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New pictorial history of Orinda out Aug. 8

By Sora O'Doherty

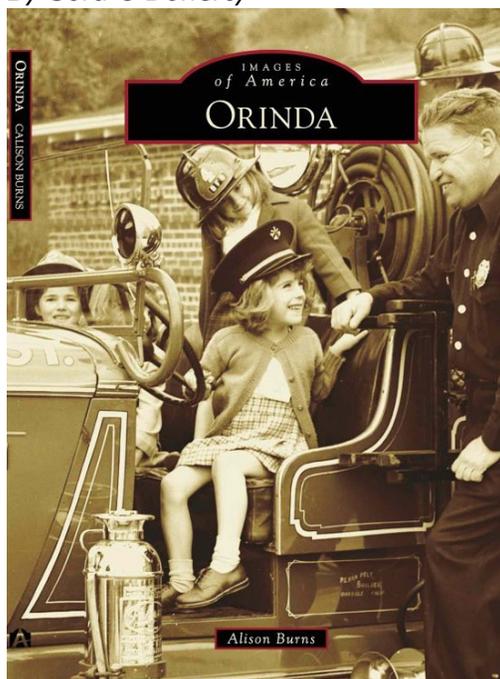


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You wouldn't expect a newcomer from the UK to be the person to write the latest history of Orinda, but Alison Burns has done just that, in addition to taking over the somewhat moribund Orinda Historical Society and giving it the kiss of life. "Images of America: Orinda" by Burns is part of the Images of America series published by Arcadia Publications, and is the second Arcadia book by Burns, who previously wrote "Legendary Locals of Encinitas" in 2012 before moving to Orinda seven years ago.

The book runs to 127 well-indexed pages and tells the story of Orinda through a scrupulously researched collection of photographs with long, detailed captions. The photographs have been reproduced in crisp black and white, and scattered throughout the pages are places familiar to most long-term residents of Orinda and will soon be recognized by all who read this book. From Joaquin Moraga and the Saklan Ohlone tribe, readers will come across many familiar names and some that may not be familiar but are notable nevertheless.

Burns assembled photographs and maps that help her tell the story of how Orinda began, from the native Saklan Ohlone tribe, through the period under Mexican rule before California became a state in the late 19th century, and the 20th century that saw the development of infrastructure and housing. Burns takes a clear-eyed

view of how these developments influenced the inhabitants of the heavily wooded, hilly city of nearly 13 square miles, now home to approximately 20,000 residents.

In her pages readers will learn more about architects William Watson (OCC Golf Course), and even Frank Lloyd Wright. Property developers Edward Ignacio de Laveaga and Fred T. Wood and their families are there. You'll learn about how James Miner tried to make a fortune from oil and succeeded in destroying all his machinery and almost killing his workers, and how Donald Rheem, whom we now associate with Moraga, built the Orinda Theatre with famous theater architect Alexander Cantin. You'll meet Peg Kirby, the first swimming coach at Orinda Park Pool, fire chiefs Joe Varni and Al Winsor, Mrs. Philip Donaldson, proprietor of Miss Graham's Riding Academy, Ewart Phair of Phairs, Naturalist Toris Jaeger and former mayors including the first mayor Dick Heggie, the first female mayor, Bobbie Landers, and Aldo Guidotti who was mayor of Orinda and successor owner to Phairs. You will even meet Orinda's first teacher, Jenny Bickerstaff, who rode side-saddle to school.

In a chapter on Getting Around, Burns tells the stories of the ill-fated California & Nevada Railway, the Pony Express, the development of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), the building of the Caldecott Tunnel and its predecessor, the Broadway Tunnel. Getting Around also documents the building of Highway 24, which bisects the city. The chapter on Schools and Pools brings you up to speed in the various pools and public schools in the city.

Burns was born in England. Married to Patrick Burns, an international human resources executive, they made their home in many countries around the world, having four children along the way. Her educational background includes degrees in French/Business Studies and Communications/Journalism. She has worked as a columnist, reporter, features writer and an editor for newspapers and magazines in Singapore, Connecticut, the Netherlands and the UK. As president of the Orinda Historical Society, she helped the Society survive the COVID pandemic and natural and unnatural disasters, like water damage from a leak in the floor above the Historical Society. She revamped the museum located on the ground floor of the Orinda Library building and is currently working on bringing back school tours. Last year her window display at the Historical Society won the prize on the Fourth of July, just going to show that, at least for this Brit, there are no hard feelings!

Burns says since she took over the Historical Society she has assembled a really great board, "enthusiastic, knowledgeable, fun, very supportive, and dedicated." She also has kind words about the volunteers that have been attracted to the Society.

Burns will be visiting England just before the book comes out for an event that was canceled earlier in the pandemic. The Historical Society will have signed copies of the book for sale, and she will be at a booth at

the Orinda Classic Car Show on Sept. 10. Kay Norman, longtime member of the Orinda Historical Society will be speaking to the Rotary Club on Aug. 10 and will have signed copies of Burns' book available for purchase. In addition, the book will be available at local bookshops and online at Amazon.com, where it can be pre-ordered.

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