los altos history museum

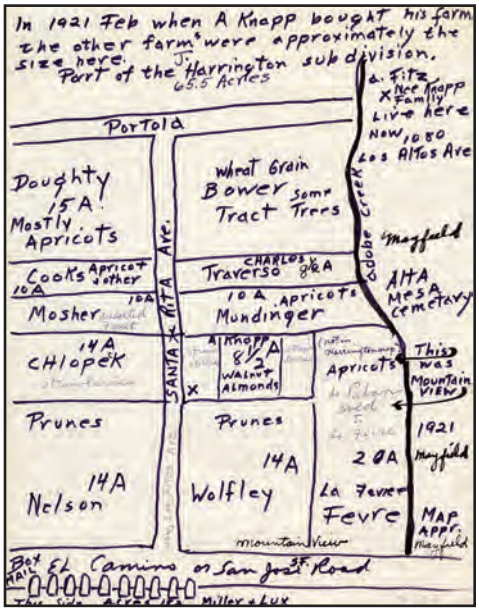
UNDER THE OAKS

Published by the Association of the Los Altos Historical Museum, founded 1978 Fall 2023

Stories from North Los Altos

The first *Third Thursday* neighborhood block party featured north Los Altos. A lot of people showed up and a lot of stories were shared.

After some time for folks to mingle and grab some of Lori Tuttle's tasty treats we headed upstairs. The displays on the big screens of the Permanent Exhibition had been changed to show vintage photographs of old homes, many dating back over 100 years, and fascinating old maps.



A hand-drawn map of Santa Rita Avenue from 1921.

Elisabeth Ward welcomed the crowd and asked, "When did you come to Los Altos?" Armond King arrived in 1951 and later moved into the Bleibler family home on Cherry Avenue and is the third-generation family member to live in it. Jim Shear arrived in 1948 and recalled delivering the Palo Alto Times as a kid. No one beat Sue Beton-Smith though. She arrived in 1939 and grew up on Los Altos Avenue. She recalled that the newspaper was nicknamed the Paly Times. She also recalled Max's Tea Room. As a kid she and her friends loved to run through it in the middle of the day just for giggles.

Armond had other stories for us. He recalled picking blackberries by Adobe Creek in August. The vines were thick and full of thorns, so he and his friends used long poles to push them aside to reach the berries. When they got too hot they jumped in the creek to cool off.

We heard many apricot stories. Nancy Colace recalled cutting "cots." It was sticky, hot and there were lots of flies. It was not much fun. Jeanine Valadez told us about her ancient apricot tree with a massive trunk. It still produces apricots, but she says the squirrels get them all. That was a common refrain. Ilona Lindauer recalled the days of drying apricots with husband Chuck. She did not like the smell of the stinky sulfur, but the dried fruit made wonderful Christmas gifts.

Suzanne Gladstone and Jeannie Tasker, best friends since the 60s.

There were touching stories of people who have been friends for decades. Jeannie Tasker, who lived off Pine, met Suzanne Angst, now Gladstone, at Covington Junior High. Jeannie didn't have a locker so Suzanne offered to share hers and they have been best friends for over 60 years. Jeannie told another story. She brought in a 1967 newspaper clipping with a letter to the editor by her mother. People were arguing about storm drains and didn't want to pay for them, but her mom pointed out that when we get hit by a big storm, we will wish we had them. The City put in storm drains.

A more sobering tale was told by Sue Beton-Smith. She went to Los Altos Grammar School, which is long gone, but recalled the air raid drills during World War II. They had one every couple of weeks and the kids were sent to nearby homes for shelter. They didn't line up outside in the schoolyard as that would have made them an easy target. She also remembered one day missing her friend Harry Hamasaki. She later learned that he had been sent to a "relocation camp."

Nomi and Fritz Trapnell attended although they live on University Avenue. When told they had come to the wrong party, Nomi replied, "We used to live on Lockhart Lane off Pine. We moved to University Avenue in 1993." She added that they plan to attend that neighborhood block party too.

The music was a nice touch that evening. It was a jazz band led by Rick Shaw. John Beman, who lives on Pine Lane near Rick, and shares a backyard fence, commented that he enjoys hearing them whenever they practice. Paul Newhagen, who once lived on Van Buren Street, recalled

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Stories from North Los Altos

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that there were apricots on one side of the street and prunes on the other. Prunes don't have the charm of apricots, but they were just as important to the local economy.

Sue Althouse and daughter Leslie McClellan, still a celebrity with her wonderful kitty story.

Sue Althouse had a good story. She arrived in 1965 and was told that the water in Los Altos is perfect for fertility. Sure enough, along came little Leslie in 1966 and that brings us to the best story of the evening. Two-and-a-half-year-old Leslie's dad and brother were biking and when she came out to greet them, she saw them being followed by a "big kitty." It was a 75-pound lion cub. Little Leslie went right over to pet the cat. To her surprise the cat, a pet lion named Buffy, gave her a whack and Leslie hit the ground. The owner quickly arrived and got things under control, but the story did make the local papers. Leslie became a celebrity and we all enjoyed hearing her tell us the tale. By the way, the owner worked at the Oakland Zoo, and it wasn't long before she and Buffy left town.

Please join us for future *Third Thursdays* and be sure to keep an eye out for your own neighborhood block party!

~ Gary Hedden

Dr. Elisabeth Ward welcoming the Third Thursday crowd.

LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM
"UNDER THE OAKS"

Gary Hedden, *Editor* Judi Eichler, *Graphic Design*
Gloria Geller, *Copy Editor*

A publication of interest to citizens of Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and neighboring communities, produced by the Association of the Los Altos Historical Museum.

President's Pen

Architect Antoni Gaudí died before his masterpiece, the basilica of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, was finished. In fact, construction still continues (take that, Sarah Winchester!), with completion scheduled for 2026, the centennial of his death.

During a recent family trip to Spain, we noticed that each region marked their progress and prosperity with grand architectural landmarks. Barcelona overflows with astonishing buildings. Madrid has the Prado and Plaza Mayor. Cáceres layers Roman, Moorish, and Gothic architecture in its ancient center. Valencia unveiled the amazingly modern City of Arts and Sciences, and already it ranks among the Twelve Treasures of Spain.

Returning home, we noticed that in contrast local architecture has often lagged behind the progress and prosperity of Silicon Valley. Partly this comes from our start-up culture, often created in nondescript garages. Noble families are willing to fund elaborate palaces; venture capitalists not so much. And companies that build a showy headquarters may regret the excess if their fortunes decline.

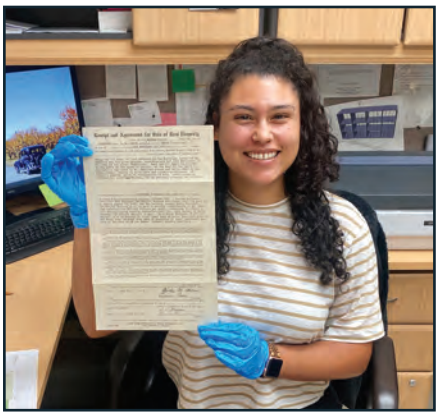
Yet Silicon Valley leaders are increasingly bringing imagination and innovation to their built environment. The Apple "spaceship" landed in Cupertino, replacing a forgettable tech campus. Hikers and bikers along Stevens Creek watched the Google Bay View campus arise, soaring pavilions covered with "dragon-scale" solar tiles. More amazing projects are underway, even as designers ponder the impact of post-pandemic work habits.

The History Museum celebrates this evolution in the exhibition *Building the Future: A Visual History of the Architecture of Silicon Valley*, featuring the photography of Richard Adler. We hope you visit this fascinating exhibition and participate in the accompanying programs.

Just as Gaudí's vision owes its fruition to countless longtime patrons, so the Museum owes its ongoing enhancement to our loyal donors and members. Thank you for supporting our wonderful Los Altos landmark.

~ Larry Lang

Our Hidden Gems



Sophia holding the 1939 purchase receipt.

If you are a longtime resident of Los Altos you may have heard of the Finnigan Home on Los Altos Ave., purchased in 1964 by Bette and the late Bob Finnigan. This historic home had belonged to the parents of Sue Beton-Smith, Billy and Eleanor Beton, who bought the home on two acres of land in 1939 from Albert and Essie Dieriex for $14,000. The Dieriex's had hired renowned San Jose architect Charles McKenzie to design their two-story Mediterranean-style home in 1927.

The house was built with an early cooling and ventilating system and was heated by an "Oil-O'-Matic" oil burner and a "Sunbeam" furnace. Other features of the home were art tile mantels, tile baths, a "complicated" hardwood staircase, highly polished woodwork and Tiffany finished plaster.

Albert Dieriex was a Naval Architect with the Matson Navigation Company in San Francisco. In the early 20th century, the Matson ships were used for food transportation, tourism, oil exploration, and military service for both world wars. Due to the increasing demand to visit Hawaii in the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, Matson built its first luxury liner in 1927, *S.S. Malolo*, which was the fastest ship in the Pacific at the time. It led to the construction of other luxury liners: *Monterey*, *Mariposa*, and the *Lurline* between 1930-1932.

The other owners have interesting histories as well. Bob Finnigan was a talented chemist who co-founded the Finnigan Corporation in 1967 to produce mass spectrometers coupled with a gas chromatograph to analyze complex chemical mixtures. His device became the worldwide-standard method of analysis for environmental pollutants and became the gold standard for analysis in pharmaceutical research and drug testing. Billy Beton, born in Italy in 1903, became a successful San Francisco importer-exporter who moved his family south for the healthier, drier weather of Los Altos.

Sue Beton-Smith grew up in this home and loved it dearly! She has many fond memories of the home as well as growing up in north Los Altos. We are so grateful to Sue for donating the purchase receipt, now in our collection, to this beautifully crafted home during a time when Los Altos was young!

~ Sophia Abarca

Volunteer Highlights and Activities

With the devastating removal of the magnificent Coast Live Oak adjacent to the Smith House, this important entranceway to the Museum suddenly became bare. Garden Committee volunteers and Board member Tyler Furuichi (liaison to the committee and a landscape company owner) brainstormed ideas to beautify the space and make it functional. The preliminary plan includes a large Valley Oak, Manzanitas, water-wise plants including California natives, accent boulders and boulders that will double as benches. There will be educational signage and art explaining how the land has changed through the years and acknowledging the original inhabitants, the Ohlone. In addition to being a welcoming entrance, it will also serve as an overflow area for the Museum and rental events. We are looking forward to it!

Don, Caroline and Jake studying Tyler's garden plan.

You may have seen the Garden Committee in action on Thursdays, planting and maintaining the beautiful flowers and trees that make up the Museum's landscaping. To volunteer and become involved, please fill out the form on the Museum's website at losaltoshistory.org/support/volunteer.

~ Caroline Landsbergen

Staff

Dr. Elisabeth Ward, *Executive Director*
Sophia Abarca, *Curator of Collections*
Diane Holcomb, *Director of Communications*
Jordan Grealish, *Exhibits Specialist*
Lillie Moore, *Assistant to the Executive Director*
Lisa Porter, *Rental Events Marketing Manager*
Ken Buscho, *Operations Manager*
Barbara Klein, *Bookkeeper*
Janna Land, *Special Projects*
Faustino Carrillo, *Gardener*

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Armond King is a third generation Los Altan. He was born here in 1935, at what is now the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. He started his education at Los Altos Grammar School, and continued at Mountain View High School. His family briefly left the area for work in Oakland, but returned to Orange Avenue in Los Altos while he was in the seventh grade. After grandfather and area blacksmith Herman Bliebler passed away in 1950, Armond's family moved to the Cherry Avenue house to help his grandmother, Bertha.

Armond King at the family home on Cherry Avenue.

Armond described rural Los Altos and the great apricot and prune orchards he worked in for extra money during his childhood summers. He was paid thirty-five cents for a bucket, and fifty cents for a lug of cut "cots." By the end of the summer, he would have earned twenty-five dollars and he used that to buy new clothes for the coming school year. In elementary school, lunch tickets were sold at the beginning of the week for $1.25, and a carton of milk cost a nickel. High school wasn't much different than it is today, though getting into college was practically guaranteed if you had the grades and could afford it. Armond claimed he lacked both. He described getting burgers at Brennan's Drive-In on El Camino and watching the cute carhops deliver the burgers. He also watched as tastes shifted from burgers to pizza, and got his first pizza at Monty's Pizza when it was the only pizza place around.

For years, Armond has been known as the train guy at the Museum. He got his first toy train, a Lionel, when he was six as a Christmas gift that he shared with his two brothers. They got a train car every Christmas for many years after. Later in life, his love of building the sets outweighed running the trains!

Every part of the past is valuable, and we hope you enjoyed this story. If you have stories to share, please let us know. We always want your stories!

~ Kellie Fernandez

History in the News

This July, the Los Altos City Council approved a three-year contract with the Museum to preserve the city's beloved Heritage Orchard. In an effort led by Museum volunteer Jane Packard, the Museum will now manage and maintain the orchard. "Our guiding principles will include conserving water, building soil fertility, and inviting pollinators. We are learning from other heritage orchards in our region, while considering the unique qualities of this Historic Landmark in our Civic Center," said Packard, chair of the Museum's Orchard Commons Committee.

Packard has assembled a talented advisory team that includes Board member Tyler Furuichi, Frank Niccoli from the Foothill College Department of Environmental Horticulture and Design, and former Los Altos Mayor Anita Enander. Working with a professional orchardist, the plan this year includes soil enrichment, tree replacement and the installation of an irrigation system. Packard recruited a team of teen volunteers, called the Green Teens, who are eager to help tracking the health of our trees. Careful record keeping will be an important component of our orchard management. A landing page on our website will offer information, updates and a section for questions and answers. Be sure to check it out, ask your questions and even consider volunteering to help!

Jane Packard contemplating the work to be done in the apricot orchard.

In other news, there will be an "old-timers gathering" at the Los Altos Hills Town Hall, Sept. 24 from 2-4pm, to share memories, followed by a reception. RSVP to Emina Steta at 650 947-2519.

~ Gary Hedden

Meet Lisa, Ken, and Barbara

Lisa Porter, Rental Events Marketing Manager
Lisa is the point person for weddings and external rental events. In addition, she supports events' marketing and volunteer recruitment. She is a talented painter and offers her art for sale at local venues and online.

Ken Buscho, Operations Manager
Ken oversees Museum operations. He holds degrees in botany and computer science, and has worked at HP and Google. Ken has been a dedicated search and rescue volunteer since the mid-80s.

Barbara Klein, Bookkeeper
Barbara is responsible for bookkeeping and accounting. She recently retired as Director of Housing Programs in the Office of the Provost at Stanford University. She enjoys her part-time job and volunteers at the Museum Store.

Welcome to our new members:

Sue and Victor Althouse
Val and Rick Arnesen
Sheri Blaisdell
Barbara Bogomilsky
Carolle Carter
Nancy Colace
Nancy and Loren Dowell
Shari Elmer
Paul Erickson
JoAnne Estill
Susan Estrem
Tempe Javitz
Rashmi Khatri
Ethan Klivans
Karen Kusanovich-Stoneham
Harbans Lal
Margaret Meigs
Rosemarie and Barry Mirkin
Diane Murphy
Eileen O'Pray and David Williams
Uma Panda
Stephen Scott
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Director's Corner

Interns at the Museum

I started my career as an intern at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in the Anthropology Department's Arctic Studies Center. That internship introduced me to amazing scholars and public servants and gave me the opportunity to apply my recently learned skills to the real world. Plus, it put me in position to get hired at that same division for an exhibition about the Vikings, drawing on my Icelandic background and leading to a lifetime of great opportunities.

Here at the Los Altos History Museum, I've been so pleased that we have been able to create meaningful internship positions over the last few years. Much of this was spurred by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to provide stipends for Foothill-De Anza Community College District interns interested in careers in the humanities. As a strong advocate for making history, art, literature, and culture a vibrant part of our society, the Museum was one of the first partner institutions with Foothill-De Anza. We have hosted over 20 interns in the last five years.

Last year, we added a new internship program with San Jose State University's Anthropology Department, thanks to the leadership of the former chair of our Oral History Program, Suruchi Mohan. She not only helped design it, she helped fund it, too! We are so fortunate to have volunteers like that. We now have students majoring in anthropology helping us with our oral histories.

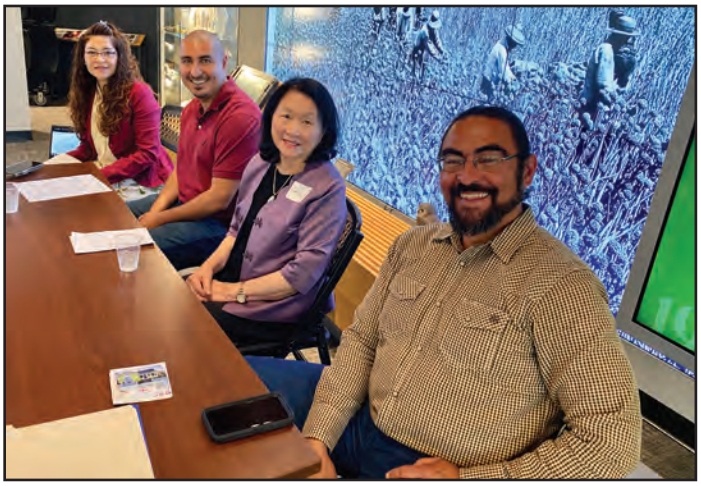
The word is out that we have internships, and students are approaching us asking if they can help. We have had fantastic interns helping with the STEM Fair, Train Days, and projects like analyzing visitor usage of the new Permanent Exhibition. Our current exhibition at the J. Gilbert Smith House—Drip, Dry, Flood—was by an intern!

Our interns add to the fantastic web of support connecting us to the community around us, and I encourage you to say "hi" and get to know them. Afterall, your membership and donations make this possible.

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery

The bust of Walter Singer, under a blanket in the Museum barn for eight years, now located by the Chamber of Commerce. Here with Chamber President Kim Mosley and Marketing Manager Nicole Walton.



The panel at the first Third Thursday event in May, discussed the history of agricultural workers in the Bay Area. Pictured are Dr. Perlita Dicochea, Dr. Alexandro Jara, Connie Young Yu and Joaquin Jimenez.

Allison Aldrich, Christopher Fling and Cindy Bogard O'Gorman, three new Board members, attending their first Board meeting in July.

Apricot STEM Fair raffle winner Debbie Lee with Dr. Elisabeth Ward and Board President Larry Lang.

Volunteer Anna demonstrating a hand-operated water pump at the STEM Fair in July.

Volunteer Pranav explaining the operation of a steam engine at the STEM Fair.

Photo Gallery

Dr. Elisabeth Ward thanking Jordan Grealish for her excellent work in curating Building the Future *at the August 2 preview night*

Richard Adler, the photographer whose stunning pictures are featured in Building the Future*, and the Stanford professor, Barry Katz, whose teaching inspired him to create the exhibition.*

Raul Perez, with the map he designed showing the Silicon Valley locations photographed in the exhibition.

Alexandria Dempsey and Jamie Jordan, guests from Google at the preview night.

Judy Hooper and Board Treasurer Wayne Hooper at preview night.

Belinda Chung and Chester Chang, two long-time Museum supporters, at preview night.

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www.losaltoshistory.org

Museum and Store Hours
Thursday to Sunday, Noon-4pm
We are closed New Year's Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

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Event Rentals
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Mission Statement *The Los Altos History Museum gathers and presents compelling stories and artifacts that bridge the past and the present by fostering the creative energy of staff and volunteers to challenge established narratives and produce engaging educational programs and exhibits for the community.*

On The Calendar

Drip, Dry, Flood: Orchard Water Management, on display through Oct. 8, Smith House gallery.

Building the Future: A Visual History of the Architecture of Silicon Valley, on display through Oct. 22, Museum gallery.

Train Days, Sept. 16 and 17, 10am - 3pm, at the Museum.

Conversations and Reflections: Building Silicon Valley's Workplace Cultures, Third Thursday, Sept. 21, 5:30 - 7pm, at the Museum. Registration required.

100 Years and Counting: Los Altos Country Club, opens Thursday, Oct. 12, Smith House gallery.

Conversations and Reflections: Silicon Valley Conspiracy Theories, Third Thursday, Oct. 19, 5:30 - 7pm, at the Museum. Registration required.

Catch the Spirit, Wednesday, November 15, 12-4pm, Museum and Smith House.

Board Meetings, Fourth Tuesday each month, 4 pm, in person and online

Third Thursdays. Join us for stimulating conversations, 5:30-7pm.
Sept. 21, Building Silicon Valley's Workplace Cultures
Oct. 19, Silicon Valley Conspiracy Theories

Larry Lang, Museum Board President, dressed for a rehearsal of the Los Altos Stage Company's October spoof on life in Los Altos and beyond, "Follies 2023."