

UNDER THE OAKS



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Spring 2015

Reflections: The History Museum Story

I became editor of the History Museum Newsletter in 2013, and like you, I received last year's annual report and was pleased to read that we had record attendance.

How is it that we have done so well and how did it all start?

I asked Bob Grimm, long time Museum supporter, and he told me a few snippets, but concluded by giving me a list of stories to read and people to contact. "Do a little research and you might find the answer."

J. Gilbert Smith and his wife Margaret sold their 9 acre apricot orchard to the City in 1954 and separately gifted their house and its 1.36 acres upon their passing to the City "for public uses only." The house opened as the History House in 1977 and furnishings showcasing a 1930s era farmhouse came later, in 1991.

The History House was very popular and the idea of having a building for a larger museum collection and to host community events was proposed by members of the Los Altos Historical Commission. In



Bob Grimm, February 2015

1993 the Museum Association voted to take on the challenge and in 1996 a capital campaign got under way, co-chaired by Ginny Lear and the late Marion Grimm.

The Association hired local architect Goody Steinberg to design a museum that would fit with the old farmhouse and he came up with a modern barn look that uses a lot of natural light. The permanent exhibit upstairs tells the story of Los Altos starting with the Ohlone Indians. The design was led by Nan Geschke and her team created a space with whimsical details like train signal noises, bird sounds and a creaky old saddle for kids to ride. They also added interactive elements like the

touch-screen monitors allowing visitors to "meet" key people in local history. The 50 boxed portraits designed by Jane Reed, known as the "Family Tree," are still fun to view today. Undoubtedly the most visited exhibit piece is the detailed replica of 1932 Los Altos complete with two working model trains.



New museum under construction, 2000. Photo collection of the Los Altos History Museum.

"This was built with private donations," recalled Liz Nyberg, past president of the Museum Association. "The City donated the land, but community members donated the money." Major sponsors were Marion and Bob Grimm, Nan and Chuck Geschke, and the Packard Foundation. Hardworking volunteers deserve our thanks too. According to board member Marilyn Henderson, hundreds of volunteers help with all of the essential tasks of making a museum work – docents, tour guides, store help, event help, exhibition teams, gardening, and more. The City continues its support as well in an arrangement that covers utilities, major maintenance and an annual subsidy; the Association covers exhibitions, the education program and normal operating costs.

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President's Pen

Dear Friends,

The Crab Feed event at the St. William venue was a great success thanks to the work of more than 35 committee members, 32 event volunteers, and more than 100 donors. We sold out within 4 weeks and we had more than 300 attendees.

The current exhibit, *Silicon Valley: The Lure & the Legends*, has had three successful and creative programs to complement it. There are more to go – don't miss them. The next exhibit, *Reflect + Create – Where Art & History Intersect* opens May 7th.

The Board of Directors has identified the following focus areas for this year:

- Fundraising campaign for permanent exhibit upgrades
- Expanding partnerships with other organizations
- Expanding the role of the museum as a community resource
- Messaging to the community

We thank you for your continued support.

~ NOMI TRAPNELL, BOARD PRESIDENT



Volunteers from the museum were historical greeters at the opening of *Enchante*, the new Los Altos French boutique hotel.

Staff

Laura Bajuk, *Executive Director*

Grace Perry, *Assistant to the Executive Director*

Johanna Fassbender, *Collections & Exhibitions Manager*

Stefanie Midlock, *Assistant Collections Manager*

Kristin Morris, *Collections Specialist*

Mark Perry, *Facility & Rentals Manager*

Faustino Carillo, *Gardener*

LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM "UNDER THE OAKS"

Gary Hedden, *Editor*

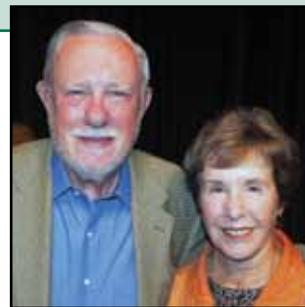
Judi Eichler, *Graphic Design*

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. A special thanks to the newsletter mailing team!

Reflections: The History Museum

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A grand opening for the new Museum, hosted by then Association co-presidents Marie Backs and Pinky Whelan, was held in March, 2001. The Association then gifted the building to the City.



Chuck and Nan Geschke,
February 2015

Rotating exhibitions are so important and there is a fresh one every six months.

Last year *Moving Art Forward* wrapped up in March, *Pedal Power: From Wacky to Workhorse* ran from April to October, and *Silicon Valley: The Lure & The Legends* opened in October. These high-quality exhibitions keep people coming back.

Events are also important. Many are tied to the exhibitions, but there are also regular events like Ohlone Day. Train Days started 6 years ago and that event is still hugely popular. Enthusiasts come from near and far, over 3000 last year. One guest from Sacramento commented that she got the "train bug" from her mom and has been a fan of trains since childhood. She is now in her 70s, and her mom came with her! MoonFest started just this past year and was a huge success with 300 guests including a great turn-out of kids enjoying arts and crafts.

The education program is a big part of the museum package. Anne Roberts tells us that over 1500 students participate every year. An important part of the education program is the annual Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest, now in its 31st year. The topic this year is *Inventors and Risk-Takers Help Make Our Community a Better Place*.

Paul Gonella, a Museum and Senior Center volunteer, tells us that "the Museum is important to seniors." They come by bus from The Terraces, The Forum, Sunnyside Gardens and elsewhere, and always enjoy themselves.

The gift store, stocked by Diane Simmons and her team, offers attractive and reasonably priced gifts, and is an important complement to the Museum.

Even the fundraisers are fun. The recently completed Crab Feed was attended by 300 guests who happily consumed 900 pounds of crab!

So what's the answer, how is it that the Museum has done so well? It's all of the above, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, interesting and ever changing exhibitions, good programs, an attractive building, talented staff, and a charismatic director, Laura Bajuk.

So thank you Bob, that's the answer, as I'm sure you knew all along!

~ GARY HEDDEN

Reflect + Create: Where Art and History Intersect

New exhibition opens May 7, 2015 at the Los Altos History Museum

Inspired by objects from the collection of the Los Altos History Museum, artists, makers and creators were encouraged to create brand new pieces for the exhibition that will open in May. Johanna Fassbender and the exhibition committee selected objects that represent the history of the Los Altos and Los Altos Hills area.

Some of the objects came from the Smith House, and some came from our collections storage area, many of which have not been exhibited in a long time – if at all. The objects were gathered in the exhibit preparation



Photo by Stefanie Midlock

Joel Barlett photographing one of the objects.

room and local photographer Joel Bartlett took high-quality photographs. The photographs were provided to the artists, makers and creators so that they could be inspired from the comfort of their studios and homes. Additionally, two open-house days allowed the artists to see the objects in person.

A side benefit of researching and photographing these objects is learning more about them, and it is a great first step in getting our collection digitized and online.

~ STEFANIE MIDLOCK, ASST. COLLECTIONS MANAGER



Ellen Gonella lines up a shot of the springy shoes.

Silicon Valley: The Lure & the Legends

Silicon Valley: The Lure & the Legends continues through Sunday, April 19 – don't miss it.

Three outstanding and well-attended programs have complemented the exhibit.

- Stanford Professor and tech entrepreneur Steve Blank pulled back the curtain on the germination of Silicon Valley, starting in World War II with radar systems in Europe, and Defense Dept. funded projects at Stanford.

- Visionary Scott Summitt showcased his company's latest 3D printed artificial limbs that give people with military injuries mobility and a sunny future.

- Symbiotic Superstars, hosted by Stanford President John Hennessy and Silicon Valley historical archivist Leslie Berlin related how

Professor Fred Terman drew brilliant minds to Stanford and initiated the brain trust that became Silicon Valley. The enthusiastic audience also learned about the University's forward thinking directions – like double majors in sciences and the arts – and teams of graduate students inventing products that improve lives in third-world countries.

- "Silicon Valley Stories" gave us a panel of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs – Chuck Geschke, co-founder of Adobe Systems; Donna Dubinsky, co-founder of Handspring and CEO of Palm; Sandra Kurtzig, founder of Ask Computer Systems; and tech writer Mike Malone. They answered "why here" and "how." Short answer: the culture of risk acceptance and the love of a challenge.

The last event will be held on Tuesday, April 14th. The Los



Altos Stage Company will show the original film *The Lure and the Legends*, produced by exhibit co-chair Nan Geschke.

~ PAULA TUERK

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Dr. Frank Berry practiced as an ophthalmologist in Mountain View and Los Altos from 1953 until his retirement in 1985. He was the first ophthalmologist between Palo Alto and San José, and was the Chair of the Medical Advisory Committee for the creation of El Camino Hospital.

A native of Massachusetts, Dr. Berry and wife Jean decided to settle in Los Altos after searching for a good location for a new practice and a growing family. "I kind of fell in love with Los Altos for two reasons. One, I loved the town itself, and the area. Plus the fact that the Stanford Medical School was coming down to Palo Alto in 1959. I had a burning desire to have a private practice, but I wanted to be involved with the medical school community in their clinics and teaching."

Dr. Berry, interviewed in April 2014 by volunteer Marcia Adams, described the energy and excitement that surrounded the effort to build El Camino Hospital.



Dr. Frank Berry, January 2015

"There was a wave of specialists and new doctors coming into Los Altos... Palo Alto Hospital was overcrowded at that point and often the patients were in the halls." Dr. Berry recalled, "There was universal enthusiasm for the concept of a local hospital." The vote to form a hospital district passed with 76 percent approval and El Camino Hospital opened in 1961.

Dr. Berry joined several of his colleagues in moving their offices to Altos Oaks drive in 1959. This innovative approach clustered a number of different specialties in one location, facilitating easier access for patients and closer relationships

between practitioners.

Like so many World War II-era veterans, Dr. Berry's efforts have benefited not just his own patients but the entire community.

~ KRISTIN MORRIS, COLLECTIONS SPECIALIST

A New Life for the Halsey House?

The historic Halsey House, located in the delightful Redwood Grove Nature Preserve, has fallen on hard times and was closed several years ago for health and safety reasons. The Friends of Historic Redwood Grove recently hosted a well-attended information session on plans to renovate the existing landmark building for City recreation programs and community use.

The session featured Katherine Halsey Buss, a granddaughter of the couple who built the house and planted the redwood trees on the property. She shared some heartfelt family stories, starting with her grandmother Emma traveling from San Francisco to "find a place in the sunshine with a creek and redwood trees," at the request of her father. The Halsey house was built in 1923.

Val Carpenter is leading the effort to save the house. She wants it to join the three other historic buildings owned by the city, the J. Gilbert Smith House, the Neutra House, and the San Antonio Club. Marie Backs spoke of the many City Recreation Department activities that began in 1978 – yoga, gardening and so many summer camps. Ginger Summit, who lives next door, told us she is looking forward to the "happy noise" that will be coming from the Nature Preserve and the renovated house.

The Los Altos City Council approved a project to define the cost and benefits, contingent on securing

\$25,000 in private contributions. Drum roll please – The Friends of Historic Redwood Grove, a designated fund of the Los Altos Community Foundation, is collecting donations. All contributions are tax-deductible!

Visit www.friendsofhistoricredwoodgrove.org for more information.

~ GARY HEDDEN



Katherine Halsey Buss, February 2015, with Halsey family photographs.

Director's Corner

The role played by extraordinary people in the success of this community – and the museum – continues to set us apart from other places and organizations.

Cycles end, whether it's a person or an event we've loved. The antiques shows are officially over; we will not have one this June after all. We were crossing our fingers, but the vintage market is changing... people don't come out for shows like they used to, so much is done online. We deeply appreciate Ted & Sandy, Tom & Sheila, Pinky & Bea... three generations of event coordinators who made this the best Americana show in the West. The taste of strawberries will always remind me of those wonderful people and beautiful old things.

Like many of you, I was saddened to hear of Ruby Lai's passing – she used to come in every month, for years, to clip out and organize the news articles about the Museum. She always remembered to ask about my cats and my husband, usually in that order, and never mixing up their names. So many wonderful people like her give (and gave) so much to make this a better place.

But cycles also begin, as is the nature of change. We're delighted that our board president, Nomi Trapnell, was appointed a Historical Commissioner. The Commission spawned the Museum, and while both organizations have grown in different ways, we are united by the heritage that makes this community unique, and are honored to preserve those stories.

These are just a few ways we advance history in our community... thank you for what YOU do, as a member and donor, to keep our heritage alive and growing.

~ LAURA BAJUK, E.D.

Photo Gallery



Abby Ahrens, "Welcome to Enchanté"



Marie Antoinette I (Linda Eckols)



French Socialite (Crysta Krames)



Marie Antoinette II (Nomi Trapnell)

History in the News

In a tale of two owners, the Dutch Colonial Revival style house at the end of Fowler Lane is a historic property with some interesting recent history. In 2011, according to Janis Ahmadjian-Baer, Historical Commissioner, the owner's granddaughter asked that the property *not* be on the city's Historic Resource Inventory (HRI), claiming it would hinder the sale. The City Council complied. The realtor then proceeded to list the home as a "historic property" and found a willing buyer, a developer, who sold it again one year later. The new owners are proud to own such a home, have begun to restore it and, in an interesting twist, now want it back on the HRI. Their wish was granted, and better yet, it is now a landmark property!

The two-story Fowler Lane house was built in approximately 1898 for Edith William and Robert Kirkwood, on land given to Edith by her parents. Robert Kirkwood was one of the earliest and largest fruit orchardists in Los Altos, an important occupation at the time. The house design was considered *avant-garde* for the area and features a side-facing gambrel roof, three dormers, and an entry defined by a projecting square porch supported by three Doric columns on each side. We are fortunate to still have such delightful homes in Los Altos. Even better, the owners have contacted the History Museum offering to host an event. Stay tuned.

In other news, the Historical Commission received two interesting presentations. The restaurant *Le Boulanger* will be renovated and earlier concerns about



Fowler Lane Dutch Colonial Revival, February 2015

a dramatic change in appearance were addressed. The new look is similar to the existing *moderne* style, but with updated materials, improved sidewalk seating, an outdoor fireplace, a larger dining area and a pizza oven. The architect thanked the commission for their thoughtful input. The second presentation concerned the Paul Shoup house at 500 University Ave. This is one of our most unique homes and the new owners proposed several alterations to improve the traffic flow inside and to the backyard, and an alteration to the kitchen window. I believe the Commissioners breathed a collective sigh of relief on learning that the new owners appreciate and value the home's significant history and only proposed relatively minor changes, changes that were approved.

~ GARY HEDDEN

Coffee for New Volunteers

Tuesday, March 31, at 10-11:30 am in the Main Museum

Everyone is welcome to come and hear about volunteer opportunities at the museum.

RSVP to Grace or come at the last minute.

The Historical Commission opened the Museum in 1977 and continues to work closely with the Museum Association.

New Members

Greg & Ginny Badros
Shirley Bailey
Jack Brownson
Jo Buchanan & Stuart Bowen
Katherine Buss
Scott Caddes
Jason Chen
Dan & Esther Debra
Grant Erickson
Jan Foo
Janelle Gaw
Laura Griswold

Kathy Horvath
Michael & Eryn Johnson
Keith Kappmeyer
Kathleen & Tim McGrath
Jerry & Michelle Moe
Provines family
Dave & Liz Rome
Linda Ronberg
Jackie Stephens
Betty & Walter Stern

For a new total of 865 members - thank you all!



Eleanor and Masao Watanabe at the Crab Feed

Crab Feed Photo Gallery



Nomi Trapnell and Ed Taft in the latest millinery.



Dick and Christine Liewer, Armond King. Dick and Armond are cousins through the historic Bleibler family.



The Crab Guys, Doug Debs and Bob Bradley, handled 900 lbs of crab!



Dave Backs, Bob Grimm and Dick Henning.



Checking out items in the Silent Auction.



Our most excellent auctioneer, Supervisor Joe Simitian.

Museum and Store Hours

Thursday to Sunday, Noon–4 pm

We are closed New Year's Day, Easter,
Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day
and Christmas Day.

General Inquiries

(650) 948-9427 x14

Collections/Research

(650) 948-9427 x11

Event Rentals

(650) 948-9427 x12

Mission Statement

History inspires imagination, stimulates thought and transforms society. The Los Altos History Museum preserves and shares our local history to enrich our community and to shape a more informed future.

Address Correction Requested

ON THE CALENDAR

Family Day/Young Minds@the Museum, Saturday, March 14, noon-4 pm

Coffee for New Volunteers, Tuesday, March 31, Museum, 10-11:30 am

Film Night: *The Lure and the Legends*. Tuesday, April 14, Los Altos Stage Company, 7 pm, Museum open 5:30-9 pm

Silicon Valley: *The Lure & Legends*, Closing Day, Sunday, April 19, 12-4 pm

May is **Historic Preservation Month & Museum Month!**

Japan Culture Day at Hidden Villa, Sunday, May 3

Silicon Valley Gives! (A day of online fundraising), Tuesday, May 5

Reflect + Create: *Where Art and History Intersect*, Opening Reception, Sunday, May 10, 2-4 pm

Essay Contest Winners Ice Cream Social, Tuesday, May 12, Museum Courtyard, 6 pm

More events are in the works – watch for your monthly member email updates!



Johanna Fassbender at the tankhouse, "Yikes. When it rains, it leaks!"

Events to watch for!

- Spring Fundraiser.
- Annual Meeting, Board Elections, and Volunteer Appreciation in June.

Help wanted!

Contact Johanna Fassbender to help reorganize the collections storage.
(650) 948-9427 x16 or
jfassbender@losaltoshistory.org

School Tours:

- 3rd Grade in April
- 4th Grade in May