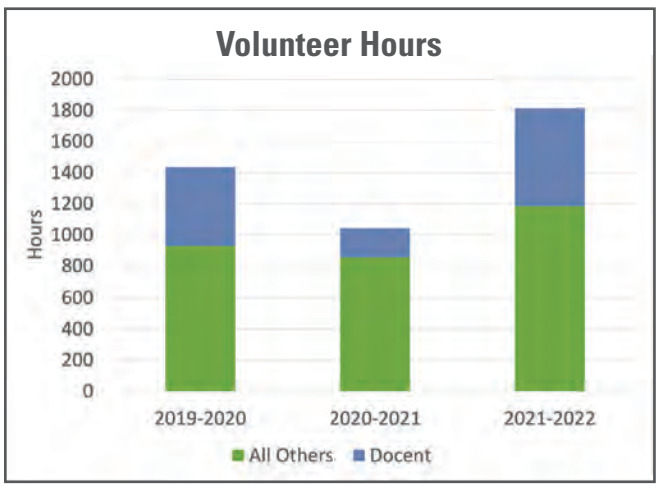
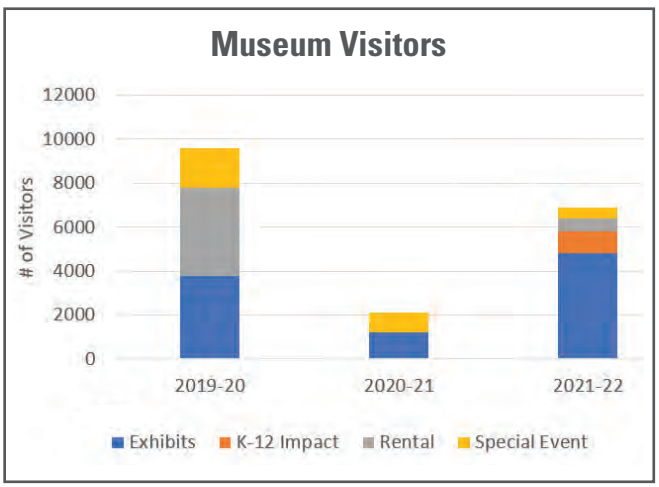
Preparing for the Future

los altos history museum

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT

The Museum offered three changing exhibits in the main gallery during last fiscal year—*Gold Fever!, Annie Knapp Fitz Paints,* and *Every Wrinkle Tells a Story*—before closing that gallery to make room for construction on the Permanent Exhibition.





PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Like a caterpillar spinning a cocoon to safely transform into a butterfly, organizations need to take opportunities to prepare for the future. Sometimes these moments come organically, as part of natural organizational change. Other times, external factors compel an organization to adapt to new circumstances and quickly adjust. For Los Altos History Museum in the 12 months spanning our last fiscal year (July 2021 to June 2022), both of those forces were simultaneously at play. With this Annual Report, we're sharing with you how we've put in place structures that will help us emerge transformed in the year ahead.

In the following pages, you'll hear about how we took the opportunities afforded by the reduced traffic of COVID closures to revamp some of our programs, and how we intend to keep that momentum going for even greater impact in 2023. You'll also hear about strategic personnel decisions we have made to help poise the museum for future growth, both on the staff and Board. And you'll hear about new programs we unveiled in 2022. But the most exciting reveal is yet to come: in this report, we are delighted to share news of the wonderful progress being made on our new Permanent Exhibition, which will open in 2023 and truly redefine the Museum.

These processes did not all begin in June of 2021, and they were not all complete by July of 2022. But last fiscal year was a particularly dynamic year internally for Los Altos History Museum, as we simultaneously reopened thanks to lifted COVID restrictions, AND closed portions of our operations due to construction of the Permanent Exhibition. This has in effect meant that the "hibernation" period for the Museum, which began with the parking lot closures associated with the Community Center, and lasted through all of COVID, continues. But in just a few short months, all members, donors, and residents of Los Altos and beyond will be welcomed into a truly dazzling and transformed museum.

Thank you so much for your steadfast support and your belief in our potential.

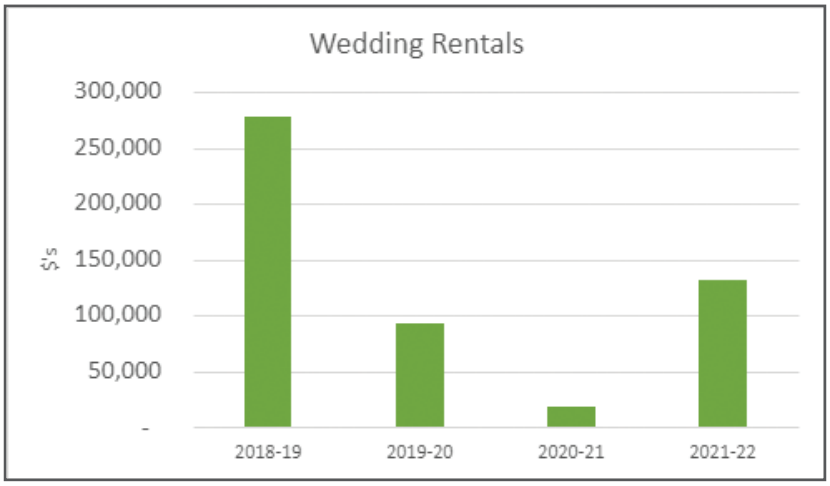
WEDDINGS RETURN WITH A TWIST

The most dramatic impact of the COVID-19 closures on LAHM was to our external rentals program. It was not until July of 2021 that we were able to once again offer indoor dancing to wedding guests, and many of the weddings that had been scheduled for 2020 were finally able to be held in late Summer and early Fall of 2021. It was our pleasure to welcome these happy couples to the Museum. By allowing them to reschedule without any additional fees, the Museum did see a loss of revenue; those Saturdays would have normally been sold to new clients. To compensate for that, the Museum has been pursuing programs to help shuttered venues, and we are also grateful that we had the reserves to weather this.

During the shutdown period, the Museum implemented several strategic decisions about our external rentals program that will continue to provide dividends into the future. These included repairs to our outdoor surfaces and lighting, as well as more signage.

The biggest change was that we brought the person responsible for these events "in house." Due to changes in California law, and our own desire to have more Board oversight into the frequency and types of rentals, this position went from being an external contractor to an internal staff member. We were pleased to welcome to the staff in June of 2021 Maria Crowder, who then trained her replacement, Jacqui Marchesinni, in early 2022.

Led by an internal staff member, the external rental program can become better aligned with our mission. We introduced a new pricing structure in 2022, which offers new types of rentals more focused on the needs of local corporations, organizations, and families. Our hope is for ongoing relationships and recurring rentals that strengthen the Museum's sense of community. We are also grateful for a strong and cooperative relationship with the new Community Center; we've already had some couples have their wedding ceremony at the Museum and their reception at the Community Center, and we expect more of that in the future.



REVAMPED EDUCATION PROGRAM

In April and May of every year since 2005, Los Altos History Museum has welcomed area 3rd and 4th graders. That was not possible in Spring of 2020 or Spring of 2021. But we used the time off to make some changes to the program, which we were excited to reveal in April and May of 2022, when the kids were finally back! The Museum is grateful to the many members of our Education Committee who returned to teach the program and helped revamp the offerings.

The Museum hired a Museum Educator in 2021 to help with this transformation, Georgianna Shea. With her background in theatre, she suggested our Education Docents dress in costume and play the parts of our historical figures, like J. Gilbert Smith and Annie Knapp Fitz. This change was welcomed by all and helped make the 2022 school tours doubly special!

The Museum Educator position includes not only supporting the youth educational programs, but also all of the adult educational programs, such as lectures and classes. The topics of public programs at the Museum have and will continue to be tied to our Changing Exhibition program, so the Museum Educator will also be working with our Exhibits Committee in deciding on exhibit topics and associated programs. By emphasizing the educational nature of our exhibits and programs, this new position will help guide the Museum and solidify our role in the community. The impact of this change will cause positive ripple effects into the future!

Georgianna Shea with Anya McClatchie and Ghania Medhi, who helped lead the teen docent program in 2022. Over a dozen teens returned to this successful program last year.

Lindsay Carpenter and Carole Katz, playing the roles of J. Gilbert Smith and Margaret Smith for the third-grade tours.

CREATING A NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION

Creating any exhibit always represents many hours of research and planning. Imagine then how much more time, energy, resources, research, and meetings have gone into our new Permanent Exhibition! Meant to last years, not months, this exhibition has taken a team of 7 curators, 3 script writers, 4 special-topic research groups, 9 contractual firms (each with their own team of employees), an oversight committee, and over 100 donors to bring to fruition. Everyone involved in this exhibition has been focused on creating a novel, exciting, informative, engaging, and welcoming experience.

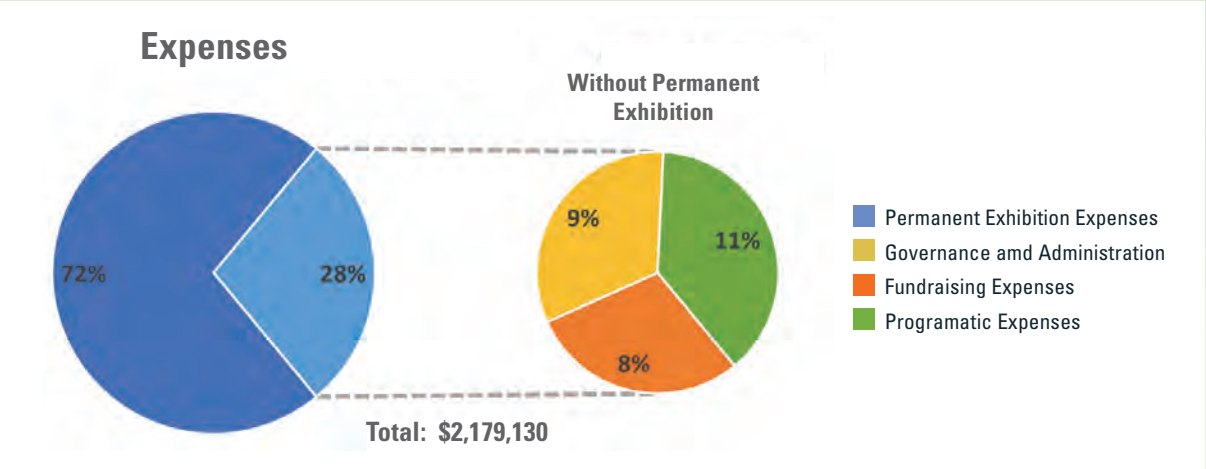
The Museum closed our original Permanent Exhibition, called *Crown of the Peninsula*, in March of 2022. Some of our visitors were disappointed to discover that the model railroad was not available, but happy to hear it will be returning in 2023 with new features.

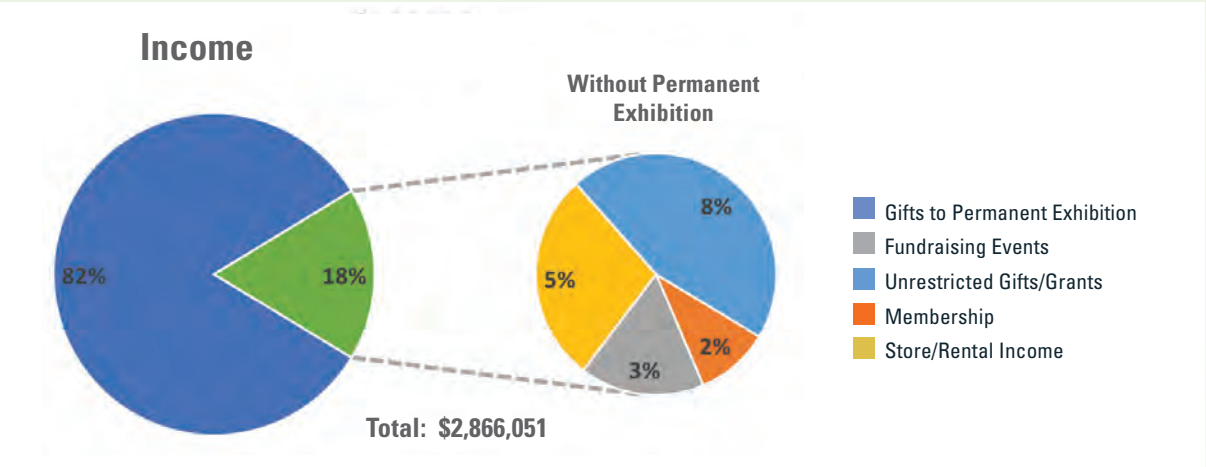
Since then, as contractors worked—ripping up the flooring, checking on the wiring, measuring the walls—the top floor of the museum has been covered in plastic sheeting. It has indeed been cocooned away from the public. But the new Permanent Exhibition, titled *Making Connections: Stories from the Land*, will emerge to absolutely delight the public in early 2023. We cannot wait to share it with everyone!

Behind the scenes, staff, volunteers, and contractors have been taking a deep dive into the Museum's collection and archives. We've digitized many records, and added vast amounts of detail and information to our database. This back-end work will position us for another wonderful reveal: the Museum is planning to present our collection database to the public online in 2023.

To accommodate the construction schedule of the new Permanent Exhibition, all Museum operations moved to the J. Gilbert Smith House, including the Store. We created four changing exhibits in the Smith House Gallery!

Our financial status remained on positive footing, thanks to a strong annual appeal in the Winter of 2021.





The Museum debuted our new annual fundraiser, Dancing through the Decades, in April of 2022, and raised 50% more than at our previous fundraisers. Every spring, we will pick a new decade and create a fun, themed fundraising auction event!

Strategic choices require strong leadership and careful planning. In addition to adding positions to the staff, the Board also spent much of 2021/2022 working on their own "staffing." During a Board retreat in Fall of 2021, Directors recognized how important it is to have a mix of talents on the Board as they lead the Museum. This also includes a mix of "insiders" (long-term volunteers involved with the Museum) and "outsiders" (members of the community with particular talents new to the Museum).

In late 2021 and early 2022, Gary Hedden and the Nominating Committee created a rubric of all the skills needed to successfully manage a museum, from financial oversight to marketing savvy, fundraising acumen to knowledge of local history, involvement with local organizations to human resource policies. It is a big job, which is why it takes 14 dedicated and talented people working together to make good decisions. Gary appointed several new Board members to fill vacancies that had come up during COVID. Margo Horn of the Historical Commission, Jan Thomas from the docent committee, Kuljeet Kalkat from the Finance Commission, and Catherine Greenberg of the marketing committee, all joined the Board during the last fiscal year.

The rubric tool and the strategic appointment of so many great new Board members were designed to assist the Museum in meeting the challenges of the future. We recognize that in many ways, 2023 will not just be a reopening of the Permanent Exhibition, but also the re-introduction of the Museum to a whole new group of people. Many new people have moved into Los Altos since the Museum opened, and this big new project offers us a renewed opportunity to bring in new audiences.

Catherine Greenberg and Jan Thomas

Kuljeet Kalkat and Margo Horn

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Nicole Andrews, 2nd VP
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Gerri Acers
John Beman
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Georgianna Shea, Museum Educator
Diane Holcomb, Director of Communications
Jacqui Marchessini, Events Manager
Farshad Fallah, Bookkeeper and Office Administrator
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Lori Tuttle, Hospitality
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Jane Packard, Orchard Commons
Kristen Fuller, Public Relations
Sharon Barkoff, Smith House
Vicki Holman, Store
Cliff Olson, Train Committee
Brigitte Ahlfeldt and Peggy Davis, Volunteer Development

Los Altos History Museum was honored by the County of Santa Clara for our 2019-2021 restoration of the Spagnoli Tank House on May 21, 2022.