

50 Facts About Lafayette

Compiled by Lauren Herpich and Mary McCosker

1. Lafayette was established in 1848
2. The official date that Lafayette became a city was July 29, 1968 – hence, our 50th Year of Incorporation
3. The land where Lafayette now sits was once the home of the Saclan tribe, a tribelet of the Miwok Native Americans
4. Acalanes High School is named after this group
5. In 1969, a Saclan burial ground was found on Lafayette Circle when excavation was being done for a new apartment building.
6. Candelario Valencia, a sergeant in the Mexican army, was given the land grant of Rancho Acalanes by the Mexican government for his bravery in the war with Spain in 1822
7. William Leidesdorff, an entrepreneur in San Francisco, purchased the land grant from Candelario Valencia
8. Leidesdorff sold Rancho Acalanes to Elam and Margaret Brown, a couple who traveled from the Midwest by covered wagon train in 1846
9. Elam and Margaret Brown's wagon train passed through the Sierras one-week prior to the ill-fated Donner Party
10. Elam and Margaret Brown purchased the 3300+ acres of Rancho Acalanes, in 1848 using money Margaret hid in an 8 Day clock she carried during their journey
11. Elam and Margaret Allen Brown donated land in the center of town in 1864 which became the Plaza Park, perhaps one of the oldest parks in California
12. Elam Brown helped draft the California State Constitution in Monterey.
13. Elam Brown's grist mill wheel is on display in Plaza Park. His mill was located near the creek behind the Park Theater
14. Near the Cooperage and the Coffee House is a plaque which marks the site of Elam and Margaret's second home in Lafayette. Due to

Margaret's insistence, the house was built with wooden floors. It was torn down in the 1930s

15. 23 states have cities that are named after the Marquis de La Fayette, the French general who helped the American colonies win independence
16. Lafayette was named after the French Marquis de La Fayette, but not directly
17. Benjamin Shreve, the owner of the Pioneer Store (now the restaurant Sideboard), originally wanted to name the city Centerville when applying for the town post office
18. Since Centerville, CA was already taken, they chose La Fayette after La Fayette County, Wisconsin, where Shreve's wife was originally from
19. The original spelling of the city was "La Fayette"
20. A statue of the Marquis de La Fayette stands near Plaza Park. There is a duplicate statue in Lafayette, Louisiana.
21. A barrel from the Pioneer Store which once held molasses is on display at the History Room. Ask someone at the Historical Society to tell you the story of the barrel
22. The Lafayette Historical Society was founded in 1969
23. The first Library in Lafayette was in the Post Office. Carrie Van Meter was the Postmaster and had 60 books to lend
24. The first schoolhouse in Lafayette was a one room building located near today's Library
25. The Second Schoolhouse was moved from its first location on Moraga Road to its present location on Mt. Diablo Blvd. and is home to Douglass Designs.
26. The Third Schoolhouse is today's Lafayette Methodist Church
27. Acalanes High School was opened in 1941 and served Canyon, Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda, and Walnut Creek
28. Saturday Night Live actor and comedian Will Forte is a notable alum of Acalanes High School

29. The Pony Express came through Lafayette 19 times in the 1 ½ years it ran from St. Joseph, Missouri to San Francisco
30. Donn Black was chosen as the first Mayor of Lafayette in 1969
31. The first burial in the Lafayette Cemetery was that of 13-year-old Henrietta Hodges who died of tuberculosis in 1854
32. The redwood tree that is now in front of Diablo Foods was planted by beloved schoolteacher Jennie Bicketstaff in front of her home in the late 1800s
33. Lafayette Improvement Association is the oldest civic organization in Lafayette and functioned as the city government prior to Incorporation.
34. The Lafayette Improvement Association came together to build what is now known as Town Hall Theater as the original center for town meeting and events
35. Town Hall has housed local government, the Red Cross, church groups, a kindergarten class, and local Boy Scout troops
36. Best known for its bouncy spring floor on the second level, Town Hall Theater was the home to monthly dances where people came from all over the area via the Sacramento Northern Railroad
37. The Railroad traveled along what it now the Lafayette Moraga Bike Trail with a station at the end of present-day School Street
38. Town Hall has been the home of several theatrical groups over the years: The Lafayette Playshop was a theater in the round in the early 1940s. Its first show was the evening before the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 6, 1941
39. The Straw Hat Revue converted the theater seating to traditional row seating when it began in 1946
40. Two of the longest running theatrical groups were the Dramateurs, who used the theater in the 1940s, and Laf Frantics, who began its run of farces and melodramas in 1956
41. The Town Hall housed cadets who were attending pre-flight school at St. Marys College during World War II

42. The Garrett Building, location of today's Postino Restaurant, was built by Col. Manuel M. Garrett, who favored constructing all building in Lafayette out of brick
43. Peter Thomson was the blacksmith in Lafayette for 60 years. His shop was located where Bank of America is today and there are two of his anvils on display in the History Room
44. Lafayette was home to a series of horse shows during the 30s and 40s which were attended by people from all over Contra Costa and Alameda counties
45. The Park Theater opened in 1941 and has been closed since 2005
46. Lafayette once had a heliport which was located near Temple Isaiah and flew passengers to the Oakland and San Francisco airports in the 1960s
47. The Lafayette Reservoir was built in the late 1920s. The capacity of the reservoir was supposed to reach almost to the top of the water tower but when the dam collapsed during construction in 1928, the level of the reservoir was lowered
48. The Caldecott Tunnel opened in 1937, the same year as the Bay Bridge, allowing freer travel to the east and west for the people of San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and cities in Contra Costa County
49. Mt. Diablo Blvd. was originally named Tunnel Road as it ran all the way to the roads which led to the Kennedy Tunnel above today's Caldecott Tunnel
50. The oldest house in Lafayette that is still standing is either the Martino House on Martino Road or the little red cottage on Moraga Blvd. near Carol Lane