

# THE MIRROR

THE RICHMOND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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## *In Remembrance*

This edition of the *Mirror* is dedicated to the memory of Wilma Winter, Recording Secretary of the Association. She was born in Hollister, California, on August 3, 1910, and went to rest on August 25, 2007, in El Cerrito, California.

### Barnard (Barney) Dietz

#### DDS

In our museum we keep things. We have thousands of things collected to see the past. But these examples of the technology of the people who came before provide very little information of the actual experiences of the people who make up the reality of Richmond. To show this, we need people; so what better way is there than to put the memories of people characteristic of our community into our museum records?

Each person has a past worthy of being remembered. The older the person, the greater the depth of the information available.

So why did I select Barney Dietz for the first of what I hope will be a series on the men and women of Richmond?

First, he's 93 years old and is as sharp and articulate as any 30-year-old. He has lived 93 years of productive life with humor and a perspective which may have us doing a sequel on him in about ten years. Most of his life has been in and around Richmond, and he is so much a part of Richmond's past and present.

Further, important at least in my perspective, he is a dentist. Dentists do not get enough recognition in our world. It is quite probable that your dentist, dreaded though he may be, has done more for you than all other medical practitioners combined. Just think how life would be if all of those fillings you now have had gone on to be toothaches instead of well-preserved teeth. Is anything worse than a toothache. Or how would you enjoy restricting your diet to that which could be chewed by your bare gums for the last half of your life?

Barney was not born in Richmond. Not many Richmonders were. We, or our ancestors, have come to this continent with cultural, genetic and familial characteristics which have been developing for generations. The interaction of these characteristics play a part in our uniquely diverse population.

Until about 240 years ago Barney's ancestors lived in Germany. Many Americans descended from German immigrants, but they came from Germany to the U.S.A. However, Barney's ancestors actually came from Russia. Katherine "The Great, Czarina of Russia" was German, and around 1770 had the idea that a colony of her countrymen could liven up Russia as she had done as an individual. Barney's ancestors were part of this, so they had more than 100 years in Russia. This was a very different heritage than would have been provided by Bismarck and others if they had stayed in Germany, or what was becoming Germany.

In 1895 the family, with some apparent pressure from the Russians, moved to Kansas. So Barney was born, the 8<sup>th</sup> of 9 children, into this family of hardworking German-speaking farmers, in Russell City, Kansas, (present population 4800), on September 3, 1914

Why Kansas? The Homestead Act of 1862 threw open 160 acres free to settlers who were citizens or declared intention to become citizens. Further, the states made varied rules which made this land safe from seizure for debt. The act applied to other areas, but good farmland was available in Kansas while other areas were occupied already. The family could never have acquired this much land in Europe, nor could they have found the freedoms of the United States.

So young Barney, growing up bilingual – he didn't learn English until he started school- knew and loved farming. With eight siblings the prospect of one-ninth of 160 acres of land did not offer a glowing future. So Barney went to high school in Heber, Nebraska. He was the first of his family to go to high school.

After high school, Barney had education more advanced than most of the rest of Russell City. He accepted a teaching job for a year. That job had very little future so he didn't mind too much when the contract was not renewed.

Jobs were scarce. It was early in the post-1929 "Great Depression" with 25% unemployment. It was the beginning of a period for Kansas and the rest of the Oglala Aquifer, we old timers know as the "dustbowl." At this time Kansas, Oklahoma and other states, victims of deep-plow agriculture and lack of rain, threatened to blow away. I'd bet that at least one-third of pre-WWII Richmonders were here as refugees from the dust bowl.

With help from his family, Barney went to the University of Missouri in Kansas City, Missouri. He graduated and at his father's suggestion, he enrolled in dental school. He probably was a good student or he would not have been eligible for enrollment. It seems an odd occupational selection since the only dentist he had seen was a lonely, impoverished tooth-puller in his hometown.

In 1939 Barney was a dental graduate with an internship in the Marine Hospital in exotic San Francisco. He was clearly not in Kansas any more!

Beverly Cotten, an RN at the hospital became his wife. He started a practice, and first daughter Kathleen arrived in 1941. He did this all by age 26.

Things were going well, but in 1943 "greetings" came from the U. S. Army. Barney was willing to serve anywhere, but luckily he and his young family were sent to Walla Walla, Washington where he became an Army dentist. This was a formidable job, for most Army recruits had never seen a dentist until they were drafted.

Compared to what most of us faced, this sounds like rather good military service. Barney was commissioned with reasonable pay, gained experience that would have taken many years in civilian practice, had opportunity to use new equipment and medications to reduce pain, and his wife and daughter were able to come along. Second daughter Betty (you may know her as Betty Tarr) was born in this period.

Back from the "war in Walla Walla" in 1945 with the knowledge and a focus on doing dentistry without inflicting pain, Barney set up practice in Richmond. This was the beginning of Rutledge, Brisbin, and Dietz at 2500 Bissell in Richmond.

Meanwhile in 1944 son Jimmie arrived and Tom came along in 1950.

The young couple, along with their four children, became very involved in the community. They saw themselves as Richmonders. It was their town and they were part of everything – the new auditorium, the art center, Exchange Club, church, Campfire girls, and everything else in which they could be productive.

Barney understood and loved the pre-war community. I suspect this was because it was so like him. But he was fascinated by the new and large wartime and postwar community, of which about 80% came from elsewhere.

He found himself working with a broad spectrum of children often from families with minimal financial resources. Many had never been to a dentist before nor had their parents.

Sometimes he felt he might never get them to a dentist again; so he set up extra long-appointments to get everything done.

Everything I hear from Barney suggests that his focus was on doing the very best, most conscientious job in everything he did.

He was so frustrated by the fact that he saw himself as the guardian of the children's teeth, but the parents new to the cash economy expressed their love for the children by giving them lots of candy. At least it brought him more patients with cavities. The mother of Aldo and Laura Forner (nephew and niece of Chano Forner of Point Richmond) Pat Allamano Forner, Kern, now Houck, confided that he was so ferocious in attempts to convince her of her responsibility for her children's teeth that he made her cry. She wasn't giving them candy but didn't realize that the "Spotolin" urged by her Italian mother-in-law was high in sugar content and was causing the problem.

Workdays were long and public service activities kept him more than busy. Daughter Betty told me that the family never took a vacation. The children might get to scout camp with their mother as the volunteer RN, but Barney stayed on the job.

In the early seventies, after 30 years of marriage and four grown offspring, Beverly decided they had been married long enough so the marriage ended.

Feeling lost as you might expect, Barney set about a new life style. He sold the family home and bought an apartment in Point Richmond. By chance, this gave him a new neighbor, the recently widowed old friend Marie Wilson. They took walks together and by 1978 were married. Marie's two adult

children became part of his extended family. Another thirty year marriage was in the works.

So Barney has led a very full life. His children are all living productive lives. His practice survived and flourished, though he is now retired.

As with so many couples living a long time, things do not always come out even. Marie is presently in a care facility with Alzheimers. He visits her regularly and is dismayed that this could happen to her.

Barney lives in the Point Richmond house. The garden he designed and maintains is a showplace. At 93, he works hard and devotes himself intently to anything he decides is worth doing. He is independent, has many friends, and is very active. Six years ago he could beat me at tennis. To avoid being beaten by Barney again, I gave up the game.



Even this inexpert account will tell future researchers more about 20<sup>th</sup> century Richmond than any mere object in our collection. I hope I shall be able to put together accounts of other Richmond women and men that will allow further insights into our city's rich history.

Thanks Barney! You'll be remembered

--As seen by George and Barbara Coles

### Meet the Nominees

Secretary: Sandi Genser-Maack is well known for her work with the city's neighborhood coordinating council. She was the volunteer coordinator for the Association before joining the Chamber of commerce staff. She is the daughter of Joe Genser, one of the signers of the museum's Articles of Incorporation, and Clara Rae Genser, former State Assemblyman John Knox administrative aide in Richmond

and feature writer for the El Cerrito Journal. Sandi and her husband Lynn are owners of the Tepco China collection exhibited in the Seaver Gallery last spring. She is by trade a professional motivator, having worked in that capacity before using that skill as staff at the museum. She is the immediate past president of the North and East Neighborhood Council, having served in that capacity for at least fifteen years.

Directors:

Phyllis Doering is a second-generation Californian. Her father was one of the original crew members of the Red Oak Victory. She lived and worked in Alaska and Germany, and has visited 14 countries. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1976, she worked at and retired from the Presidio of San Francisco where she was Senior Secretary/Executive Assistant to the Two Star Deputy Commanding General of the Sixth Army Headquarters. Many of us are acquainted with Phyllis and her husband Bob, as they so cheerfully help manage the bar at various museum and Red Oak functions. She was a prominent model at the Museum's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2004.

Joe Fischer has been very active at the museum since learning of the Monica Haley children's art collection there. A lover of art and the culture of Indonesia, he has a particular interest in the work of children. He has been of great help in sorting and categorizing our collection of children's art from the child-care centers that operated in Richmond during and after World War II. He helped to select pieces used for the fall exhibit of children's art in the Seaver Gallery. Joe has lectured at the School of Education at UC Berkeley and has written five books on Asian art. He and his wife, Clare, live in Berkeley.

Jeffrey Wright is a 28-year veteran of the real estate business and is the Managing Broker/Owner of Wright Realtors - the company founded by his father Eddie Wright in 1968. In 1994 he was elected president of the West Contra Costa Association of Realtors, and again in 2005. That year, he was selected the WCC Board of Realtors "2005 Realtor of the Year." He currently serves at the state level in the capacity of Regional Chairman for Region 5 (Contra Costa County). Jeffrey is also a member of the West Contra Costa Unified School District Citizen's Bond Oversight Committee, a state-mandated "watch dog" committee charged with the oversight of \$1 billion expenditures for school modernization and reconstruction. He and his wife Tyra live in El Cerrito, and are the proud parents of ten-year-old Jeffrey and eight-year-old Gina.

#### **Nominees:**

President	Lois Boyle
Vice President	John Ziesenhenn
Rec, Secretary	Sandi Genser-Maack
Corres. Secretary	Mary Tom Coe
Financial Sec.	Lorraine Regier
Treasurer	William Rochester

3-yr. Term Directors:

Jeffrey Wright, Phyllis Doering

2-yr. Term board director: Joe Fischer

## DONALD'S CORNER

The year 2007 is coming to a close, and it is time to review where we have been and to take a look at where we are going.

First of all, we have hosted two major exhibits in the Seaver Gallery this year. In the Spring, we put on an exhibit of TEPCO China ware, courtesy of members (and volunteers) Lynn Maack, and Sandi Genser-Maack. This drew a lot of interest from people who might not normally visit our museum (or any museum) and still generates queries from china ware collectors all over the country. Anyone familiar with the size of the Genser-Maack collection knows that we only displayed a small portion of what may be the largest TEPCO collection in the world, so there is certainly the possibility of a further display in the future. In the Fall, we opened our exhibit of children's art from the child-care centers in war-time Richmond. Called "Art on the Home Front," this exhibit features just a small portion of the museum's extensive and well documented collection of children's art, produced by kids from 2 to 12 years old, and dating from 1943 to the 1960s. This exhibit will remain in the Seaver Gallery through the end of this year, so if you have not seen it, you still have a few weeks left.

Also in the Fall, the museum participated in the first-ever "Home Front Festival," which took the place of Richmond's "Festival by the Bay," which was Richmond's premier annual event in years past. Preparations for this event took many months, but paid off in a very lively weekend for the museum, and especially for the *Red Oak Victory*. We estimate that between 1000 and 2000 people visited the ship on the weekend of September 29 and 30, wolfing down boatloads of pancakes and hot dogs, and swilling gallons of coffee, coke, and beer. The gift shop did a great business, and luckily we were ready with books and calendars and posters and all kinds of souvenirs. But we could not have done it without the cheerful support of the gift shop volunteers, Ella Gralund, Susan Krelle, Louise Cook, Marjorie Hill, and Lorraine Regier. The museum did well too, selling off donated items, and objects deemed of no value to the museum collection. Plans are already being made for next year's Festival.



For 2008, the museum has at least two exhibits planned for the Seaver Gallery. In February, we are collaborating with **Community Works**, of Berkeley, to host an exhibit called "**Where I'm From**," a collection of images and poetry created by African American and Latino youths from Richmond High School (a detailed description of this event is included in this month's *Mirror*). Later in the Fall, we are planning to put on an exhibit highlighting Richmond during World War II, and called "Richmond at War." Perhaps no city in the nation was as dramatically affected by the WW II experience as was the city of Richmond, and this will be our first effort to attempt to convey the meaning of that event (though we cannot hope to do more than scratch the surface). The effort that we make will serve us well as we move forward with planned changes in the Main Gallery. As many of you know, who are familiar with our permanent exhibits, our displays virtually end with the beginning of the Second World War. Very little has been done to show the war period in any detail, or to explain the period following the war. For years we have been planning to remedy this deficiency, and 2008 has been deemed the year of change. With help from a grant from the ever-supportive **Soroptomist Club of Richmond**, we will remove some generic displays, replacing them with World War II and post-war exhibits that have real relevance to Richmond's past. This will be, I think, the first real alteration of our main gallery since the founding of the museum association.

Lastly, we would like to introduce one of our volunteers, **Lorna Bastian**, who came to us just this year. With her great organizational skills, Lorna has already proven herself to be a valuable asset to our team. She usually can be found in the museum every Thursday, and occasionally pops in on other days, when she can. Lorna is retired, and lives in the Marina area of Richmond  
*Donald Bastin, Executive Director*

*Nobody ever asks you to sit down and tell them about your life, and by the time they think of it, it's too late.*—From the interview by Bianca Charles with her great grandmother, Ruby Jean Fox, May, 2007.

Family stories give us a sense of participating in the world. We come from somewhere. We belong to someone. We are significantly different from other creatures because we tell our stories. We want to tell them, and someone else wants to listen. Even the word “history” is literally *his story*. Well, his story is only one story. We are many voices and many stories, billions in fact. Our stories may be painful or joyous, but they are our stories.

Richmond is a place rich with stories, some discovered, some yet to be discovered.

The Richmond Museum of History and the *Where I'm From* project welcome you to come visit an exhibit of photographs and student writing, inspired by interviews with local families and community members. While the exhibit will run from February 10th to April 30th, there will be a special opening on Sunday, February 17th where youth and their elders who participated in the project will be present to share their experiences and wisdom with the community. Further, this will give the youth an opportunity to showcase their work and to celebrate their accomplishments.

We hope this exhibit will inspire you to ask your own family members (your elders) where they came from, what your family names are, what was life like then, and if they left from somewhere to come here, what were the motivating reasons. Be sure to take notes so when a child in your family asks you where, how, when, and why, you already have some of the answers.

## **Project Background**

In 2006 Summer Brenner collaborated with Ruth Morgan and Community Works (CW) to create the *Where I'm From* project. This project was supported by a grant from the Christensen Fund and was designed to: Put young people in touch with their own past; strengthen the students' connection to time and place; train students to conduct interviews; use the *Where I'm From* poetry

template for writing about themselves and their interview subjects; and create a community exhibit.

Once the *Where I'm From* project started, Ms. Brenner met weekly with a dozen ninth-grade students at Richmond High School, selected from Byrne Sherwood's Cultural Geography class. The group included African-Americans from families who had migrated from the South and Midwest and Latinos from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Students designed a uniform questionnaire reflecting what they most wanted to learn from their interviews. Family members were invited to participate, and in cases where family members were not available, community members were asked instead.

Initially, four community members were asked to visit the class for group interviews. Students took turns asking questions, jotting notes, and most importantly engaging in “active listening” by letting their curiosity override the questionnaire.

These group sessions were dynamic. Over four weeks students heard from an African-American whose family fled the South under death threats and who himself was a draft resistor in the Vietnam War; an octogenarian Mexican-American who grew up in San Diego and moved to Richmond during World War II; an Irish-American whose immigrant parents raised nine children in a nearby two-bedroom house; and a Chinese-American whose parents were engaged at six months in a remote district of China. Following each group interview, the students worked collectively on a poem describing the subject: *Where He's From* or *Where She's From*, incorporating answers from the group interviews they had conducted the week before.

By late spring of 2007 it was time for the one-on-one interviews. Delays and complications ensued. There were absences, sickness, no-shows, but by the end of school a near miracle had occurred and a dozen interviews were complete. After the interviews were conducted, students wrote poems inspired by the “Where I'm From” format. They used interview notes to write poems dedicated to the interviewees, and separately to write poems about themselves.

*Sara Marin, Program Coordinator*

*Lest We Forget . . . .*

## ***Richmond Chamber of Commerce***

*-- Mary Tom Coe*

For a few years now, the museum's board has been meeting at the Chamber of Commerce. We thought our readers might like to know something about the Chamber's history. Thanks to Sandi Genser-Maack for providing us with that history.

Edward M. Downer III, whose grandfather founded The Mechanics Bank over 100 years ago, was a founding member of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce. He was very active in Chamber activities in the 1970s. During his two terms as Chamber Board Chair, Downer remembers the Board as having 60 members.

"I actively solicited to get rid of that," Downer recalls, and the ensuing reorganization and scaling down the size of the board to its current 25 members was the result. But in the 70s, he saw a climate that was positive and business friendly, in spite of its being an era when "the Chamber, along with the City, fought and scratched to attract new businesses."

Other past Board Chairs, who were recognized at the 80th Anniversary Gala, include Mervyn Davis of Mervyn M. Davis Insurance, and Fran Watson of Watson, Hoffe, and Haas, Attorneys-at-Law, whose firm has contributed three Board Chairs over the years. Merv Davis recalls that 40 years ago, a delegation from the Chamber welcomed ships into port with a case of wine and was entertained on board by the captain. "When we heard of a new business coming to town, we would go to them and blow our horn. We were the Goodwill Ambassadors," he says. Davis, who is a Richmond native, bought the insurance business in the 1960s from Charles Regan, who was "a character in Richmond. Everyone knew him." Regan had started the business in the 1920s.

Fran Watson, who joined the Chamber in the 1950s, remembers that the members came from "all walks of life and represented different values of what was good for Richmond."

Davis adds, "Richmond was a little town. Everyone knew everybody. You didn't dare do anything wrong. And during the War, it was just a matter of transitioning into the bigger town we are now," referring to the population surge stemming from the shipbuilding industry.

One thing has never changed: the need for networking opportunities. Davis, Downer and Watson all remember the Richmond Trade Club gatherings at the Richmond Auditorium, a dinner and entertainment venue for 750 men twice a month. "You'd fight to get a ticket," said Davis. All three were active in a time when Chamber membership was almost a given. Everybody joined. You were supposed to belong to promote business, just as you belonged to a service club and a golf club," Davis continued.

In the 20s, the Chamber mission was very simple: to promote business in Richmond. In "A History of Richmond, California," published in 1944 by the Chamber, author Joseph C. Whitnah writes, "Sentiment which had been stirring for some time in the minds of the business and professional men crystallized into action in 1924 with the formation of the Chamber of Commerce, which was at least organized on such a sound basis that it could endure through the years and could provide the community with the leadership that is the duty of such organizations to provide." Whitnah was the Chamber's director of publicity and advertising in 1928.

In the "old days" the Chamber staff, usually two people even as recently as 12 years ago, did the bulk of the work while the Board met monthly for lunch. General Manager Barbara Obele, who has been at the Chamber for more than 20 years, remembers when the Chamber worked with many other organizations like *Christmas in April*, but "not under our banner," she says. "Now we are involved in many more activities and are more visible in the community." "Today," she adds, "the Board members are more involved and participate more often in the Chamber's projects."

As we prepared for this issue of the *MIRROR*, I recalled the years I worked at the Chamber during the 1950s and how many changes have occurred since then. However, there is one thing that has not changed and that is the table in the Board Room. It was in place in 1953 when I started to work there. I had always thought Don Hardison was responsible for its structure but in talking to him recently, I learned that it had been Elmer Freethy who designed and built the table. When the Chamber moved from its 10th Street location (next to Breuners) the table was put into storage. When it was to be moved to its present location, it was too large to get into the board room. And this is where Don came into the picture. It had to be cut in half and 2-3 feet were removed from the center, then moved into place, and put back together, minus the 2-3 feet. It was Don's job to design and carry out this change. It is still a beautiful table and the Museum Board enjoys sitting around it. Thank you to the Chamber of Commerce for its hospitality!

## **RICHMOND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION**

### Tentative Calendar of Events - Museum and Red Oak Victory - 2008

January 27, 2008	Annual Membership Meeting Annual Reports Election of Officers Adoption of Budgets Approval of Calendar	2 p.m.	Museum
February 10	Exhibit Reception - Seaver Gallery Black History Month "Where I'm From"	2 p.m.	Museum
March	"First Flush" Sanitation System	2 p.m.	Red Oak
April 13	First Pancake Breakfast	9-1 p.m.	Red Oak
April 23	Volunteer Recognition Dinner	6 p.m.	RMA/ROV
May 11	Pancake Breakfast - Mother's Day	9-1 p.m.	ROV
May 14	Historic Preservation Mixer Mechanics Bank/Point Richmond	5:30 p.m.	Museum
June 15	Pancake Breakfast - Father's Day	9-1 p.m.	Red Oak
July 3	4th of July Celebration	6 p.m.	Red Oak
August 10	Pancake Breakfast	9-1 p.m.	Red Oak
August 24	Exhibit Opening Reception "Richmond At War"	2 p.m.	Museum
September 14	Pancake Breakfast	9-1 p.m.	Red Oak
September 20-21 or 27- 28	10th anniversary/Move of Ship Artisans Booths/Collectibles Flea Market Tours, Coffee & Donuts Hot Dogs, and beverages	All Day	RMA/ROV
October 12	Pancake Breakfast/Fleet Week	9-1 p.m.	Red Oak
November 11	Annual Veteran's Day Celebration	2 p.m.	Red Oak
November 23	Opening - Upper Gallery Section "Richmond at War"	2 p.m.	Museum

**Richmond Museum Association, Inc .**  
Museum open Wed-Sun, 1-4 pm  
400 Nevin Ave, PO Box 1267  
Richmond, CA 94802, 235-7387  
[richmondmuseumofhistory.org](http://richmondmuseumofhistory.org)

**Officers**

Lois Boyle, President  
John Ziesenherne, VP  
Wilma Winter, Rec Secty  
Mary Tom Goe, Corresp. Secty  
Lorraine Regier, Fin. Secty  
William Rochester, Treasurer

**Directors**

Denise Berger  
Wendy Wilson Boyer  
Tom Horsfall  
George Coles  
Rich Chivers  
John Marquez  
Robert Moore  
Marjorie Roque Hill  
George Harris  
Ray Sitton

The Richmond Museum Association (the Richmond Museum of History) is a 501 (C)(3) non-profit educational organization. All gifts and donations are tax deductible.

**Appointed Chairs**

Nancy Neilson, Gift Shop  
Louise Walker, Gift Shop  
Leona Derheim, Red Oak Tree  
Lorraine Regier, Membership

**Endowment Fund Board**

Joe Bagley Hank Gowell  
Ed Downer Don Hardison  
Margaret Morkowski

**Museum Staff**

Donald Bastin, Exec. Director  
Clementina Diaz, Exhibit Coordinator

**The Mirror Staff**

Donald Bastin  
Lois Boyle  
Mary Tom Goe  
George Coles  
Helen Perce

**NOV Restoration Team**

Tom Horsfall, Restoration Mgr  
Rolf Stevens, Port Engineer

***Mark Your Calendar***

***Annual Membership Meeting***

On Sunday, January 27, the Association will engage in determining the course of its activities for 2008. It will adopt its **Calendar of Events** and operating budget, and it will elect its officers and directors. The president will present the 2007 annual report.

The tentative budget will be presented by the Budget Committee chair, William Rochester. George Coles as chair of the Plans and Programs Committee will present the tentative Calendar of Events, and Marjorie Hill, chair of the Nominating Committee, will present the slate of officers and directors.

**The meeting will be held at the Richmond Museum of History, in the Seaver Gallery, at 2 p.m.**



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**Admission:**

*Members: Free*  
*Seniors/Students: \$1.00*  
*General: \$2.00*  
*Children: Free w/adult*