & Mrs. Santos purchased three homes, they also purchased a home on Granger Ave. once owned by Mr. Fred Hafen. They built a duplex on Watkins St. and they built their home on Vallejo St. in 1928 where Mrs. Mae Santos lived for many years even after her husband passed away on 1959.

The U-Auto Stop Service Station was built in 1927. The Service Station at that time sold gasoline for three companies, Shell Oil Co., General, and Richfield. In 1928 it became the first station in Washington Township to sell only Shell gasoline. The original station was demolished in 1961 and a new one built at the same location at 31112 Horner St. (Corner of Horner and Vallejo St.).

Mr. & Mrs. Santos' son-in law Mr. Tony Brune bought the business, and his two sons, Dave and Don Brune, worked for him. Mr. Tony Brune worked the gas station until he retired in 1964. Dave and Don Brune ran the business, hiring many of the teenagers in the town and gave them an opportunity to learn the trade. Dave left the gas station in 1973 and went to work for a trucking company and then he went to work for the City of Union City Fire Department. After 50 years with Shell Oil Co. Don Brune closed the station in 1978. The station was demolished on Feb 24, 2003.

Mr. & Mrs. Santos were very active in the Holy Ghost Parade. They donated meat and money for the SDES Hall. Mrs. Mae Santos was active in St. Anne's Catholic Church in Alvarado, and was the shop chairman of the White Elephant. Mrs. Santos was also very active in the first Mothers club. Mr. & Mrs. Santos had two daughters, Alvina and Winifred both born and raised in Alvarado.

Mr. & Mrs. Santos' daughter Alvina Elizabeth was born on November 11, 1920. Alvina's husband Antonio (Tony) Brune was born in November 1911, in the Azores, Portugal., He passed away at he age of 65 on September 15, 1976.

Mrs. Alvina Brune worked at the old Post Office part-time, which was located behind the bank on Smith Street and Union City Blvd. Then she worked full-time at the new Post Office (opened in November 1, 1954) on Smith Street in Alvarado, and later became the postmaster. She retired from the Post Office in 1981.

Mrs. Alvina Brune was an active member of the community; she was the president of the first Mothers Club in Alvarado. She was involved in many activities relating to St. Anne Catholic Church in Alvarado. She was also involved in the Holy Ghost parade along with her family.

Mr. & Mrs. Brune had two sons. Dave was born on November 20, 1941, and he passed away on November 17, 1997. Don was born on August 30, 1943. Both were born and raised in Alvarado.

Mr. & Mrs. Brune's son Dave worked as a fireman in Union City (the Union City Firefighters Local 1946) until he had a neck injury on the job and retired on May 12, 1979. Dave has three children, Debbie, Theresa and David Matthew; they were all born and raised in Alvarado.

Don was a volunteer Firefighter for City of Union City. Don has two daughters Joyce and Linda, both born and raised in Alvarado..

Mr. Don Brune and Mrs. Ann (Balestreri) Brune got married on January 20, 1996. Mrs. Ann Brune was born in San Francisco on November 16, 1955 and moved to Union City in 1972. Mrs. Ann Brune has two children: son

Michael and a daughter, Amanda, from a previous marriage.

Mr. & Mrs. Santos' daughter Winifred was born June 19, 1923. Winnie married Bill Harper in March of 1942. Mrs. Harper was born July 20, 1921. Mr. Harper worked for Mr. Santos prior to being his son-in-law at the Shell Gas Station, in Alvarado. Mr. & Mrs. Harper had one son, Bill born April 6, 1943; he was born and raised in Alvarado.

That is the complete story of the Brune's family told beautifully and to be remembered forever by our residents, especially by the Alvarado residents.

Mutual Aid Societies of Union City

By Timothy Swenson

As immigrants came to America, most created mutual aid societies based on ethnic background and for the purpose of helping others in their communities. The structure and benefits provided varied from group to group. In Union City, the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities created local mutual aid societies for their respective communities.

La Commission Honorifica Mexicana

The Mexican community founded this group in 1939. They purchased a home at the corner of 7th and G St. The home would eventually be rented out with the proceeds going to fund their projects. The Bracero program in the 40's brought in Mexican workers and the society worked to assist them. The society also sponsored Mexican Independence Day parties. These parties continued over the years until the early 1990's. The society also gave donations to an orphanage and rest home in Mexico and sponsored two

scholarship programs. In 1997, they awarded two \$1,000 scholarships. The name "La Comision Honorifica Mexican" was also used for similar societies in other parts of the United States.

Puerto Rican Union of Mutual Aid

Founded in 1937 by Ramon Berrios, this society started with the purpose to help other Puerto Ricans new to the Decoto area. Their motto is "to advance with progress." They keep the culture alive through Jíbaro music and Puerto Rican food. They have dances once a month and raise funds for educational scholarships and other community benefits. On June 11, 2002, the Union City Council enacted a "Resolution in honor of the Puerto Rican Union of Mutual Aid and its founder, Ramon Berrios." The resolution was accepted by PRUMA President Carlos Feliciano.

Socieda Hispana de Decoto

Founded on Sept. 24, 1932, this society was formed to help raise money during the Depression to help Spanish families pay for funeral expenses. By 1995 all members were financially able to pay for their own funerals, so it was decided to dissolve the society. The society funds were given to charity after some were set aside for lawyers and taxes. The Boys

Club of San Leandro received half of the funds with the other half going to Prevent Blindness of Northern California. Three officership badges from this society are on display in the Museum.

**A Personal Link to the Flight 615 Air
Crash**

By Timothy Swenson

Lana Gunn has never lived in Union City, but she has ties to the history of Union City. On August 24, 1951, when Lana was only 9 months old, her father was killed on United Airlines flight 615, when it crashed in the hills above Decoto.

Lana had been to Union City before. She even had a relative living at the Masonic home just about a mile from the crash site, but had not considered visiting the site.

In November of this year, her son Toby Smith of Dallas, was doing some research on the plane crash. While searching the Internet, he came across the Museum web page and the description of the aircraft artifacts that we had. Once he told his mother, she

was determined to come visit the Museum and even take a hike to the Tolman Peak crash site.

On December 26, while Toby was visiting her for Christmas, they both drove down from Chico to Union City. After staying the night, they came to the Museum. Lana brought a small flower arrangement, in memory of her father, and placed it on the aircraft display.

Lana's father, Clayton Edward Gunn, was a 43-year-old rancher living in Santa Rosa. He was married to Leah, and had one son Clayton Edward Gunn Jr. and Lana. He owned two ranches in California, the Los Robles Ranch near Santa Rosa, a 7,000 acre ranch near Oroville, a 36,000-acre ranch in Montana and a ranch in Nevada. Besides ranching, he owned a Chrysler car dealership in Chicago. Because of his car dealership, he would make the trip from Oakland to Chicago many times.

He made trips to his different ranches and to Chicago so much that he even had his own plane. Some time before his final trip, he had crashed in his own airplane, causing him to walk with a limp, and forcing him to fly commercially.

Over the years, Lana has tried to find out a little about her father. Her mother was greatly affected by her husband's death, so much that she did not keep many of his possessions after his death. Clayton Jr. was 11 years old at the time and Lana says that he had told her that he remembers the phone call informing his mother of the crash and her crying. Since Lana had called the Museum to check when the Museum would be open,

I was aware of her coming down. I took the liberty of photocopying some newspaper reports from the day of the crash, the more recent article in the Argus and the final Accident Report. Since she also wanted to visit the crash site, I printed a map of Garin/Dry Creek/Pioneer Regional Park, showing the trail to Tolman Peak.

Lana plans on visiting the Museum again and showing her other children the display on the aircraft.

Mary George – Decoto and Union
City Postmaster

By Timothy Swenson

Mary George held the position of Postmaster longer than anyone else in the history of Union City. Mary, with her maiden name of Janeiro, was appointed Decoto Postmaster in 1936.

Mary grew up in Decoto, attending Decoto Elementary School and Washington Union High School.

The Decoto Post Office was in a corner of the Olson's store on 10th St. At the time Mary had to use her own money to purchase the equipment she needed. In 1938 she was able to borrow \$800 to purchase new postal equipment and to install 176 postal boxes. That same year she was able to expand into a building next door, almost opposite of the Decoto Fire Department.

During WWII, the Post Office moved to another location and added 240 more postal boxes. Mary would marry Albert George, whose family had been farming the Decoto area for many years. In 1958, funds would come to Decoto to build a new Post Office. The office was

built at 200 E. St. and was opened on March 8, 1958. When Decoto and Alvarado would merge to form Union City, the Decoto Post Office would become the main post office for Union City, with the Alvarado post office becoming a sub-station. Mary would become the first postmaster of the new Union City Post Office.

With the new Post Office being open, home delivery would come to Union City. It started with three carriers and then expanded to five the next year. Besides the five carriers, Mary would supervise seven administrative and clerical workers.

In April of 1961, Mary would be honored by the Alameda County Postmasters, celebrating her 25th Anniversary as Postmaster.

In 1972, Mary would send a letter to the City about naming a new street “Alvarado Nuevo”. She said it was confusing enough with Alvarado Blvd and Alvarado-Niles Rd. and suggested using a name that is “more compatible with the new commercial growth on the street.”

In June of 1972, Mary announced that she would be retiring from the Post Office, after 36 years of service. She felt that it was simply time to step down.

Besides being Postmaster, Mary would also dedicate her time to Our Lady of the Rosary Church and several civic organizations.

THEY CAME, THEY SAW, THEY
REMINISCED

By Myrla Raymundo

Four ladies came to the Museum on a Thursday afternoon after a nice lunch at Fresh Choice at Union Landing. They were **Jean McNamara, Lois Bonvicino, Judy McLarmon Reed and Catherine Pratt**, long-time residents of Union City. They enjoyed the Museum Tour and the Museum Artifacts.

Jean McNamara, a schoolteacher at the Holy Rosary, gave this editor a red napkin with the inscription “Happy 25th Anniversary Union City.” She was a member of the Union City Women’s Club, a non-profit organization established in Union City on May 27, 1971. It folded in 1992. All their materials were given to the editor and are now on display at the Museum.

Lois Bonvicino was a schoolteacher and married to another schoolteacher at the Alvarado Middle School

Judy McLarmon Reed now lives in Galt, California.

Catherine Pratt’s husband, who passed away recently, was a commissioner of the Decoto Fire District. When this

editor visited them sometime ago, Mr. Pratt gave the Museum tons of materials regarding the Decoto Fire District. They are now on display at the Museum.

The Decoto Fire District was formed in 1925 as a special district with the purpose of providing fire service to a major portion of the land, which was part of Union City and approximately 2,700 acres of hill land east of Mission Boulevard. Since that time, incorporation of the City and various annexations by both Union City and Hayward has reduced the area of the District to 1,766 acres.

At that time, the Decoto Fire District was located in the unincorporated area of Alameda County.

It was somewhere in 1977 or 1978 that the Decoto Fire District was transferred to Union City.

They all met when their children attended school at Holy Rosary and became close friends.

They sat down and enjoyed the materials of the Union City Women's Club. they reminisced old times looking at the pictures when they were younger.

FOUNDER'S NOTES

Everybody likes to read stories of other people and have done so almost since the beginning of writing. Whether it be the historical figure in the old Decoto district or the latest profile in our city, oral histories have long fascinated the reading public.

Almost every issue of the Union City Historical Museum Newsletter in the past five years has a short biography of the outstanding personality of the season and it is read with much gusto.

There are many reasons why we are very interested in other people's story. First, we are more interested in people than in any other aspect of living. We are naturally curious about anybody. People's stories, especially from Union City, inspire us by showing great examples of men and women who accomplished much, often against great odds.

Second, we continue to write stories of our people, we aspire with their subjects, we rejoice in their success and we profit from their mistakes and rip a wealth of experiences and knowledge about life.

Finally, our people's stories widen our horizons mentally as well as socially and ethically. Who knows how many of our

Residents have discovered new worlds of the mind, new visions of their own future by reading someone's life story?

In future issues of the Museum Newsletters, you will read fascinating accounts of the lives of people in Union City, both historic people and present day great men and women.

This is our second component of the Union City Historical Museum, the ORAL HISTORY. In this issue, you will read about the Brunos in historic Alvarado district and the Pearces in the historic Decoto area. Happy reading!

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MUSEUM DOCENTS

We're calling on the Museum members to help us. If you're available on any of the days that we are open, please call Barbara Friedrich at the Museum.

HISTORY PRESENTATION

The history of Union City is being presented at the Union City Historical Museum on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Please come to the Museum and learn more about our city.

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