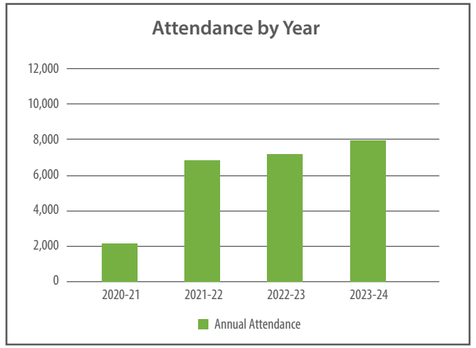
Unseen Histories: A Year of Discovery and Engagement

los altos history museum

2023-2024 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."

"What a great find! Enthusiastic, welcoming docents. Fascinating exhibits. Something for every age to enjoy. Can't recommend it enough!"
– Elaine, Museum Visitor

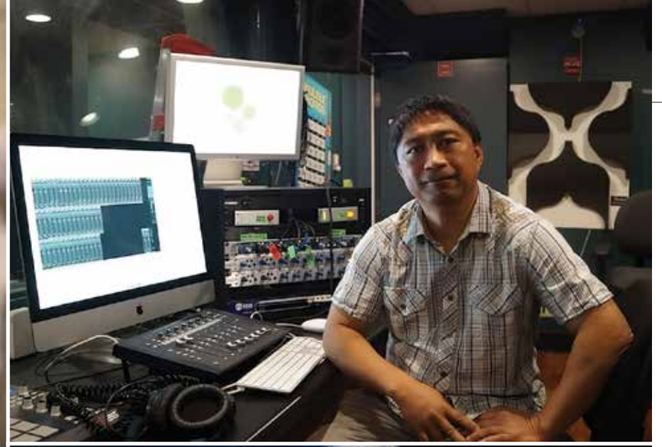


Unveiling New Narratives

The theme "Unveiling New Narratives" reflects our commitment to discovering and sharing stories that have been overlooked or marginalized. By bringing these diverse voices and experiences to light, we aim to provide a more authentic and inclusive representation of the past, helping to shape a more informed future.

This year, we embraced new ways to share these stories, including leveraging technology to enhance engagement, making oral histories accessible online, and developing an app to enrich the Museum experience. We also involved younger generations in key processes and took on stewardship of the Los Altos Heritage Orchard, preserving a living testament to the Valley's agricultural heritage. Thank you for your unwavering support, which allows us to bring history to life and strengthen the connection between the past, present, and future.

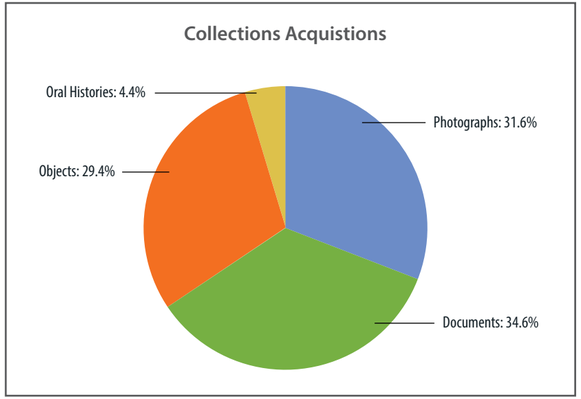
Vision: We aspire to be the premiere local center for intergenerational and intercultural connections.



Sharing Our Stories – Collections & Oral Histories

"More than a Collection: Los Altos History Museum Preserves Stories"

The cover feature in the Spring 2024 issue of *Living in Los Altos* magazine explored how Los Altos History Museum safeguards local stories. Over the past year, our goal was to share these stories with the community through our "Museum without Walls" project. We have made fifty oral histories available online, highlighting narratives beyond the familiar apricot tales. Thanks to a generous $10,000 grant from the Farrington Historical Foundation, these personal and cultural stories are now accessible to the public. The project also benefited from the collaboration of San Jose State University interns, who assisted in abstracting, indexing, and creating audio excerpts for these invaluable oral histories.

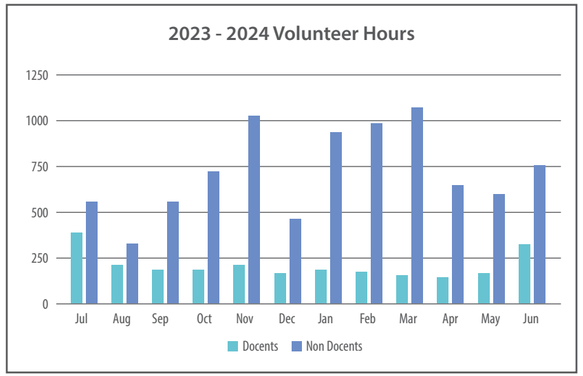


"Oral histories offer a unique opportunity to hear the authentic voices of our community members, their emotions, and vivid stories that may be missed in a written transcript."

– Sophia Abarca, *Curator of Collections*

"What added immensely to our visit was our guided tour with teen docent Michael. Not only did I learn about the [J. Gilbert Smith] house, its residents, and the period objects within it in an engaging way, but I was profoundly inspired and encouraged to know that there are young people like Michael who are truly engaged in history and in sharing it so eloquently with others."

– J.P., Museum Visitor



Encouraging New Perspectives – Volunteer Engagement

Empowering the Younger Generation

To include younger perspectives, we proudly nominated our first Youth Representative to the Museum's Board of Directors. Audrey Hollenbeck, a Mountain View High School senior and dedicated Teen Docent for three years, brought fresh ideas to the decision-making process. "This new position will provide the Board with another point of view, and I am honored to have been selected," Audrey said. We also welcomed 28 new volunteers into the Teen Docent Program, where they worked alongside History Docents to guide visitors and share our diverse stories.

Empowering through Volunteerism

At the Annual Alliance of Museums conference in Baltimore, outgoing Executive Director Elisabeth Ward, Interim Executive Director Julie Bly Devere, and Education and Volunteer Coordinator Lillie Moore emphasized the vital role of volunteers in community-building. Their presentation, "Much More than Volunteers: Centering Your Community-Building Mission," reinforced our belief that volunteers are central to our mission.

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*as of July 1, 2024

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We extend our gratitude to the generous donors whose support has enabled us to preserve and share the rich history of our community. Your contributions continue to fuel our mission, helping us engage, educate, and inspire future generations.

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"What a lovely surprise while spending the afternoon in Los Altos. I love history and the colorful and interactive exhibits in the museum were fantastic! It's also free, so come learn about the history of this Silicon Valley town."

– Jason, Museum Visitor

Engaging and Thought-Provoking Experiences – Exhibits

A Wide Breadth of Local History

Guided by the theme "Unveiling New Narratives," we aimed to present experiences that challenged visitors to see history from fresh perspectives. This past year, our exhibits explored a range of subjects, from early agriculture to high-tech architecture, the origins of Los Altos street names to the evolution of California's El Camino Real, and the impact of service clubs on the community to the community's influence on art.

Highlights included *Her Side of the Story: Tales of California Pioneer Women* which shared courageous journeys of women who crossed land and sea to forge new lives. *Drip, Dry, Flood: Orchard Water Management* explored the challenges and innovations in water management. *Rotary Club of Los Altos: 75 Years of Service Above Self* revealed the club's numerous community and international service projects. *Building the Future: A Visual History of the Architecture of Silicon Valley* showcased the evolving architectural landscape through the lens of photographer Richard Adler. An accompanying self-guided tour brochure of Silicon Valley's iconic high-tech buildings is available for download at *losaltoshistory.org/building*.

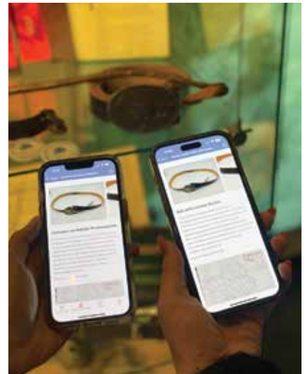
Bringing History to Life – Educational Outreach

Interactive Learning

In March and April, over 775 students in 3rd and 4th grades from the Los Altos and Mountain View School Districts explored California history through our educational tours. The Museum's Education Committee revamped the curriculum to include our Permanent Exhibition, *Making Connections: Stories from the Land*. Through a scavenger hunt, students engaged with exhibit technology to find answers about notable local historic figures. They also explored the train diorama of early Los Altos and an interactive map of the town. In addition to this program, we expanded our community reach through events like the Apricot STEM Fair and Train Days, engaging families and history enthusiasts with hands-on learning.

At the Touch of a Finger

Utilizing the Stqry platform, we introduced new educational opportunities via QR codes. Visitors can download the Los Altos History Museum mobile app on their smartphones or tablets to explore the Permanent Exhibition—with artifact descriptions in 23 languages—as well as the Los Altos Heritage Orchard and a walking tour of downtown Public Art. This platform enhances accessibility and engagement, connecting people, places, and stories in innovative ways.



Number of students attending school tours
406 3rd graders **372** 4th graders

Revitalizing a Landmark – The Heritage Orchard

Preserving Our Agricultural Past

Following a season of drought and the passing of its orchardist, the Los Altos Heritage Orchard had seen better days. To revitalize this landmark of the area's agricultural past, the City of Los Altos approached the Museum with a contract to assume responsibility for the care and upkeep of the Heritage Orchard for three years. Our first order of business was to hire a professional orchardist. Terence Welch brought 45 years of fruit-growing expertise to the role, and worked with the Museum's Orchard Commons Committee, chaired by Dr. Jane Packard, to make the orchard thrive once again. They accomplished this impressive transformation over four phases.

Phase One: Installed an irrigation system, made possible with matching funds from Valley Water and the City of Los Altos.

Phase Two: Pruned branches, removed deadwood and dying trees.

Phase Three: Planted nearly 300 Blenheim apricot saplings, ordered from Four Winds Nursery in Watsonville.

Phase Four: Harvested the fruit, which was sold at DeMartini Orchard.

Future plans include new interpretive signage, and orchard-related activities for the community.

Fostering Dialogue and Connections – Programs

Conversations that Matter

Our programming continued to explore new narratives and foster meaningful connections within the community. *Conversations and Reflections: The African American Experience in Santa Clara County* and *The Los Altos Story: The Impact of the Rotary AIDS Project* were standout programs that highlighted underrepresented experiences. These programs were part of our Third Thursday series, which covered new ground, shared new stories, and connected neighborhoods through block parties–from North and South Los Altos to the Gemello neighborhood and Downtown Triangle.

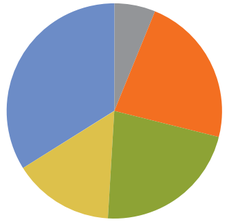
Hidden Histories

We joined with Foothill-De Anza Center for Applied Humanities to present *Conversations and Reflections: Silicon Valley Conspiracy Theories*, which brought together over 100 attendees. Stanford Professor Steve Blank revealed the "Secret History of Silicon Valley" in this thought-provoking event.

Financials

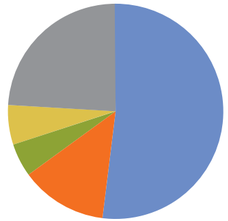
2023-2024 Income

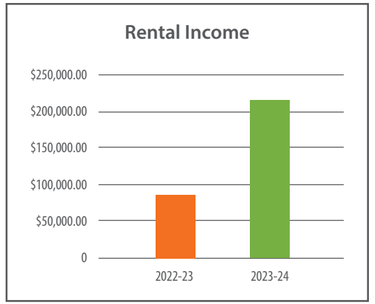
Membership	$63,650
Facility Rentals and Store Sales	222,788
Programs and Events	222,027
Public Support	146,649
Private Donations	335,093
Total	**$990,207**



2023-2024 Expenses

Staff	$579,704
Administration	142,634
Fundraising and Programs	50,212
Supplies & Equipment	67,245
Special Project Vendors	270,809
Total	**$1,110,604**





"Los Altos History Museum is a special venue. The first thing that captures your attention is the charming house and its beautiful garden setting and massive trees that surround the venue. The Staff did an awesome job at executing the couple's vision and making their day seamless. A great venue to work with and from my perspective, a great venue to have your dream wedding at!"

– Jennifer, Museum Visitor

los altos history museum

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We thank Dr. Elisabeth Ward for her leadership over seven years, and all of the volunteers, members, donors, board and staff who have supported our mission and helped make our achievements possible.

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Lillie Moore, Education and Volunteer Coordinator
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