los altos history museum

UNDER THE OAKS

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10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia to Premiere in Los Altos

In 1947, Vimala was eight years old when the Partition of the British Indian Empire was announced, creating Pakistan and India as independent states. The portion of the Gurdaspur District where she lived was to become part of Pakistan. News of unrest spread quickly while Hindu and Muslim families rushed to cross the border in opposite directions. As stories of atrocities against women reached their village, Vimala and her widowed mother, Sita Devi, were sent to a relative's house in Jammu, India. They carried only a few clothes, believing they would return in a few weeks when things calmed down.

Their train reached their destination safely. But while they were staying with relatives in Jammu, three children about Vimala's age arrived one night, their clothes soaked in blood. The train they had boarded from their hometown—now in Pakistan—had been attacked. Their parents, along with nearly everyone else on board, were killed. The children survived only by hiding under the dead bodies. Vimala remembers playing with them in the days that followed, as their young minds tried to normalize the trauma they had endured.

The 1947 Partition was a momentous event that reshaped the region and reverberated across the globe. It was one of the largest mass migrations in human history, with between fifteen and twenty million people displaced and more than a million lives lost in the violence that followed.

Vimala Gauri and her mother Sita Devi during Devi's interview with the 1947 Partition Archive. 2017, New Delhi, India.

Emergency trains at a station near Delhi crowded with desperate refugees. 1947

Vimala and her mother never returned to their village in Pakistan. Resilience through loss and upheaval became the defining theme of their lives, as it was for millions displaced by Partition. They settled in a town in Punjab, India, not far from the village where she was born, now across the border. They lived in a house vacated by Muslims fleeing to Pakistan, just as her family had fled in the opposite direction. Vimala's mother found work as a prison warden for women's prisons and ensured her daughter was educated through college. Vimala studied mathematics and became a high school teacher. She married Shyam Gauri, also a Partition survivor, and together they raised two children and now have four grandchildren. Her mother lived to the age of 97.

Today, Vimala is 86 and lives in Los Altos with her husband and her son's family. Both her story and that of her mother are preserved in The 1947 Partition Archive.

The Archive, founded in Berkeley by Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla, is the world's leading oral history initiative on the Partition of India—the traumatic division of British India into India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. It is the first community-driven digital repository of its kind. Hundreds of "citizen historians" have been trained to record oral histories within their own networks, often traveling by foot or bicycle to remote areas. What began as personal recollections has become a rigorously documented resource for the world.

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10,000 Memories to Premiere in Los Altos

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Over the past decade, the Archive's collection has grown to more than 12,000 video and audio interviews, spanning 14 countries and over 36 languages. These first hand stories reflect migrations, memories, and resilience across religious, regional, and class backgrounds. They democratize history-making, ensuring that voices long absent from textbooks are preserved for generations to come.

Hundreds of families in the San Francisco Bay Area have had their experiences preserved in the Archive. Los Altos has a deep connection to this global effort, with many residents active as citizen historians, donors, and mentors of the Archive. As winter 2025 approaches, Los Altos History Museum prepares to welcome a landmark traveling exhibition: *10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia*. This exhibition will debut in Los Altos before traveling across California and beyond, bringing to the heart of Silicon Valley immersive, multimedia experiences and poignant testimony. More than a history exhibition, it offers a vital opportunity to experience the human impact of one of the most transformative events of the twentieth century.

The exhibition is designed to immerse visitors in the lived experiences of Partition. Curated by a team of historians, designers, and researchers, it will combine photographs, recorded testimonies, and interactive installations. The goal is not only to preserve history but to humanize it—to allow visitors to step into the shoes of those who endured upheaval and understand how their lives were transformed. The exhibition will feature stories from across the Indian subcontinent and connect them to global events including World War II. It will also hold pieces of local history, bringing forward stories from families of Los Altos residents and those of neighboring cities.

For Los Altos History Museum, hosting *10,000 Memories* is an honor and a responsibility. It reflects the region's role as home to a significant South Asian community, where global stories intersect with local lives. It underscores the contributions of residents who have given their time, resources, and personal histories to ensure that this work continues.

The story of Partition is not only about borders drawn on a map. It is about families torn apart and reunited, about journeys across continents, and about the resilience of communities that rebuilt their lives in new lands. The *10,000 Memories* exhibition reminds us that history is not distant—it lives among us, in the memories of our neighbors, in the legacies of our families, and in the shared responsibility to remember, learn, and grow.

~ Raashina Humayun

Raashina Humayun is a board member of The 1947 Partition Archive and a Los Altos resident. Vimala is her mother-in-law.

President's Pen

Good things are coming to Los Altos History Museum! While we could not exist without the help of so many amazing volunteers, I am increasingly confident that the Museum has a management team of professionals running this wonderful institution that can expertly manage a collection, create inspiring exhibits, and connect with the community through education.

I am very excited that we are curating *10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia* about the 1947 Partition of India. Opening December 18, this exhibition focuses on the division of British India into the independent nations of India and Pakistan. It was accompanied by one of the largest mass migrations in history, as millions of Hindus and Sikhs moved to India and Muslims moved to Pakistan. This division resulted in a sudden and violent migration of millions of humans.

Many locals will be able to relate to this major historical event. It impacted my own family—my parents were from Punjab, the part of India most severely impacted by the Partition due to its mixed religious population. My father's family lived in a remote village and had to flee at the last minute with literally the shirts on their backs. The harrowing experience of being severed from one's home like that was too much for many who endured it. My father never spoke of it except once. We got only glimmers of his past through the poetry he often recited in two languages that were foreign to us —Urdu and Farsi.

People impacted by the Partition of India now live in the Bay Area, with many in Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and Mountain View. It is my hope that our exhibition will help us develop new intergenerational and intercultural connections true to the mission of our Museum.

~ Kuljeet Kalkat

Newsletter Update

Our newsletter editor, Gary Hedden, is on medical leave, so the printed newsletter will appear twice annually—in the fall and spring—instead of quarterly. Nora Haley has stepped in as temporary editor for the two issues, bringing with her a marketing background at the city of Los Altos. For monthly Museum updates sent directly to your inbox, sign up for our online newsletter at *losaltoshistory.org*.

LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM
"UNDER THE OAKS"

Nora Haley, *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.

Our Hidden Gems

Frank Duveneck's Diary

Frank Duveneck wrote in this diary while he was a soldier during World War I, between 1918 and 1919. In it, he wrote to his wife, Josephine, and their children, expressing his never-ending love for them and reminding them to never forget about his love if he did not return home. As he moved from the United States to his station in St. Argonne, France, he described the unease and uncertainty of life in the army. Frank wrote when he could—sometimes after a few days, other times after a few weeks or a month had passed. Rather than recording his thoughts for himself, Frank addressed each entry as a letter to his beloved wife.

Sophia Lujan, Curator of Collections, peruses Frank Duveneck's diary.

Today, people keep diaries or journals to help express themselves or perserve their memories. Some do it as a form of therapy. Some do it to recount hardships they are currently facing. Writing in diaries helps provide insight into a particular time. Although written with the intent of it being personal or addressed to someone in the event the diary is returned without its author present, it also provides insights into the writer's feelings at the time of the entry. Such as Frank Duveneck did during his time in the army and being away from his wife and family. Such as Anne Frank did while hiding from the German occupation of Amsterdam, the Netherlands from 1942-1944. Such as those who fled the violence of the 1947 Partition of India.

Ultimately, diaries allow the author to recount memories that are, at times, too hard to speak. Diaries also allow the author to recount the best days, and everything in between. As a result, diaries provide self-reflection and emotional processing and can ease stress. If you keep a diary, do you think anyone in the future will read it? What would it say about the current time we live in?

~ Sophia Lujan

Staff

Anna Toledano, PhD, *Executive Director*
Amy Ellison, PhD, *Curator and Director of Exhibitions*
Diane Holcomb, *Director of Communications*
Sophia Lujan, *Curator of Collections*
Lisa Porter, *Rental Events Marketing Manager*
Christina Zhao, *Education and Volunteer Coordinator*
Barbara Klein, *Bookkeeper*

Volunteer Highlights

The Teen Docent Program

Chances are you have entered the Museum and been greeted by a smiling teenager. You have just experienced our Teen Docent Program! Los Altos History Museum started this program in 2019 to expose high schoolers to local history and pique their interest in the Museum. Today, we have approximately 40 student docents, representing eight local public and private high schools.

The Teen Docent Program has steadily grown in popularity and provides a win-win scenario: Teen docents practice interpersonal and leadership skills (including public speaking and event management), see how a museum is run, and learn about local history. The Museum benefits by gaining volunteers, having docents who bring different perspectives to the exhibits, and making the Museum relevant and interesting to teens and children.

Riya Srivastava, a second-year teen docent and recently elected youth representative on the Museum's board of directors, loves volunteering for tours. Srivastava says, "The most important skill I've learned is to engage with people from all different walks of life and backgrounds. Observing what visitors are engrossed by makes me tailor their tour to their specific interests so that every tour is different. These connections with other docents and visitors makes me feel like I really belong."

A group of 2025 teen docents pose in front of the Museum.

The program strives to build rewards and flexibility for busy high schoolers. The process for choosing teen docent volunteers starts with an application in the spring. Each applicant is interviewed and must attend a three-day, 12-hour training session during the summer. Once trained, the teen docents make a volunteer commitment for one or two shifts per month of two hours each for one year.

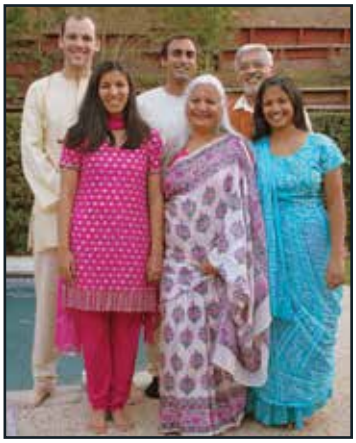
If you know a teen who might be interested in participating in this popular program, please keep an eye on our website for application information in the spring. A huge thank you to all our teen docents for their gifts of time and talent to the Museum.

~ Rebecca Lowell, LAHM Board Member

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Saroj Pathak—Engineer, Nonprofit Entrepreneur, and Mentor

In 2015, ten years ago this fall, Oral History Committee volunteer Ginger Summit interviewed Saroj Pathak. Pathak is an accomplished engineer, active community member, and former member of the Museum board. She is also one of the first people of South Asian descent to be interviewed by the Museum.



Saroj Pathak and family.

Pathak grew up in the Himalayas, the fifth of six children. She recalled of her upbringing: "My parents always knew that education was the key for success. We were three brothers and three sisters, but we never felt like there was any difference between girls and boys. This was really unusual in those days. It's unusual even today."

She attended local schools and completed a bachelor's degree at university. Her winning a prestigious Rotary International Fellowship paved the way for her advanced education in the United States, achieving a master's degree in engineering at UC Berkeley that led to finding employment in Silicon Valley.

During her Oral History interview, Pathak explores many of the twists and turns of her career and her family life. She was driven to work and achieve professionally and also to guide others: "I always was there for people, and I love the feeling to be able to teach and to be able to help. Even in my professional life, I was able to always hire young people and train them. I was more of a mentor. Many times during my career, I thought I should go back to teaching."

In her retirement, Pathak and her son started a nonprofit called Explorabox. She shares, "The concept is to give kids the opportunity to build things with their hands and just enjoy exploring and doing in a systematic way—in a way that they're playing—but at the same time they're learning the concepts of science. I think it's been very rewarding to us, and hopefully it's helping kids, too."

Pathak may not call herself a pioneer, but as a South Asian immigrant and as a woman in high tech, she certainly helped pave the way. Even as a newcomer, Pathak recalls, "I never felt out of place at all. Just coming to Berkeley itself, I felt like this is home. And in the same way, coming here to Los Altos, it felt like this is home." Her connection to her home community in India is strong, and her bonds to Los Altos are deep. She expresses both in her interview, capturing a perspective that is shared by many immigrants.

~ Kristin Morris, Oral History Committee Chair

Meet Our Newest Board Members

Back in July, Mike Kasperzak and Riya Srivastava joined the Los Altos History Museum's Board of Directors, bringing valuable experience and fresh perspectives.

Former Mountain View Mayor Mike Kasperzak offers over 25 years of experience in business, law, and public service. He has held leadership roles with the League of California Cities, National League of Cities, and many regional boards and commissions. Locally, he is active with Los Altos Stage Company and the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce. Mike earned his Juris Doctor from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, and a Bachelor of Arts from Lewis & Clark College (Oregon).

Our Youth Representative, Riya Srivastava, is a junior at Pinewood High School and has served as a dedicated teen docent for the past two years. Recognized by her peers for her commitment to service, Riya brings valuable insight into the interests of her generation—an important perspective as we create programming that is relevant and engaging for younger audiences.

We're delighted to have Mike and Riya on board to help guide the Museum's future.

~ Diane Holcomb

History in the News

Happy Birthday, California

Did you miss it? On September 9, 2025, the state of California celebrated its demisemiseptcentennial—or, if you prefer, its dodransbicentennial. Sometimes this anniversary is also called a quartoseptcentennial. I think we can all agree that it's just easier to say 175th birthday!

On September 7, 1850, the United States House of Representatives voted to admit California as a "free state" (meaning slavery was illegal) into the Union by a vote of 150 to 56. The vote was part of the Compromise of 1850, which helped resolve the issue of how to incorporate new territories ceded by Mexico after the Mexican-American War ended in 1848. On September 9, 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed the measure into law, making California the 31st state.

For more information about the history of California and how its admission into the Union led the United States closer to civil war, visit your local library or your favorite search engine.

~ Rebecca Lowell, LAHM Board Member

Pinky Whelan

We remember Pinky Whelan, one of the key founding members of the Los Altos History House in 1977, whose dedication and spirit shaped our community. She served on the Los Altos Historical Commission, organized the Museum's beloved Crab Feed fundraiser, and received the Los Altos Historic Preservation Award in 2017. Pinky's passion for preserving history and her generous spirit touched so many. She passed away on September 29, 2025, at the age of 94, leaving a legacy that will continue to inspire us. The family has generously requested that donations be made in her honor to the Museum.

Director's Corner

Bridging the Past and the Present

Historians don't like to predict the future, but as the Museum's Executive Director, I have to leave the comfort zone of the past to think about where we're heading next. In a place like Silicon Valley, where everyone is talking about the "next big thing," we can sometimes feel out of our depth. Our mission is to bridge the past and the present: to preserve what was while telling stories of who we are now.

The 6.5 square miles of Los Altos have been the site of so many moments and memories. As our community grows and changes, so does our history. Even though a momentous event may not have occurred in Los Altos, if someone who is now part of our community experienced it, it is part of our shared story. That's why I'm so excited to welcome you to our upcoming exhibition *10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia*. This event happened thousands of miles away, but it directly and deeply affected, and still affects today, so many Los Altans.

To continue to expand our reach and tell these vital stories—the local and global histories that live right here—we need to secure the Museum's next chapter. Your financial support at the end of the year allows us to continue to bring to life ambitious, relevant, and powerful exhibitions like *10,000 Memories*.

What will you do to help preserve all of our local stories? Please donate today to sustain the Museum's mission of bridging the past and the present into the future.

~ Anna Toledano

Welcome to our New Members

Saleem Ahmed
Megan Allen
Jennifer Cauble
Amy and Han Chae
Robin Chapman
Sally Falkenhagen
Richa Goyal
Michele and Michael Greenfield
Barbara Hansen
Wesley Helmholz
Raashina Humayun
Karen Jones
Marji Karlgaard
Michael Kasperzak
Patrick Kavanagh
Elijah Kim
Sheri King
Hebe Li
Christina Liao
John MacKay
Kevin O'Brien
Susan and Jack Owicki
Scott Pietka
Lynn Porcedda
Sella Raman
Veronica Ryan
Christine Sellers
Bentley Shuster
Bonnie Sorenson
Eunice Tsai
Kaitlyn Van Peursem

Business Members

Business
DJM Inspections
Christopher Fling, Realtor
Illuminate Properties
Los Altos Town Crier
Pine Cone Lumber
The Garden Club of Los Altos

Partner
BK Collections

Corporate Members
Bogard-Tanigami Team
Cloudinary
Kiwanis Club of Los Altos
Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation
Pink Ribbon Good
Recor Medical

Photo Gallery

Bernadette Quiroz sharing the History of the Chochenyo Language.

Anna Toledano, Lisa Porter, and Jan Thomas enjoying flavors at A Taste of History. *Photo by Toan Nguyen.*

Julie Bly DeVere presenting the history of wine at A Taste of History. *Photo by Toan Nguyen.*

Curator Amy Ellison and exhibit designer Judi Eichler celebrating at the Building El Sueño *preview.*

Participants cutting 'cots like in the old days at the Apricot STEM Fair. *Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

Child exploring the world through a Foldscope paper microscope at the Apricot STEM Fair. *Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

Photo Gallery

Family searching for plants at Isabel's Scavenger Hunt. *Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

Board President Kuljeet Kalkat enjoying the moment at the Members' Summer Social & Volunteer Tribute. *Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

Young enthusiasts delighting in the model train at Train Day. *Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

A packed crowd in the Geschke Gallery for the talk Sarah & Isabel: Two Sisters and their "Dream Houses." *Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

Participants creating a rabbit lantern at the Mid-Autumn Festival, *one of many hands-on activities. Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

Robin Chapman unveiling the story of Sarah Winchester as orchardist at A Winchester Mystery in the Valley of Heart's Delight. *Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

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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 *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

Building El Sueño: Isabel Merriman, Sarah Winchester, and the California Dream, on display in the Main Gallery through Nov 30, 2025.

10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia, on display in the Main Gallery Dec 18, 2025–May 24, 2026.

Annual Fundraiser, Sat, May 9, 2026. Museum closed to the general public.

Meet the Smiths, ongoing display in the J. Gilbert Smith House.

Stay tuned for our inspiring lineup of **Third Wednesday Programs**, beginning Jan 2026.

A charro in the making? A young attendee learns the ropes at Rancho Day. *Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

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