

## A RECIPE FOR HEALTHY AGING: THE LAMORINDA VILLAGE APPROACH

BY LAURA-KATE JURKA,  
LAMORINDA VILLAGE



**WHILE SUPPORTING SENIORS** through volunteer-provided services remains the core of Lamorinda Village's mission, the organization expanded its focus in 2022. At the suggestion of board member Gordon Chong, a committee was formed to explore the growing field of healthy aging. Led by Village member and retired Public Health Professor Emeritus John Swartzberg, the group includes retired nurses, physicians, therapists, and social workers.

The committee researched ways to increase healthspan — not simply living longer but living free of disease and disability — and quickly concluded that improving healthspan required a holistic approach. They identified three key areas of focus: physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. Though genetics plays a role in disease risk and mental health challenges, research has shown that individuals can meaningfully affect their health outcomes through behavior. Guided by these findings, Lamorinda Village continues to develop programs that promote well-being across all dimensions of healthy aging.

### Staying Strong

Because falls are a leading risk for older adults, Lamorinda Village offers strength and balance classes three days a week in Lafayette and Orinda. Chair yoga, breath and stillness, and fitness activities at the Lafayette Community Center benefit participants physically and support their emotional well-being.

### Building Cognitive Resilience

Programs such as brain enrichment, writers' group, bridge, mahjong, and book club help members stay mentally engaged. Weekly lectures cover topics ranging from art restoration and nutrition to Alzheimer's research and emergency preparedness.

### Forging Connections

Every Village activity provides opportunities for social engagement. Events such as community luncheons, Don's Golden Happy Hour, and Senior SWELL at the Lafayette Library are especially designed to foster connection. Smaller groups, such as Living Solo, offer more intimate settings where members build meaningful relationships based on shared experiences.

Research on healthspan continues to evolve, but the principles guiding Lamorinda Village programs remain constant: a life well lived requires nourishing the brain, body, and spirit.

To get connected, call (925) 283-3500 or visit [lamorindavillage.org](http://lamorindavillage.org).



## ELAM BROWN'S LANTERN The Light That Led the Way

BY JOHN KENNETT, LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

It all started with a flicker.

In 1846, Elam Brown, Lafayette's founder, traveled west, bumping along in his covered wagon from St. Joseph, Missouri, toward the wilds of California. His path was lit by a single candle set inside a hand-punched tin lantern, its star-shaped cutouts casting a ghostly glow.

That lantern was there through it all — wind, weather, and westward expansion. It glowed in Illinois before 1840, lit the way across prairie trails, and eventually shone in the untamed reaches of Contra Costa County. When Brown settled in what would become Lafayette, the lantern hung quietly through the town's earliest days, when rattlesnakes likely outnumbered residents. He used it around his home on what was then Hough Street, now Lafayette Circle, perhaps scaring off a few raccoons and maybe even a bandit or two.

In 1879, ten years before his death, Brown passed the lantern to his friend and neighbor James Bickerstaff, who lived along Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Bickerstaff later gave it to his daughter Jennie, a beloved schoolteacher and budding historian who delighted local students with stories of Lafayette's past. Jennie often carried the lantern to classrooms tucked safely inside a battered Challenge Butter box, sharing tales of dusty trails, pioneer life, and the town's earliest settlers.

In 1960, Jennie donated the lantern to the county library to help preserve its history. But when it was loaned to the Lafayette Library Association for a ribbon-cutting ceremony in 1962, it vanished — misplaced in a Pleasant Hill library vault and seemingly lost to time.

Members of the Lafayette Historical Committee made trip after trip to search the vault, but the lantern remained missing. Finally, in 1969, local historian Joan Merryman asked Pleasant Hill historian Thomas Gates to take one more look. "Look for an old butter box," she suggested.

Moments later, Gates emerged from the vault holding a faded Challenge Butter box. Inside was the long-lost lantern. "I nearly had a heart attack," Merryman later recalled.

Though rusted and fragile, the lantern was carefully restored by Lee Devol of Concord, who repaired its hinges and door with salvaged metal.

Today, the lantern that once lit Elam Brown's journey west is proudly displayed at the Lafayette Historical Society on Golden Gate Way, a small but shining reminder of the light that led the way.

Special thanks to Aegis Living Moraga for sponsoring our Lafayette History section.



Local historian Joan Merryman and her young son look on as Pleasant Hill historian Thomas Gates reveals the long-lost lantern in 1969.

## AGING IS LIFE

At Aegis Living, we see aging as a gift. Aegis offers support for all stages of senior care, including short-term stays, assisted living, and memory care. We'd love to answer your questions and show you around.

Call us today! 925-483-7347

**Aegis Living** MORAGA  
Assisted Living | Memory Care

ICF 18 75601 424