

Telling Corralitos' story



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Judy Malmin of Corralitos shows historical photographs from her archives on Corralitos history.

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Lifelong resident has spent three decades detailing community's past

By ERIC ANDERSON

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CORRALITOS — Inspired by visits to the Egyptian museum in San Jose, Judy Malmin dreamed as a girl of becoming an archaeologist.

Instead of traveling the world to Egypt, India or South America in search of priceless ancient artifacts à la Indiana Jones, however, Malmin has lived her entire life in the small town of Corralitos, and doesn't even sport a whip or fedora-style hat.

Still, Malmin has found her own calling, doing her digging right in her hometown — and in the process making a contribution to the community she cherishes. Rather than excavating dirt to find objects, she has probed people's memories and gathered old photographs to write a straightforward history of Corralitos, named simply "Corralitos," as well as operate the Web site corralitoshistory.com.

"It's just part of my life," Malmin said, putting on eyeglasses as she showed some of her historical photo collection, of Corralitos history during an interview at her home Wednesday. "It's entertaining to me. I always loved



Courtesy of Judy Malmin

Members of the Corralitos Band are shown in a photograph from around 1880. Walter H. Bowman is shown second from left.



Courtesy of Judy Malmin

The workers from Corralitos Fruit Growers Association pose for a group photo sometime in the 1920s on Keamey Street in Watsonville.

CORRALITOS

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a mystery. Mystery was my big thing growing up."

Malmin said she began her research for her book in either 1976 or 1977, and finished the first edition in 1982. The book is straightforward. Malmin chose to print information primarily directly from sources rather than provide her own interpretations. That first edition contained approximately 30 photographs; in 1998, she published a revised edition with slightly more text, but significantly more photos.

"The book is a great thing for my children and my grandchildren, so they can learn about the history of Corralitos also," local resident Kandy Learn-Bonnema said.

Learn-Bonnema, a checker at the Corralitos Market, estimated the market sells 10 to 15 copies of Malmin's book per month.

From idea to reality

Although its population has grown over the last few decades, Corralitos is still a small town. The 2000 census listed the community — the name of which means "little corrals" in Spanish — as having 2,431 residents.

It's a community where many roads are named after the

town's early leaders and major landowners; for example, Aldridge Lane was named after Franklin Aldridge and Hames Road is named after the family of Frederick Hames, who some have argued gave Corralitos its name. (Malmin, however, believes Corralitos was named by members of the Portola Expedition during their trip through the area in 1769.)

In the late 1970s, Malmin, at the time a mother of two in her late 20s, was working on a history of her family, but, because many longstanding families in the community are inter-related, her investigation broadened. She could not locate any books about Corralitos' history, which got her to thinking.

"All of sudden I got an idea, 'Oh, I can't find anything about Corralitos, maybe I should write about Corralitos,'" Malmin said.

The project turned into a family affair, with husband Jeff, and their young children, daughter Terry and son Tom, all chipping in to help Malmin.

"He practically wrote this book," Malmin said of her husband. "He was my proofreader, he was my critic, he was driving me anywhere I wanted to go. He did so much for this book."

Meanwhile, she even put her children, under 10 at the time, to work in the form of a game, looking for mentions of the

word "Corralitos" in microfilm of old newspapers at the library.

"If they found something I could use, that was finding gold," she said. "If they found something I couldn't use, that was called finding fool's gold."

Malmin, who said she is most fascinated about Corralitos' early history, also interviewed dozens of the community's eldest citizens, before coming out with her book.

Initially, some people were concerned she would be writing about stories they'd rather be kept secret. Jeff Malmin recalled going with Judy to interview a 90-something man and the man's wife, both of whom were forthcoming about the family.

About 15 minutes after the Malmin's returned home, they got a phone call from the elderly couple's granddaughter, who asked accusingly, "Just what exactly did they tell you?" Jeff Malmin recalled.

"It was kind of interesting the older people didn't have a real filter on what they had to say, but the rest (were concerned)," Jeff Malmin said.

Judy Malmin later held a book signing in town, and was thankful for the response she received.

"I really had a wonderful welcome and got a lot of thanks for doing this project," she said. "That was very rewarding because I did this project because I wanted to do something for people."

She's done a lot of stuff for

the community, a lot of history," Learn-Bonnema said. "So I think it's great."

"Most any community has a story to tell and she's been the one to tell the story of Corralitos," Jeff Malmin said.

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Moving forward

One person who decided to check out the book was the Malmin's young daughter, Terry. She looked at the book, noticed a lot of text and few pictures, then proclaimed, "I'll read it when I get older."

In 1998, Judy Malmin published the revised edition with significantly more photographs, and continues to find and be sent new photos. She's currently preparing to print more copies of the revised edition, and is also considering creating a photographic history of Corralitos, and is seeking historically interesting photos of the 1980s and 1990s.

Even as Malmin works on her projects, history is occurring. Last month's Summit Fire approached Corralitos, and Malmin, who did not have to evacuate her home, said it ranked with the biggest disasters to ever hit the area.

"Nothing like this has happened that endangered all of Corralitos," she said. "Nothing that had people in Corralitos evacuate. This is the biggest historical fire in Corralitos."

With the creation of her Web site early this decade, Malmin, a

private person by nature who said she likes to stay home and take care of her dog and five cats, now does much of her work through the Web, receiving e-mails and phone calls from people interested in family history. A binder of her materials about Corralitos history is available for viewing at the Corralitos library.

"There's just such a pleasure in doing something that involves people that also involves privacy," she said. "I don't have to be out with a bunch of people, I can do it on my own time."

Malmin said she anticipates continuing to keep a sharp eye out for interesting photographs and stories for many years to come, saying she thought she "would miss it very much" if she didn't continue to follow Corralitos' history.

"It's ongoing, and it just never really ends," she said. "History, hopefully it never ends."

She also noted that nobody has indicated an interest in taking over for her, and that, if anything were to ever happen to her, she has directed her materials to be given to a museum. Malmin, a former teacher, said, ultimately, she loves Corralitos, and studying its history has become an integral part of her life.

"I started the project as kind of a giving back to the community," she said. "The community has done so much for me. Corralitos is my home. It's almost like my genealogy is Corralitos."