

Fairview Register

Monthly publication of the Costa Mesa Historical Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3)

MEMBER: CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY



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What Happened to the Volunteers?

In years past, actually decades, there were people who had time on their hands.

Some were retired, others did not have sufficient skills to be employed, some were limited to what they could do because of a disability, and some just wanted to make a difference. Many sought a way to avoid boredom. They volunteered for churches, youth sports programs, hospitals, veterans programs, community projects, fire and police departments, and yes, historical societies. This not only gave them a meaningful activity, but a social outlet, too.

Fast forward to the present. Entertainment advanced by leaps and bounds. Instead of browsing through a dozen plus channels on a TV dependent on “rabbit ears”, you now have 80 to 100 plus channels to watch your favorite programs

and a variety of movies. Computers were made user friendly, opening up a new world for young and old alike. And of course today parents and grandparents have more activities involving their children and grandchildren.

As a result of all these changes to our lifestyle, the volunteer base has diminished over time. People don't necessarily need to volunteer anymore to socialize or avoid boredom. However, volunteers are still as important as ever.

An organization like ours relies heavily on volunteers to continue the work of preserving history. In view of the challenges we face, the need for volunteers is never ending. So, if you're not busy doing other things, we can use your help.

Please contact us and find out more.

— Bob Palazzola, Society Director

UPCOMING EVENTS

Early California Days

Noon - 3 p.m., Saturday, June 1

Don't miss this year's Early California Days in Estancia Park on Saturday, June 1. This perennially popular event is fun and informative for the whole family. The adobe will be open for tours, a mobile recreation van will entertain the kids, and adults can power up with a pleasant jolt from the Coffee Bean, who will be supplying beverages.

The adobe setting will make the perfect backdrop for popular local historian Phil Brigandi's talk on a landmark event in Orange County history: Gaspar de Portola's journey through Southern California 250 years ago. This expedition was the first time Europeans set foot in today's Orange County.

MAY CALENDAR

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	1

Museum	Adobe	California Days
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WANTED: HISTORY LOVERS AT THE ADOBE

Would you like to learn more about the 2nd oldest building in Orange County – and share that knowledge with others? We're looking for part-time volunteers to set up the adobe for visitors and to conduct tours of this historical treasure. It takes only a few hours per month and we'll train you on everything you need to know. Join us!

Promoting and preserving Costa Mesa's history is our mission



SEARCHING FOR COSTA MESA'S JAPANESE PIONEERS (1920-1942)

Detail from a 1938 photo of students and parents at the Japanese school in Costa Mesa. L-to-R: B. Omori, M. Inokuchi, S. Kanno, Kaz Kurihara, S. Kurihara, K. Shigaki, Unknown.

You may have heard of the postwar Japanese-Costa Mesans like the Sakiokas and the Iwamotos. But how much do you know about the Japanese who lived here before World War II – the Hiratas, Yamamis, Omoris, Ikedas and Kuriharas?

Sadly, we at the historical society know very little ourselves. We do know that Japanese families have lived in Costa Mesa since before it was Costa Mesa. The 1920 census documents about a dozen Japanese households. They lived in every part of the present day civic boundaries — from Paularino to Fairview Farms, from Newport Heights to Newport Mesa. By World War II, the population had jumped to over 50 households, with a total population in the hundreds.

Prior to WWII most Japanese in Costa Mesa made a living as “truck” farmers, growing a variety of vegetables for sale at market. According to a 2003 oral history with Ralph Leon, who worked on the Inokuchi and Omori farms in the 1930s, they grew “a little bit of everything”: “lima beans, corn, peas, and tomatoes.”

Many Japanese farmers were located on the West Side of present-day Costa Mesa. A pair of their neighbors there took a keen interest in their plight. This was none other than legendary firebrand and philanthropist Fanny Bixby Spencer and her husband Carl.

A letter quoted in Clarence Nishizu's 1982 oral history paints a picture of this colorful woman. “I have three lines of work: bringing up my foster children, helping my neighbors (mostly Japanese farmers), and banging my head against the stone wall of militarism and conservatism that hems me in.”

The couple, who bore no children of their own, fostered children of Russian, Persian, and Japanese descent. This included Kay Okamoto and Setsuko Hirata. The bonds between the Spencers and the Japanese families in the area were deep and long lasting. Yuri and Roy Hirata, for example, were present at Carl Spencer's bedside when he died in 1950.

But that was later. When Fanny died in 1930, she left property to several local Japanese families with whom she had bonded, including the Kuriharas, Hiratas, and the Ikedas. In

1931, a Japanese school opened on the land willed to Tosh Ikeda. The Costa Mesa Nihingo Gakuen (Japanese Language School) sat in the city's far southwest side, close to where Whittier School is today, around 18th Street and Whittier. In 1940 the school had 45 students.

The Kuriharas, whose farm was located at 18th and Pomona, helped found the school along with the Hashimotos and Ezakis from the East Side, the Minatos from the West Side, and Shuji Kanno of Talbert.

Kanno's sons, Jim and George, were students there. Jim would later become Fountain Valley's first Japanese-American mayor, and among the first Japanese-Americans mayors in all of North America.

The children went to local grammar schools for their primary education. Japanese school was envisioned, at least in part, to help transmit Japanese culture to the Americanized children. It didn't always work out according to plan.

“They complained,” Ms. Kanno remembered in a later oral history. “They could read Japanese sentences, but very slowly, so when they got to the middle of a book, they would have forgotten the first part.”

Japanese School was held on Saturdays. For a time, Reverend Kowta of Wintersburg served as the primary teacher.

At the start of World War II, Shuji Kanno was school president and Kurihara was treasurer. According to oral histories on the era, their connection to a Japanese language school made them targets of wartime paranoia, and they were among the first to be rounded up by the FBI. For a time, they were jailed separately from their families. Later, other Japanese Costa Mesans were sent to Poston on the Arizona border.

We know little about what happened to the “evacuees” after the war ended. Yuri Hirata became a pharmacist in Costa Mesa. Kyoko Numata was a student of Hank Panian's at OCC. But we want to know more.

We've only scratched the surface. Do you have more information on Japanese families who lived in Costa Mesa before WWII? If so, please let us know!



This past April, Costa Mesa's Balearic Park hosted "The Wall that Heals," a traveling replica of the Vietnam War Memorial. Thank you, Nancy Pedersen, for sharing your beautiful photos of this moving tribute to America's heroes.

Share Your Story

We'd love to hear your Costa Mesa stories. Many changes have taken place and we want to hear from those who lived through them. Write the memories yourself or come to the museum and we'll transcribe them for you. It's that simple!

Temporary Parking Instructions

Entry to the historical society parking lot is currently limited to Anaheim Avenue, but this is subject to change. If Anaheim is closed, try Park Avenue. There is no estimated completion date at this time.

Make a Difference – Volunteer

We're looking for a volunteer to **set up refreshments** at our monthly programs as well as members to sit on two committees: the **Newsletter Assembly Committee** prepares the newsletter for mailing, while the **Adobe Committee** recruits volunteers to plan an event, become a docent, or work on exhibits. Committees meet monthly and are chaired by board members. Interested? Visit costamesahistory.org/volunteer. Isn't it more fun to work as a team?

Donate Online

The Costa Mesa Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization that depends on support from people like you. Visit costamesahistory.org/donate to make your tax-deductible contribution today. Thank you for helping preserve local history!

Shop with us on Amazon

Every time you start your order with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate to the Costa Mesa Historical Society – at no cost to you. Visit costamesahistory.org/smile before making your next purchase. You can use your existing Amazon account.

Dues Overdue?

Make sure your dues are up to date by looking at your **dues expiration date** on the address label to the right of your name. If your dues are due, renew online at costamesahistory.org/membership, mail in a check, c/o Susan Weeks, Treasurer, or drop it off on a Thursday or Friday from 10am to 3pm. Membership dues are listed on the back page.

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V I S I T U S

Diego Sepulveda Adobe

1900 Adams Ave.

Open 12-4 p.m. Every 1st and 3rd Saturday*

Explore centuries of history when you visit one of Orange County's oldest buildings in its gorgeous setting at Estancia Park.

Costa Mesa Historical Society Museum

1870 Anaheim Ave.

Open 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Every Thursday and Friday*

View a mind-boggling array of artifacts from 5,000 years of Costa Mesa history – from the first peoples to the City of the Arts.

* Or schedule an appointment at 949-631-5918.

I N S I D E

Early California Days • Where Are the Volunteers?

Japanese Costa Mesans 1920-1942

"The Wall That Heals" in Costa Mesa

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— *Membership Form* —

Name: _____ Address: _____

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Membership Categories

	Annual		Lifetime	
Individual	\$20.00	Individual Life Member	\$500.00	
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