

Visit the

Martinez Museum  
1005 Escobar Street

Tuesday & Thurs-  
day  
11:30 am - 3:00 pm  
and  
First four Sundays



## Martinez Historical Society Newsletter

P.O. Box 14  
Martinez, CA 94553

Website: [martinezhistory.org](http://martinezhistory.org)

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### May Program

Pat Seaman

## *The History of Kaleidoscopes*

Saturday, May 5

2:00 - 3:00 PM

Veteran's Memorial Hall  
930 Ward Street  
Martinez

Refreshments will be served



"You remember those magic cardboard tubes we enjoyed as kids? Come and revisit some of them and learn what the kaleidoscope was originally. who invented it, what practical use it had and the fine art it has become recently. Many of Pat Seaman's collection will be available to look at and into! Come prepared to be dazzled!"

# Abigail Bush Showed Them A Woman Can Run a Meeting

By Harriett Burt

*Editor's Note: this article appeared in the Martinez Patch in March, 2012 in connection with a three evening film series on the suffrage struggle jointly sponsored by the Martinez Historical Society and the Contra Costa County Historical Society. The two local history preservation groups also jointly sponsored a lecture series in October, 2011 celebrating the centennial of California women winning the right to vote in October, 1911. Martinez was an active center of the 1911 campaign as well as being the home for 20 years of early suffrage heroine Abigail Bush for whose family Bush Street is named*

When Susan B. Anthony stood up to speak to the crowd in the Martinez Opera House on October 3, 1896, she knew how to capture the audience --- make a local connection between herself and all of them.

She was so glad to speak in Martinez, a town, she told the packed house, which had been the home of one of the early leaders of the national suffrage movement -- Abigail Bush. What she apparently did not mention was that Abigail Bush was a woman who quietly defied Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the second suffrage convention in the summer of 1848 by refusing to step aside as duly elected president of the gathering to let a man conduct the sessions.

By 1896, Abigail Bush was 86 years old and living in Vacaville with her daughter. She had lived in California since the Gold Rush and except for a brief article in the Contra Costa Gazette in 1883 about the warm letter she had received from famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass, she lived here quietly and was probably best known for a real estate deal. After her husband, Henry, died in 1875, she sold 40 of the 600 acres they owned at the "top of Pine Street" near what are now Bartolini Drive and Bush Street to the De La Salle Institute so it could build a seminary for the Christian Brothers. The Christian Brothers Seminary and winery was located there until 1931 when the success of the winery business caused it to move to Napa. Although Bush lived elsewhere for most of the rest of her life, her son David, a San Francisco businessman and city Tax Collector, kept a home here for family vacations. His son Hartley later built the only surviving Bush home on what is now upper Susana Street.

Thanks to the research of longtime Contra Costa County Historical Society member Bernard Freedman for an article in the spring, 2010 edition of the CCCHS newsletter, we know something about Bush's early life and her activism in both the suffrage and the abolition movements in western New York in the 1840s.

Abigail Norton Bush was born in Cambridge, Washington County, New York on March 19, 1810. In her childhood, her family moved to Rochester in upstate New York, an area easily described as a hotbed of social progressive activity in the early and mid 1800s largely because of the activism of Quakers, Unitarians and Presbyterians like Bush. Susan B. Anthony came from Rochester and may have known Bush before her move to California to join her husband and oldest sons in 1852.

As a young woman in the 1830s, Bush worked for the Rochester Female Charitable Society, an organization devoted to the care of the poor and the ill. In 1833 Abigail Norton married Henry Bush, a stove manufacturer. The Bushes had six children of whom four survived to adulthood.

Henry Bush was an ardent supporter of the abolitionist movement as was Henry Stanton, Elizabeth's husband. When the movement underwent a schism in 1840, Bush remained with the American Anti-Slavery Society, the faction that accepted women as active members.

The Bush home became a station on the Underground Railroad. When Frederick Douglass came to Rochester during his escape from slavery, he was protected and helped by the Henry Bush family. Forty years later he wrote Abigail Bush of his "great pleasure to hear from one who had befriended him in days when friends were scarce."

But it was for one thing she accomplished in the nascent woman's suffrage campaign that makes Bush an "unsung heroine" of the seven-decade struggle.

For unknown reasons, she did not attend the Seneca Falls convention called by Stanton for July, 1848. It was continued to August 2, 1848 in Rochester so that Lucretia Mott could stay over and speak there as she had at Seneca Falls. An Arrangements Committee consisting of four of the leading activist women in the city was directed to plan the event. Among the decisions made was to nominate Bush as president and presiding officer of the Convention.

Today we would think nothing of it but that decision created quite a controversy as the convention opened. According to Bush's biography on the *winningth-evote.org* website, "even such committed feminists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott opposed Bush as President, believing that it was a most hazardous experiment."

As Bush later recalled, the opponents stopped her in the hall on the way to the meeting. They tried to persuade her to step aside as presiding officer in favor of their candidate “a fine-looking man to preside at all their meetings, James Mott, who had presided at Seneca Falls.” The Arrangements Committee persuaded Bush to stand her ground because it was time for a woman to step up to leadership of suffrage meetings.

The body of the convention elected Bush but as she “took the chair”, Stanton and Mott left the platform to take seats in the audience in protest only after being persuaded not to walk out of the entire convention. They were fearful that a woman would not know parliamentary procedure and might create an impression of incompetence that would weaken the entire movement.

Bush went on to preside over all three sessions each of the two days handling quietly and persuasively calls for louder voices from the platform with a calm statement and the quick substitution of a committee member with a louder and more resonate voice as secretary to make sure everyone could hear.

Bush stepped up to the demands of her position and performed very well according to reports.

After the conference was over, the 38-year-old Bush “stated that once she had proven herself, ‘Lucretia Mott came forward, folded me tenderly in her arms and thanked me for presiding.’ Stanton is reported to have apologized personally for “her own foolish conduct.”

The strain took its toll. Later Bush confided that, ‘when I found my labors were finished, my strength seemed to leave me and I cried like a baby.’ She ultimately concluded that the effort was worth it, because her action ‘had ended the feeling with women that they must have a man to preside at their meetings.’ Indeed, while the participation of men was always important in the suffrage campaign both locally and nationally, from 1848 in Rochester to victory in 1920 the association and meeting leaders were always women.

Although her skillful handling of leadership responsibilities gave her eminence in the fledgling movement, she made abolition her main project. But Abigail Bush was soon to be uprooted and separated from her friends and associates in both movements to build a new, quieter life in northern California.

Henry Bush was facing serious business losses in 1849 so he left his pregnant wife and their youngest child and headed for California with the two oldest sons to recoup his fortune in the gold fields. The family was eventually reunited in 1852 in Martinez where Henry had bought 600 acres of land on the hills just south of the tiny village of Martinez. It is said that he paid for

the property with \$50 octagonal gold pieces that had been mined in Hornitos. Building a saltbox style house on the top of the hill near the intersection of Pine and Bush Streets, he put 70 acres under cultivation in fruit and nut trees, wheat fields and 12 acres of grapes.

The remaining 46 years of her life were passed out of the spotlight although she continued to support women’s rights. In 1878, she sent a congratulatory letter (with a Martinez, California postmark no doubt) to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary convention of the National Woman Suffrage Association. She wrote Frederick Douglass in 1883 and was pleased at the prompt return letter and pencil sketch of himself in response to her request for a picture of him. Although she was not present in Martinez when Anthony spoke here, they did correspond one last time in 1898 when the National American Woman Suffrage Association 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary convention was held.

During “Pioneer Evening” the founders of the movement who were still living were honored. Although Bush could not be present because of her age, she sent a letter to Anthony reminiscing about her role in the 1848 Rochester convention.

“From that day to this, in all the walks of life,” the 88 year old Bush wrote, “I have been faithful in asserting that there should be ‘no taxation without representation.’ It has seemed long in coming, but I think the time draws near when women will be acknowledged as equal to man. Heaven grant the day to dawn soon!”

But neither she nor Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton would live to see what they started come to a triumphant conclusion in 1911 in California and nationally in 1920. Bush died in Vacaville shortly after she wrote that letter, Stanton died in 1902 and Anthony in 1906.

Freedman writes that Abigail Norton Bush is buried with her husband in Alhambra Pioneer Cemetery on a hill across the city from the one on which she had lived for nearly 30 years. However, that could not be confirmed in City records as only Henry Bush is listed in city records but his headstone could not be found at either of the two plots indicated.

But confirmation exists as both the Contra Costa Gazette and the San Francisco Call carried her obituary which noted her death in Vacaville in early December, 1896 followed by burial in Martinez.

Interestingly enough, the Christian Brothers named the portion of the Bush property that is now Valente Circle, “Mount Hope.” Had they been thinking of the suffragists such as Bush and Anthony, they might have added “and Hard Work and Determination for 72 Years.”

## **Museum Director's Report**

### **Andrea Blachman**

#### **Museum Visits during February and March 2012:**

- Approximately 95 guests signed the guest book in February 2012. A group of 10 from Inroads, Antioch visited in February.
- Approximately 75 guests signed the guest book in March 2012.
- Approximately 85 volunteers signed the logbook in the library in February 2012.
- Approximately 76 volunteers and visitors signed the logbook in the library in March 2012.

#### **Museum Operations:**

- New docent Pegg Hixson will be on duty one Thursday per month.
- New docent Vivian Roubal will be on duty one Thursday per month.
- New docent Sharon Vladeff will be on duty two Tuesdays per month.
- Number of days in March Museum scheduled to be open: 12
- Number of scheduled days closed: 1 due to docent illness 3/22
- Number of days closed due to 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday: 1 3/29

#### **Accessions:**

- 57 Color photos – AHS Homecoming Parade 11/28/11, Amtrac Station, “Golden Bear” Reserve Fleet, donated by Roger Meininger
- Pick-up sticks games found in her home, donated by Vivian Roubal
- Photos, zoning provisions and other misc papers belonging to her late husband, donated by Evelyn Hodgson
- Information about U.S. Route 40, donated by Larry Paul
- Kerry election button and other misc items, donated by Kathleen Clancy
- Girl Scout pin, donated by Annie Holter
- Martinez Woman's Club engraved silverware, donated by Woman's Club
- Scrapbook belonging to his mother, donated by David Little
- Cannery and kitchen tools, donated by Barbara Kapsalis

#### **Old Business:**

- The Oral History project is now meeting regularly, usually the last Thurs of each month. Debbie Zamaria will be working with us. We are currently concentrating on interviewing veterans. Jane Silva, a WWII Marine, will be interviewed in April. If anyone knows of a veteran (WWII, Korean War, Vietnam or later) that might be considered for an oral interview, please contact Andrea Blachman 925.387.5385.
- We are in the process of having the oral histories transcribed and are using the Martinez Community Foundation funds that were awarded to the project a year ago.
- The Brown Bag Lunch group continues to meet at the museum at 11:30 AM on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of each month. Come, invite a friend – we have a great time sharing memories!
- Dunstan Granshaw, Bettye Bloom and the Friday Group continue to research downtown businesses and will continue to provide Central San with updated information.
- We have received a lot of requests for information from researchers who are contacting us through the website and our new email address. Sometimes we have the information they are looking for, sometimes not. I always tell people “We only have the information that people have shared with us, or donated.” So, encourage your family and friends to share their genealogy and family photos with us so we can have the information that folks are searching for.

- The Martinez and Contra Costa Co. Historical Societies presented *A Suffrage Film Festival*. The festival was very popular and extremely well attended = approximately 50 ladies a few gentlemen joined us for each of the 3 films shown at the Martinez Veterans Hall. It was a diverse group representing several different organizations from Martinez and other local communities. The CCCHS and the MHS will each receive ½ of the donation money. Good work Harriett, Kay and Nancy
- I encourage that everyone go see the display at the CCCHS History Center -- *Before BART: Electric Railroads Link Contra Costa County*. The Center is open Tuesday to Thursday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month from 10 AM to 2 PM. The display traces the evolution of the electric railroad system in Contra Costa County during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bring your children and grandchildren – there is a special toy train for children to enjoy.
- I purchased several Arcadia Images books about local towns and communities and other various subjects for the Museum Library.
- Mary Lou Johnson, Harriett Burt and I are working on the storyboard for the Brown family vault at the Alhambra Cemetery.
- I am working with Jennifer Chapman, Fire Communication & Education Specialist, SF Bay Area National Park, and a representative from the Consolidated Fire District on a display about fire prevention for Earth Day Birthday at the John Muir Historic Site in April. I have loaned Jennifer several photos from our collection that Tom Zamaria has scanned and printed, and he is loaning them photos he took of the 2004 fire. If they can provide a secure display case, we may loan them a couple of our fire-related artifacts for that event. They are very impressed with our collection and the source material relating to the history of fire in the area that we have been able to provide.
- Doran Lamb, Marlene Thompson and I have been re-organizing the boxes stored in the vault. Doran has created a map that makes it much easier for us to locate specific boxes. Thank you, Doran and Marlene!
- I am getting quotes for the volunteer luncheon that we would like to have in July. The luncheon will be to thank the museum volunteers.



Left:  
Carolyn Duncan  
Presenting  
Amber Cole with a  
Plaque for service to  
the Home Tour



Right  
Igor Skaredoff as  
John Muir



Left  
Board Member  
Cathy Ivers at the  
Shell Booth



Right  
One Year of Plastic  
Bags for One Person!



## NEW Membership Benefit

For members desiring to receive the Martinez Historical Society Newsletter in **COLOR**, you can sign up for a PDF copy to view on your computer. Signing up will **NOT** replace the printed copy, it will be in addition to.

To receive an electronic color version of the newsletter all you have to do is email:

Gay Gerlack, newsletter editor, at **Ggerlack@aol.com**

**from** the email address where you would like it sent. Make a reference to the newsletter and you will receive a full color version of all upcoming issues.



Sue Fritzke, Deputy Superintendent, NPS  
And Martinez Historical Society President  
John Curtis



Carter Wilson with Home Tour Plaque  
For presentation to John Muir National Historic Site



Harriett Burt



Jeanne Hilson, Gay Gerlack  
With Jeanne's guests

## 2012 Calendar of Coming Events

Date	Sponsored Events	Events We Participate In
May 5	General Meeting / Program - Veterans Hall The History of Kaleidoscopes - 2:00 to 3:00 pm	
May 12	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
May 19		Peddlers Faire Downtown Martinez
June 9	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
July 14	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
July 21	Thank You Luncheon for Volunteers	
August 4		Peddlers Faire
August 11	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
September 8	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
September 22	Polenta Feed (Potential)	
October 13	Martinez Historical Home Tour	
November 10	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	
November 30		Holiday Frolic
December 2	Christmas Open House - Museum 4:00 - 7:00 pm	
December 8	Brown Bag Lunch - Museum - 11:30 am	

### Upcoming Events

- History Day - The Morning After - July 2013
  - 2nd Open House
  - Docent Fair - Training Sessions
    - Lecture Series
    - Tea Time



## MARTINEZ HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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WEBSITE: [www.martinezhistory.org](http://www.martinezhistory.org)

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Director Emeritus	Justine Sellick
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