



SAN MATEO COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION

happenings

# Historical

a monthly publication for members of the San Mateo County Historical Association

ON THE COURTHOUSE DOCKET

## *The Basque in California*

On **Saturday, November 13 at 1 pm**, the Courthouse Docket continues at the San Mateo County History Museum with a presentation on the *Basque in California*. The historic Basque country overlaps the border of France and Spain.

During an illustrated presentation Xabier Berrueta will talk about Basque history and immigration to the United States. Born in San Francisco to immigrants from the Basque Country, Xabier has been an active member of the Bay Area Basque community serving in many capacities over the years. The Burlingame resident has been Director as well as President of the South San Francisco based Basque Cultural Center and continues to serve on several committees. Currently, he is President of the United States Federation of Pelota (USFP) looking to promote the game, with Basque origins, across the United States.

The presentation will be followed by a demonstration of *Bertsolaritza* or improvised sung poetry by Johnny Curutchet. As a youngster growing up in Ezterentzubi, Curutchet was always attracted to *Bertsolaris* (*Bertsolaritza* performers), and enjoyed listening to his father

sing. He started singing in San Francisco among family and friends. He did his first public performance in 1970 at a Basque Club program and continued to perform at many San Francisco Basque functions as well as those outside San Francisco.

In 2003, Curutchet, along with three other U.S. *Bertsolaris*, received a National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowship, which is the nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts. He performed at the People's Poetry Gathering's poetry festival, which promoted poetry from the world's endangered and contested languages in their mother tongues and in English.

The cultural demonstration will continue with a *Txistu* performance by Juan Jose San Mames. The *txistu* is a three-holed flute (see photo at right). Mames is from Portugaleta (Bizkaia) and he has been a *txistu* player for the San Francisco Basque community for the past 45 years.

After the Courthouse Docket, visit the exhibit *Gardeners of Identity: Basques in San Mateo County*. This exhibit will close March 2012.

Cost: Free with museum admission: \$5 for adults, \$3 for seniors and students.

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### HOW TO PLAY MUS:

## *A Basque Card Game*

HANDS-ON HISTORY  
NOVEMBER 20

The San Mateo County History Museum will present a workshop on *How to Play Mus: A Basque Card Game*. Led by Xabier Berrueta, former director of the Basque Cultural Center, who will provide an overview about how the game originated in the Basque Country and how Basque immigrants carried the game to other countries where there are national and international Mus Tournaments.

This workshop is held from 1 to 4 pm on Saturday, November 20, 2010, in the Wells Fargo Learning Center. Pre-registration is required. RSVP by November 13, to the Education Department at 650-299-0104, Ext. 231 or [education@historysmc.org](mailto:education@historysmc.org). SPACE IS LIMITED.

**Hands-On History** is a quarterly series of workshops for adults. The workshop is free with museum admission. Mus cards available for purchase at the end of the workshop.



The *Ikkurrina* or Basque flag was adopted as a symbol of the Basque people in 1936.



At left is Johnny Curutchet performing the improvised sung poetry known as *Bertsolaritza*.