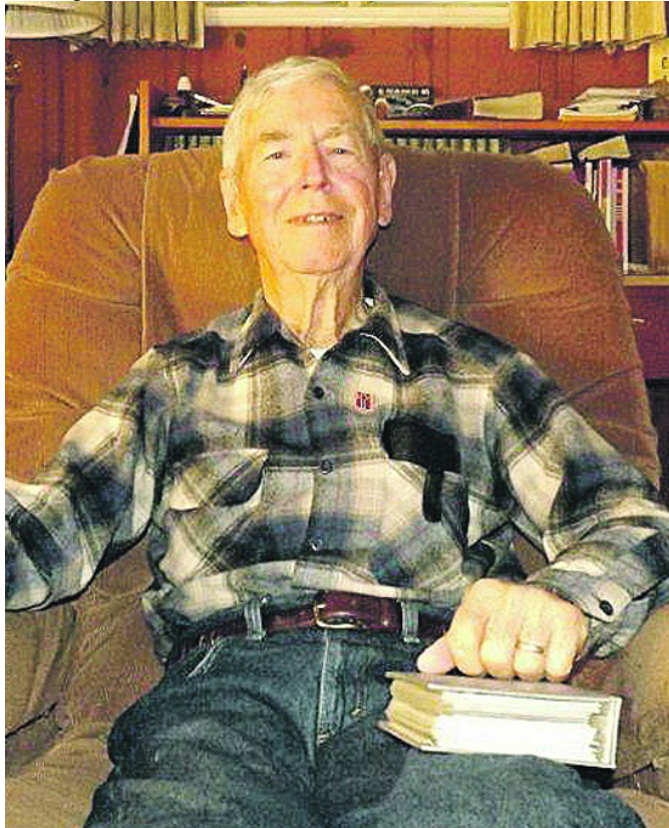


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## Keeping an Eye on the Old Yellow House A Former Resident's Reflection

Cathy Dausman



Ezra Nelson Photos Cathy Dausman

Ezra Nelson is living local history. He's lived in Orinda all of his considerable years and he grew up at 209 Moraga Way - the home affectionately known as The Old Yellow House, although it's been salmon colored since Nelson's sister Mabel re-painted it in 1991.

"That paint didn't hold up too well," he says. Nelson is the youngest child of Charles and Karen Nelson, who bought the Orinda treasure in 1918. He lived in the house with his parents and four siblings, Clara, Clyde, Mabel and Earl. The family relocated from Albany to escape the Spanish Flu Pandemic that killed Nelson's brother Walter (Clyde's twin) when Walter was 18 months old. It was an eight-room house, and Nelson's "bedroom" was the upstairs landing.

When the family moved in, the house had no heating, no indoor plumbing, no gas or electricity. The front room was where the Nelsons could entertain visitors, but the family "spent their life" in the kitchen, the only room heated by the warmth of an old Athens wood stove.

Nelson still marvels at the breads, pies and preserves his mother produced on it. He also remembers the winter his siblings brought snowballs into the kitchen for an indoor, and presumably warmer, fight. For a while, there was a party-line crank telephone in the front hall, phone number CLifford 4487. That disappeared during the Great Depression when money got scarce.

Nelson says depression times were good and bad, easy and hard, but mostly he remembers the good. He remembers a barn where the current garage is, with a steeply sloped roof on the north, and an ad for "Bull Durham tobacco" on its side. The barn had no stalls but his family

kept a cow and horse. It was an Orinda family farm, with "horizon [visible] everywhere," he says, of then-bare hills.

Nelson's mother carried two redwood seedlings from Oakland eighty years ago; young Nelson and his mother walked until they got to Old Tunnel Road. Then Karen called another son and asked for a ride - it was too dangerous to walk through the tunnel, he says. Nelson estimates those trees are 140 feet tall today; he built a bench beneath them commemorating the occasion.

Ezra is the last of his generation, and he's still keeping an eye on the old yellow house from where he moved in 1952. It wasn't far - in fact it was only next door, into "the cabin," still on the two-plus acre plot his family originally bought. He still thinks the Old Yellow House "has a lot of charm to it," and is watching the work being done by new owner James Wright. "I'm glad [Wright] came," says Nelson, who wants to see the work completed. "I hope I live to that time."

You can read more about life in the Old Yellow House online at <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0607/Growing-up-in-The-Old-Yellow-House.html>



Sign by the redwood trees in Nelson's back yard

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