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Students get hands-on history lesson



Oak Ridge juniors Ryan Hurst, Parker Doshier, Shri Shankar and Maddie King, back row left to right, and Lilly Alcozy, Binwant Kahlon and Kelly Ryoo, front row left to right, recently presented research papers on Clarksville and early El Dorado Hills at the El Dorado Hills Library. The students collaborated with members of the Clarksville Region Historical Society, a partnership both sides said they hope continues to keep local history alive. Village Life photo by Julie Samrick

How do we keep local history alive? In an attempt to bridge the gap between generations, members of the Clarksville Region Historical Society mentored Oak Ridge students from Matt Hodgins' AP U.S. History class during the course of the school year. Mentors who know the history of the Clarksville region (a pre-cursor to El Dorado Hills) shared their knowledge and prodded students to conduct their own investigations into local topics, including Mormon Island, Salmon Falls, the

Mormon Tavern and the former city of Latrobe.

The experiment was a success, as evident when students presented highlights of their research papers at the El Dorado Hills Library earlier this spring.

The team of Lily Alocozy and Binwant Kahlon shared that the area's first constructed space, the Mormon Tavern, built in approximately 1849 was "for housing and as a rest stop for miners and people traveling the Pony Express Trail," Binwant said.

"The population surged because of it," Lily said. "The tavern became a polling location and a significant community center. Mormon Tavern sounds like a paradox to us today, but it wasn't back then. The revelation Mormons had about alcohol didn't happen until 1902."

Lily pointed to special guest Madeline Petersen Moseley, whose family owned the last business in Clarksville — a gas station and cafe. "Madeline told me Mrs. Joerger gave the kids milk and cookies at the tavern," Lily said. The Joergers are a well-known settler family from the area; they owned a ranch and dairy spanning what is now El Dorado Hills Boulevard and they bought the Mormon Tavern in approximately 1871.

A Joerger descendant, Genevieve Joerger Mann, was another special guest.

Kelly Ryoo and Maddie King called Mormon Island “one of the biggest mining towns in California. It became a settlers’ society, but by 1856 a fire wiped everything out and all the gold had been picked over,” Kelly said.

“I knew Mormon Island was the town under Folsom Lake,” Maddie told Village Life, “but until I did research I didn’t know it was such a big, exciting mining town.”

Ryan Hurst and Joe Shaller shared what they learned about the Salmon Falls region. “It had a school with about 60 kids,” Ryan said. “The school teacher’s husband built the bridge that’s still there today.”

Shri Shankar and Parker Doshier immersed themselves in Latrobe. “The town was a hub until the railroad moved on and left it in the dust, leaving it to become a ghost town,” Parker said.

Would you do it again?

“It had its moments,” Shri said. “It was hard to find a lot of information.”

“I found out how to actually research instead of just looking things up online,” Lily said.

“It was neat to hear how El Dorado Hills actually came to be,” Maddie told the audience, which was music to local historian Betty January’s ears.

January served as a student mentor along with Melinda Peak and former Village Life reporter Mike Roberts. “Tonight meant a lot to me, seeing and hearing the young people relating the past,” January told Village Life. “And working with them ... as one said, when she heard she had this assignment she was not thrilled at first but when she got into it, she appreciated and marveled at the *real* history. She was proud of where she lives. This is why we formed Clarksville Region Historical Society!”

January said librarian Carolyn Brooks plans to archive the students’ full research papers at the El Dorado Hills Library.

Clarksville Region Historical Society is dedicated to the restoration and preservation of Old Clarksville, established in 1848, the forerunner of El Dorado Hills, and the surrounding region by preserving items of historical interest and educating the public. For more information call (916) 923-3173.