

## ALAMEDA MUSEUM

### CITY REPORT 2023/24

On June 17, 1948 an article appeared in the *Alameda Time Star*, reading: “Climaxing ‘Alameda History Week’, sponsored by the Alameda Free Library, will be the formation of a historical society to aid in acquiring additional historical documents and lore for permanent housing in the local library.”

Two days later it was announced that one hundred citizens interested in the collection of historical data of the city attended the meeting.

The first regular meeting of the society was held September 15, 1948 with election of the board with Fred J. Croll as the first President.

The Alameda Historical Society found its first physical home in the Carnegie Library in 1950 with funding from the City to remodel the basement of the library. Today we have come full circle with the Alameda Museum now being in partnership with the Alameda Free Library.

### THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

I last presented to the City Council in 2019. After our board election that year we had a robust board of eleven members looking forward to 2020. On March 15, along with the rest of our city and the country we closed due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

We remained closed for 15 months, as museums were the last public places allowed to reopen. During the pandemic our lecture series was canceled, fundraising estate sales ceased and the Meyers House was not open for tours. Our Treasurer passed away, our Curator of 50 years retired, board members, members, and docents moved away from the Bay Area.

Despite all of these challenges, we maintained a good level of engagement with the community in Alameda and beyond. While our doors were closed we produced three temporary exhibits in our front windows for people walking by and online. The museum newsletter continued. Imelda’s Merlin’s book *Alameda, A Geographical History*, which is out of print was converted to an ebook available at the museum website. Museum published books on Alameda history were available to order online and masked volunteers delivered to the buyer’s doorstep.

## THE COLLECTION

Volunteers continued to work in the archives. The original typed 3 x 5 card system describing over 20,000 objects in the collection was transferred to the CatalogIt digital database. This required input of the donation card text, organizing the storage of the item, and photographing every object.

The general content of the museum warehouse started to be reviewed and organized and this work continues today.

Our textile expert Nancy Martin came in to assess textiles, predominately articles of clothing. She photographed each outfit and further researched the fabric, the style, and the history of the apparel.

The Alameda Library had a display of Native American artifacts in the Carnegie when the historical society established a home there. This collection moved with the museum to two other locations. The Alameda Museum has reached out to three local Ohlone tribes for advice and collaboration on the best path forward for these items.

The work described here is unprecedented, and is somewhat of a silver lining from the challenges brought about by being closed to the public and the retirement of our longtime curator. By redeploying volunteers and taking a “fresh start” approach to collections management, our capability to serve researchers and help the public make sense of Alameda’s history is stronger than ever before.

## VISITORS

In 2020 the museum started to record how many people were coming to visit and why on a sign-in sheet. We averaged about 150 visitors a month. This year in the past few months we have averaged 400 visitors a month with 918 visitors in July with the Makers Fair and the Park Street Fair

|             |                                      |                    |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>2020</b> | 62% Exhibits, 34% Research, 4% Shop  | January – March 15 |
| <b>2021</b> | 51% Exhibits, 44% Research, 5% Shop  | June 12 – December |
| <b>2022</b> | 78% Exhibits, 18% Research, 4% Shop  |                    |
| <b>2023</b> | 74% Exhibits, 12% Research, 14% Shop | January to October |

## RESEARCH

The highest percentage of visitors come to view exhibits. Research inquiries were at their highest during the pandemic as the public had more time to delve into the history of their homes, ancestors, and Alameda in general. Requests came from across the US and other countries.

We continue to receive research requests weekly by email, over the phone and in person. Historian Dennis Evanosky is currently at the museum on Saturdays and Sundays from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm to answer questions and assist with research. We can also schedule research by appointment on weekdays.

In October the museum added an online archive available to the public. This is using the CatalogIt Hub available on the museum website at [AlamedaMuseum.org](http://AlamedaMuseum.org).

The majority of researchers at the Alameda Museum are private citizens. A number of local writers have used our records for stories and books, as well as writers in other states that have discovered an Alameda connection of interest.

The museum's maps and photographs have also been useful to various development projects in the city.

- Central Avenue Safety Improvement Project: (Andrew Young)
- Clement Avenue Safety Improvement Project: JRP Historical Consulting: (Samuel Skow)
- Alameda Marina Project: Archaeological/Historical Consultants: (Daniel Shoup)
- Alameda Marina: City of Alameda, Recreation & Park Department  
Significant historical figures for park naming. (David Leimsieder)
- Maritime Service Officers School: City of Alameda, Planning Department  
Released original blueprints to the Planning Department for scanning.
- California Historical Radio Society: Research on Radio Boys living in Alameda who were the only contact with SF during the 1906 earthquake. (Robert Rydzewski)
- Alameda Japanese American History Project: Digitizing and documenting materials pertaining to the Japanese residents of Alameda. (Brad Shirakawa)

## **VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES**

In 2022 our lecture series became the Virtual Lecture Series available on zoom and hosted by Board Member Rasheed Shabazz. We began focusing on Heritage Month themes with speakers addressing more diverse topics. There was also the “Events Workshop” and an “Exhibitions Workshop” to gather community input about the museum.

PLEASE SEE SEPARATE LIST

Our lectures have included:

### **May 23, 2022 – Asian Heritage Month**

Serena Chen, Rev. Mike Yoshii, and Lillian Galedo.

### **August 15, 2022 – East Bay Yesterday**

An exploration of East Bay history and amateur historical storytelling with the host and producer of the *East Bay Yesterday* podcast, Liam O'Donoghue.

### **September 19, 2022 – Latino Heritage Month**

Latino identity, history, and politics with George Galvis

### **November 17, 2022 – Native American Heritage Month**

Indigenous histories, with Corrina Gould, tribal spokesperson for the Confederated Villages of Lisjan.

The Virtual Lecture Series continued in 2023 with presentations by

### **August 21, 2023 – Placing Yourself in History: challenges of writing memoir**

Dorothy Lazard, former head librarian of the Oakland History Center.

### **September 18, 2023 – Chicana/Latina Arts Histories in the Bay Area**

Dr. Martina Ayala, Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts in San Francisco.

### **October 16, 2023 – Deeply Rooted: Celebrating Filipino/a/x migrations, struggles, and contributions in Alameda**

Dr. Claire Valderama-Wallace, professor of nursing at CSU East Bay, and Lean Deleon, feminist and communications specialist, both long-time Alamedeans.

### **November 20, 2023 – Muwekma Ohlone Tribe: Preservation, Recognition and Sovereignty**

Charlene Nijmeh, Chairwoman of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay.

## PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Our board has many great ideas and changes we would like to make. However, the Alameda Museum has reached a point that it can no longer be managed and run on volunteer power.

We need an Executive Director to work with the board to help solidify and implement a strategic plan. We started on the goal in 2022 hiring someone for the position in 2023. Unfortunately, they were unable to continue due to unforeseen circumstances and we are in the process of filling the position again.

- The museum will engage in the STEPS program, a self-paced assessment program designed specifically for small- to mid-sized history organizations to review their policies and practices.

Once an ED is hired we will work to participate in MAP (Museum Assessment Program) by American Alliance of Museums to continue professional development of the Museum, its Board and staff.

- We established an online archive available on our website and plan to make the CatalogIt database information available at the front desk.
- Historian Dennis Evanovsky is at the museum on weekends to answer inquiries in a timely manner with research by appointment on weekdays.
- The museum has sent a letter to East Bay Ohlone groups requesting a review of the collection and to discuss a responsible outcome for the items. We have met with one tribe and are in communication with the others.
- Increase community outreach to promote awareness of our resources and promote collaborative partnerships specifically with groups that have been underserved.
- Reimagine our gallery space to broaden the stories told and histories displayed.
- We have re-established our high school community service internship and hope to expand our internships for longer periods of time that would include a focus on research and archiving processes.
- Increase programming at the Meyers House to include in depth displays on the Meyer sisters who were college educated career women at a time when that was unheard of.

- Continue and expand our lecture series to include hybrid / in person lectures.

The museum is in a strong position to bring on a new leader and enact a new strategic plan; As alluded to in this report, we face some challenges particularly around resourcing. We would welcome conversations with the City about these challenges and how we can most effectively address them in partnership.