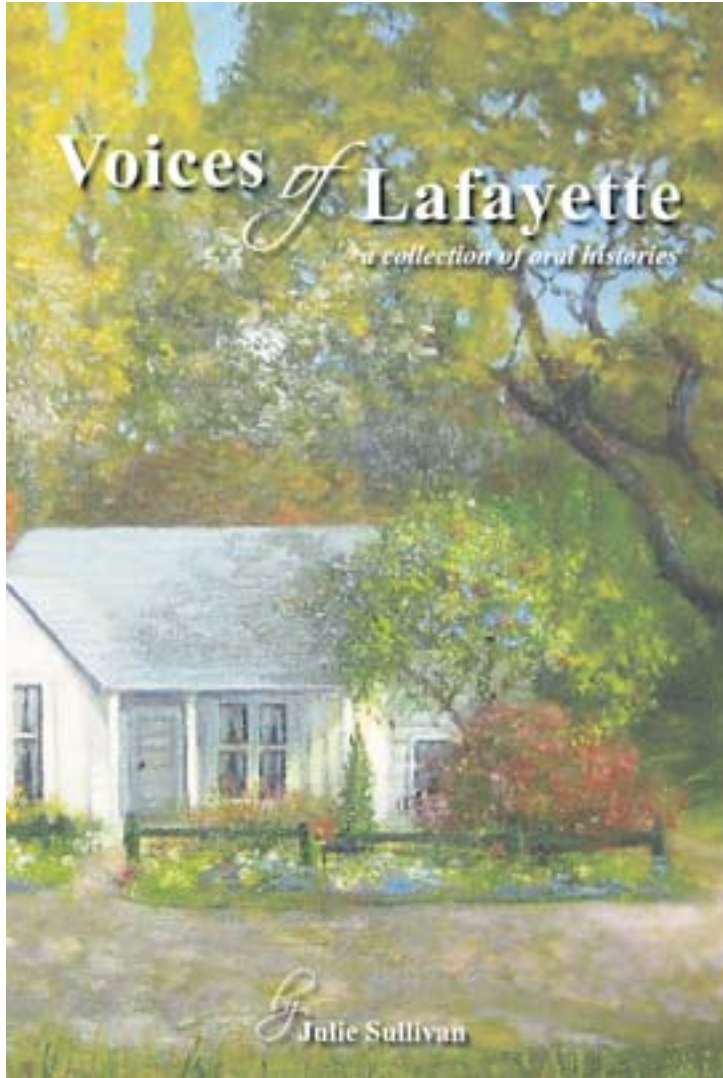


# Life in LAMORINDA

## New Book Highlights Family Histories of Lafayette

By Rosylyn Stenzel



The cover features a painting of Jennie Bickerstaff's home. Bickerstaff was one of Lafayette's first schoolteachers, and her home was located where Diablo Foods is today. Photo provided

Hot off the presses is a new book on the history of Lafayette titled, "Voices of Lafayette; A Collection of Oral Histories." Conceived by long-time resident and local business owner Bill Eames, and written by his assistant and writer Julie Sullivan, the book highlights past business owners and old families of Lafayette.

"Voices of Lafayette" includes over 50 stories spanning over 100 years. The book was five years in the making with Sullivan conducting the interviews. She writes, "Originally this book was designed to record the history of the businesses that used to operate in Lafayette, but it became much more, encompassing the stories of the families who founded the city, who beautified and governed it, and who left their unique mark on Lafayette."

The book is rich with interesting individual family histories reminiscent of days when Lafayette was a rural, agricultural town where everyone knew each other. Throughout "Voices of Lafayette" are inspiring success stories highlighting the ambitious spirit of early

business owners in Lafayette. As Eames comments, "They showed entrepreneurial spirit, where a couple - a husband and wife - may have an idea, take a gamble and just make it happen."

Eames and his wife Karin are an example of that entrepreneurial spirit with the founding of Bill's Drugs. After graduating in 1957 from Idaho State University School of Pharmacy, Eames worked in San Pablo at three different pharmacies at the same time before being approached to open his own pharmacy. In 1959 with help from partners and family, Acalanes Pharmacy opened on Mount Diablo Boulevard on the site where Round Table Pizza is today.

Eames clocked in long hours at his pharmacy; working seven days a week with only three days off his first year. Hard work and business savvy eventually paid off, and in 1964 he began acquiring other area pharmacies.

Bill's Drugs was established with around 80 pharmacies acquired throughout the years. In 1993, Eames sold Bill's Drugs to Long's Drugs but kept ownership

of the Lafayette building which Long's leases. His offices are there today on the second floor where he houses an extensive historical collection of pharmacy memorabilia.

In addition to the business stories are personal accounts of prominent and long-time Lafayette families. As in William McNeil's Family, they trace their roots back to the founding of Lafayette. McNeil's great-great-grandmother Margaret Allen was Lafayette's unofficial first lady. In 1846, Allen and her family joined the wagon train led by Lafayette's founder, Elam Brown. McNeil is quoted, "The Brown Party made it over the mountains in time, but they were only a week ahead of the Donner Party, who got caught in the snow."

In addition, McNeil's grandfather Robert Elam McNeil owned Lafayette's Pioneer Store from 1902 - 1935 which was located on what is now Golden Gate Way. Next door to where the Pioneer store was, McNeil still owns the Geils Building, the former location of his parent's home.

Finally, the stories in "Voices of Lafayette" are a glimpse of times past; diverse in their biographies. But one common theme ties their experiences together, their love for Lafayette.

Publishing of "Voices of Lafayette" was made possible by Bill and Karin Eames. He writes, "This book is dedicated to the business people who live and worked in Lafayette. Lafayette has been very good to me ever since I opened Bill's Drugs here in 1959. This book is one small way for me to repay the 50 years of goodwill and friendship I've experienced." All proceeds from the sale of the book benefit the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation. It is available for purchase at the Lafayette Library.

Please send story ideas to [storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com)



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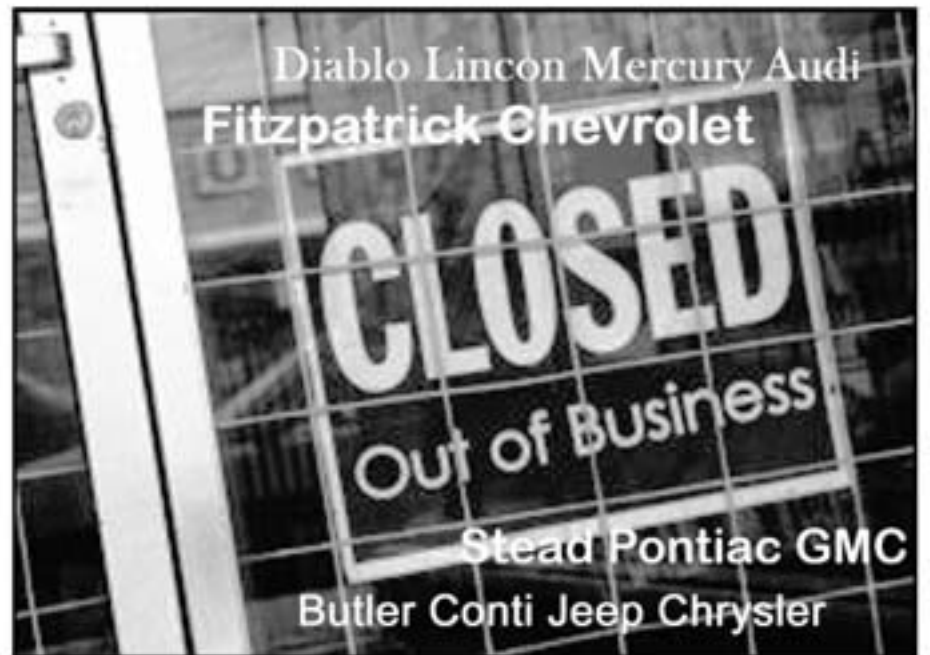
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