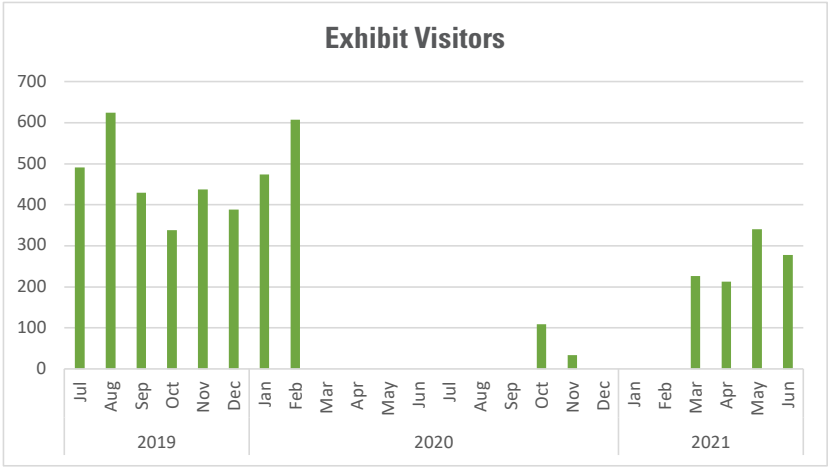
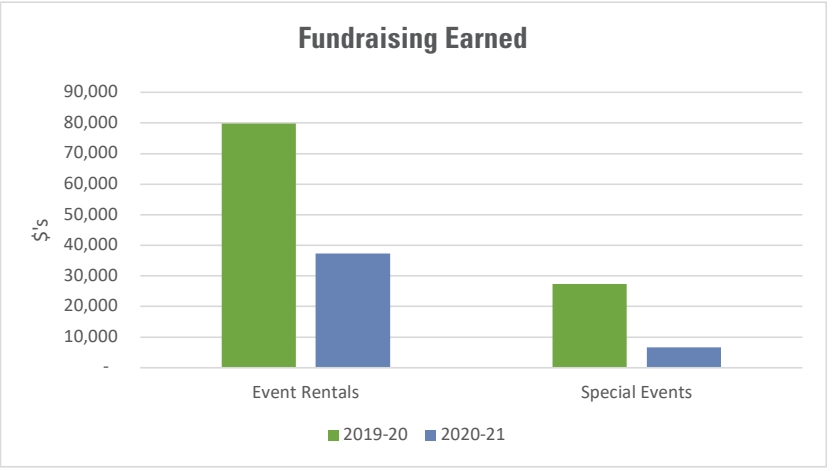
Staying on Mission Despite Challenges

los altos history museum

2020-2021 Annual Report

"Los Altos History Museum gathers and presents compelling artifacts and stories that bridge the past and the present by fostering the creative energy of volunteers and staff, challenging established narratives, and producing engaging educational programs and exhibits for the community."





COVID-19 was an Unprecedented Challenge

Welcome to Los Altos History Museum's Annual Report, covering activities from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. The pandemic overshadowed that 12-month period of time, and this annual report shows the full impact of COVID-19 on Museum operations.

These were challenging times for all of us, and the Museum was not immune to the effects of shelter-in-place orders, closures, and limits on gatherings. Visitorship plummeted, since we could not open our doors, and with no docent shifts for many months, volunteer hours were down from previous years. Due to school closures, we could not offer elementary school tours in the spring of 2020 or 2021, and we were unable to hold family-friendly events. So our outreach to school-aged children was very low.

One of our reliable lines of operational support comes from renting the Museum's beautiful patio to external clients, but county health orders mandated that we had to cancel large gatherings, and offer refunds to many young couples hoping to get married here. Although quite a few of them decided to postpone their celebrations until 2021 rather than cancel, the fiscal impact of cancellations was still considerable. It was primarily the Museum's robust "rainy day" reserve, which the Board voted to utilize during this crisis, that allowed us to keep operating despite the shortfall.

We are therefore especially proud to report that we did not merely survive through the pandemic; we thrived. The board, staff, and volunteers stayed focused on the Museum's mission and achieved remarkable results.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing and steadfast support of our members and donors. What we accomplished together, despite being physically apart for most of this 12-month period, is a testament to the strength of our community. You are invited to review and celebrate what you made possible in this Annual Report.

CROSSROADS
Patience
Hang in!
Head up

Gathered Compelling Artifacts and Stories

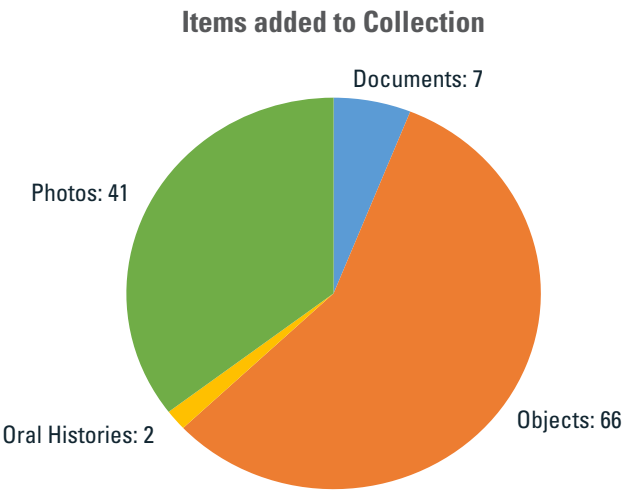
Our mission to gather compelling artifacts and stories that document the lives and experiences of the local community could not be put on hold just because our doors were closed. Instead, we recognized that in the midst of significant upheaval and turmoil, the Museum's obligation to document history is especially vital.

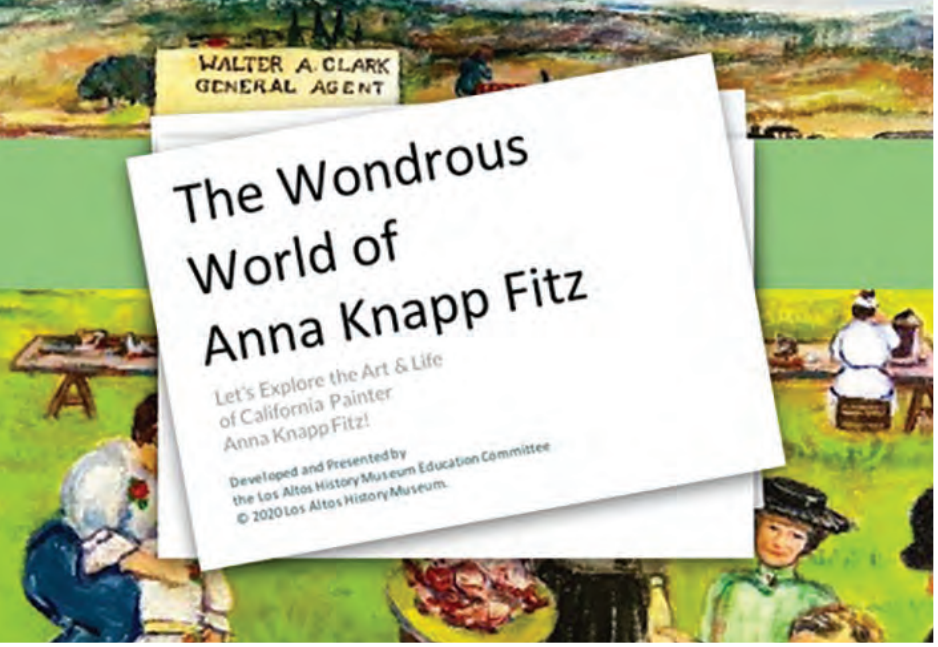
Los Altos History Museum was one of the first museums in the country to issue a call for members of the public to contribute artifacts, art works, photographs, memoirs, poems, videos, or recollections that documented the COVID-19 experience. Called "Collecting COVID," this initiative received dozens of contributions, and is ongoing. We are honored to be the repository for art works and written pieces that capture the shock, stress, and despair, but also resilience and hope, of the pandemic so future generations may understand our experience.

One special effort toward this collection was made by the Oral History Committee. Eric Greenhut interviewed many people of all ages to gather their perspectives on the pandemic. He, and other volunteers on the committee, continued to document the stories of our community, but had to do so over Zoom rather than in-person.

During the last 12 months, as people had more time at home to sort through their personal storage areas, we acquired more artifacts for our collection. We received, for instance, an amazing collection of color slides documenting Los Altos in the 1940s and 50s!

We also completed our Collection Policy during this period, with a Board vote for formal adoption in April of 2021. This document will guide our priorities in collecting an array of material related to local history as we continue our mission to gather and present compelling artifacts and stories.





"If you are interested in what happened in Silicon Valley before tech came to town, this is a very interesting snapshot of life."

– Michael P, Museum Visitor

Bridged the Past and the Present

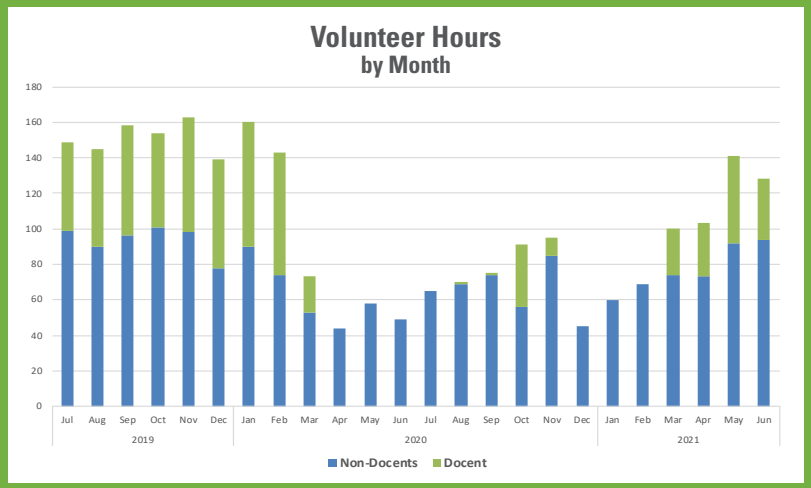
A mark of distinction between LAHM and other historical associations is our focus on making the past relevant to the present, which helps shape our shared future. In fact, everything we do is intended to bridge the past and the present, which is why that phrase is at the crux of our mission statement.

During the shelter-in-place, we seized the opportunity to utilize modern technology to help document historic artifacts. After a successful fundraising effort in May of 2020, we invested in new equipment to allow us to scan, photograph, and archive our collection with the latest technology. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the *Museum without Walls* fundraising effort!

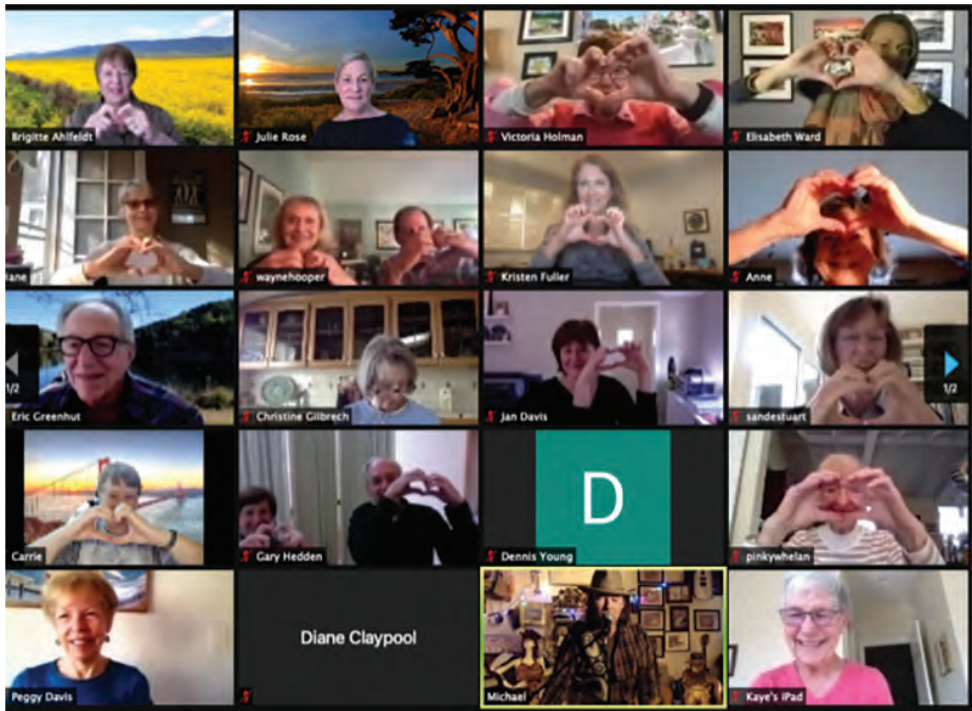
The most exciting application of modern technology to historic artifacts was the completion of 3-D modeling of the central artifact of the museum, the historic J. Gilbert Smith House. Filmed during the COVID lockdown, when no one could enter the Smith House, this technology allows for a self-guided, realistic virtual tour, and is now available on our website.

We then embarked on an ambitious effort to expand the content on our website, including a warm and engaging video presentation of the tour normally given to 4th graders, added to the Educational Resources page. We revamped the Exhibit Section to make it easier to find information about past exhibitions, each of which contain original research into our local history. We added greatly to the Collection Section of the website, with details about our photographs, maps, artifacts, and oral histories.

Creating digital assets like these help bridge the past to the present, inspiring the next generation.


Volunteer Hours
by Month
180
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun
2019
2020
2021
Non-Docents
Docent

MARKETPLACE


Brigitte Ahlfeldt
Julie Rose
Victoria Holman
Elisabeth Ward
waynehooper
Kristen Fuller
Anne
Eric Greenhut
Christine Gilbrech
Jan Davis
sandestuart
Carrie
Gary Hedden
D
Dennis Young
pinkywhelan
Peggy Davis
Diane Claypool
Michael
Kaye's iPad

Fostered Creative Energy of Volunteers

The COVID-19 pandemic changed so much of our daily interactions with others. The hybrid model of LAHM, where staff and volunteers work side-by-side, was not possible during shelter-in-place, and the staff suddenly had to do much of their Museum work alone in the early months of the shutdown. The staff quickly pivoted to more postings on our social media and other outlets, and increased the frequency of our e-newsletter to maintain connection with our members.

Our volunteers continued to find ways to contribute to the Museum's mission. The Garden Committee resumed meeting outdoors once a week to tend to the garden as soon as it was declared safe to do so. The Oral History Committee met online and stayed fully on schedule interviewing subjects. The Public Relations and Website Committee Chair Kristen Fuller was as busy as ever with many projects directly affecting our communications. The Fundraising Committee took on the challenge of mounting a virtual online auction. The Exhibits and Smith House committees learned all about virtual tours. And several board members and past board members joined special committees focused on safely reopening, transitioning our rental program, and creating a Collection Policy, all held via Zoom.

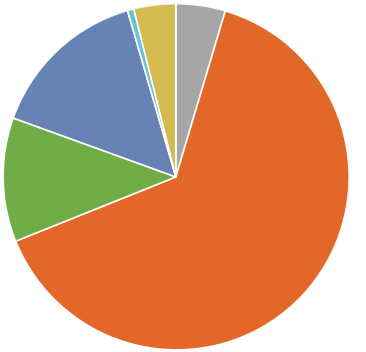
The staff—Amy Ellison, Diane Holcomb, Andrew Mendoza, Dianne Shen, and Elisabeth Ward—oversaw interns from Foothill College who continued to work with us remotely through much of the pandemic. And there were new operational systems to work out as we all learned how to work from home.

The staff remains grateful to the supporters of the Museum for this rewarding and challenging work, and grateful so many of our volunteers came back! That creative energy is the hallmark of LAHM, and one of the best examples in the country of a museum deeply and meaningfully engaged with its community.

Financials

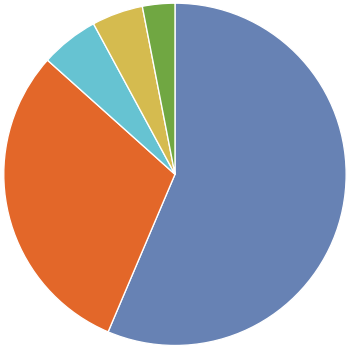
2020-2021 Income

Membership	$51,668
Restricted Gifts/Grants	720,741
Unrestricted Gifts/Grants	130,045
One-time Investment Gain	167,686
Special Events Revenue	6,695
Store/Rental Income	43,740
Total	**$1,120,575**



2020-2021 Expenses

Staff	$367,189
Special Project Vendors	196,861
Admin/Other	35,712
Printing	31,489
Supplies & Equipment	19,912
Total	**651,163**



"Los Altos is lucky to have you—you are truly an asset to the community."
– Pat, Museum Visitor

Challenged Established Narratives

The Mission statement includes the words, "challenging established narratives." What this means is LAHM is committed to not just repeating the same information year after year. Rather, we embark on original research, we talk to more people, and we gather more evidence so we can tell a more complete history of our community.

During the last fiscal year, staff and teams of volunteers focused their attention into drafting a script for a new, reimagined Permanent Exhibition. The first draft was completed in May of 2021, challenging established narratives by asking new questions about our local history and framing the answers in a dynamic new way.

Instead of asking simply "what happened when," we also asked, "what happened ***where*** and when and why." Adding in the specifics of our local places and geography will help our visitors better appreciate how history is all around us and affects even the shape of the roads we drive on!

We are also telling untold stories of our community. The year 2020 will be remembered for a global health crisis, but also for renewed national attention on the history of racial dynamics in the United States. History museums have been called upon to provide a forum for diverse voices to be heard. To help us accomplish this, we assembled a wonderful group of local historians who focus on the minority communities in our area. The suggestions of the Diversity Advisory Group have added greatly to the complexity of the stories we will be telling in the new Permanent Exhibition.

We are grateful for the many, many generous donations that came in during 2020/2021 specifically for the new Permanent Exhibition. Those funds are held in reserve until we go into full production of the project in 2022/2023, and have already inspired us to push the boundaries of our historical understanding!

"What a great find! Enthusiastic welcoming docents. Fascinating exhibits. Something for every age to enjoy. Excellent displays explaining the history of Los Altos. And wonderful to have a tour of the house. We will be back. Can't recommend it enough! "

– Elaine P, Museum Visitor

Produced Engaging Exhibits

In order to fulfill our Mission to produce engaging programs and exhibitions for the community in the midst of a global pandemic, LAHM staff had to be especially creative and flexible. We know how much the community looks forward to our surprising and intriguing exhibition topics and that our members deserve enrichment even when our doors are closed.

August of 2020 presented an important milestone—the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote—and we were determined not to let that historic moment pass by unnoticed. For the first time, we mounted an historic exhibition on the porch of the J. Gilbert Smith House. *Rise Up! The Fight for Women's Suffrage* outdoor version included photos of national and statewide leaders in the Women's Rights Movement, and local leaders here in Santa Clara County, as well as the text about the challenges and strategies of the movement. This exhibition opened in time for the 100th anniversary, and was viewable 24 hours a day while staying socially-distanced. When we safely reopened, we unveiled the complete *Rise Up!* exhibition with artifacts and more information, and we produced a teacher's guide and 3D interactive online tour of the exhibition for students, since youngsters were still encouraged to stay home.

Other online exhibitions included *Young at Art*, a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Art Docents program.

As restrictions began to lift, we were able to open *Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change*, but all related programs were still hosted online. We also offered online programs of general interest, including a popular program on the history of African Americans in the area. Los Altos History Museum's YouTube Learning Channel has now been enhanced with recordings of all of our online programs.

We feel we rose to the challenge of 2020, thanks to the incredible support of our community.

los altos
history
museum

Assn. of the Los Altos Historical Museum
51 So. San Antonio Road
Los Altos, CA 94022
www.losaltoshistory.org

Board of Directors 2020-2021
Gary Hedden, President
Ginny Badros, 1st VP
Larry Lang, 2nd VP
John Beman, Treasurer
Vicki Holman, Secretary
Julia Lovin, Past President
Marcia Adams
Nicole Andrews
Janis Ahmadjian-Baer, PhD
Carole Flores
Tyler Furuichi
Wayne Hooper
Janet Klinke
Julie Rose
Avind Ven

Board of Directors 2021-2022
Gary Hedden, President
Larry Lang, 1st VP
Nicole Andrews, 2nd VP
Victoria Holman, Secretary
Wayne Hooper, Treasurer
Gerri Acers
John Beman
Kelly Davis
Tyler Furuichi
Margo Horn
Kuljeet Kalkat
Janet Klinke
Alex Wang

Staff
Dr. Elisabeth Ward, Executive Director
Diane Holcomb, Outreach Coordinator
Maria Crowder, Development Events Representative
Farshad Fallah, Bookkeeper and Office Administrator
Faustino Carrillo, Gardener