William and Carol Cranston moved to what became Los Altos Hills in 1914 and called their home at West Fremont Road and Campo Vista the “Red Barn.” William developed property on Main Street and was active with community projects, including building the Boy Scout hall. Their daughter, Ruth Eleanor (R.E.), and son, Alan, attended Castilleja. Alan attended Los Altos Grammar School and Mountain View Union High School.

William’s best friend, Fremont Older, a newspaperman and editor in San Francisco, influenced Alan’s interest in journalism. Fremont crusaded for people he believed were wrongly convicted. One such person was Tom Mooney, a labor leader convicted of planting a bomb (pardoned in 1936), whom Fremont took Alan to meet in San Quentin. Alan graduated from Stanford University in 1936. Alan was a competitive runner and at Stanford he was on the country’s fastest mile-relay team. In 1969 Alan set the world’s record for 55-year-olds in the 100-yard dash.

After college, Alan became an International News Service foreign correspondent, covering England, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Ethiopia. On returning to the U.S. he saw an English-language translation of Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf, sanitized to not alarm Americans. To reveal Hitler’s antisemitism and plan for world conquest, Alan published an unauthorized version that sold 500,000 copies in 10 days for 10 cents a copy before Hitler’s publisher successfully sued for copyright infringement. Alan also helped Jewish refugees arriving by ship in New York avoid being repatriated to Europe.

In 1939, Alan met his wife, Geneva McMath, on a blind date. She was an activist who worked for Orson Welles and the Citizen’s Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion.

Alan became Chief, Foreign Language Division, Office of War Information, Executive Office of the President, and worked in 1942 with Eleanor Roosevelt to try to prevent the creation of relocation camps for Japanese Americans. Unsuccessful, he later visited Los Altos friends interned at Tule Lake, California and Heart Mountain, Wyoming.

In 1945, Alan published The Killing of the Peace, a chronicle describing how a few senators opposing U.S. entry into the League of Nations thwarted the will of the people after World War I.

Alan and Geneva returned to Los Altos in 1947 to a home Alan and friends built on Hill Top Drive. They had two sons, Robin and Kim, who attended the Peninsula School and Hillview School.

Robin attended Foothill College, was an entrepreneur, and co-produced a 1977 Broadway show that starred his Canadian cousin Toller Cranston, who won the Bronze Medal in figure skating in the 1976 Winter Olympics. Robin was tragically killed in a car accident in 1980.

Alan’s older sister, R.E. married Jack Fowle in 1929 and they purchased Feather Hill Farm from Rudolf and Gerda Isenberg, who had purchased the property from one of Juana Briones’...
President’s Pen

We are recruiting a new Executive Director who will join us as we move forward into the next generation of History Museums. We see a future that honors our past, appreciates the changing dynamics of our members and our community, and prepares us for a bright future.

Our professional staff and loyal volunteers are working together during this transition to keep our exhibits growing and the Museum running smoothly. We look forward to your continued support and enjoyment of our wonderful Museum. If you haven’t yet seen the current exhibition, Hau Beiren@100: Works from the Old Apricot Villa, you now will have more time; the show has been extended through December! Don’t miss seeing the work of this world famous artist. Hau Beiren is an excellent example of our mission, “History inspires imagination, stimulates thought and transforms society.”

See you soon at our Museum.
~ Marilyn Henderson

Hau Beiren @ 100

Hau Beiren@100 is a retrospective exhibition of Los Altos artist Hau Beiren (Paul Hau). The paintings, spanning decades, were curated by Professor Mark Johnson, San Francisco State University.

The 100-year-old artist has lived about half his life in China and half in Los Altos.

His unique style called “splash ink color” is a marriage of classical Chinese brush painting combined with Western influences. The paintings show the progression of his style from traditional paintings to more recent vivid and abstract works. “I am so proud to have this exhibit in my hometown of Los Altos. I hope people will come and enjoy my work,” remarked the artist.

The artist’s books, seals, and brushes are also on display. Panels with details of biography, style, and calligraphy provide a narrative that helps the viewer understand the meaning and context of the many varied paintings.

~ Rose Hau

New Members

Welcome to our new members:

Cam Acker
Rob Arathoon
Jane Clemmons
Jayne Haberman Cohen
Gloria Luna
Roy & Patty Woolsey

And thank you to all 787 active members!

Staff

open position, Executive Director
Crystal Taylor, Assistant to the Executive Director
Sam Scott, interim Collections & Exhibitions Manager
Gena Hunter, Bookkeeper/ Accountant
Mark Perry, Facility & Rentals Manager
Faustino Carrillo, Gardener

LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM
“Under the Oaks”

Gary Hedden, Editor
Judi Eichler, Graphic Design

A special thanks to the newsletter mailing team!
The Alan Cranston Story cont.

many daughters. The Isenbergs sold the rest of their property to Esther Clark, and much of that land is now Esther Clark Park.

R.E. was politically active and president of the Foothill-De Anza Community Foundation, served on the Stanford University Founding Grant Society board of directors, and was a trustee of The Trust for Hidden Villa. R.E.’s best friend was Mary Stegner. R.E. studied writing with long-time Los Altos Hills resident and Pulitzer Prize winning author Walcle Stegner and published a biography of Alan in 1984. Jack’s father, Arthur Fowle, was elected the first mayor of Los Altos Hills but his health prevented him from serving. Jack was on the first Los Altos Hills City Council, served as mayor, and was a leader in the Committee for Green Foothills. The Fowles donated land and improvements for the original Los Altos Hills town hall.

In 1947, Alan became a partner with William in the family real estate business. Alan was National President of the United World Federalists from 1949-52, and sought to strengthen the United Nations. He founded the California Democratic Council in 1949, and was its President from 1953-58. Closer to home, Alan and other property owners led the effort to create the parking plazas allowing Los Altos to compete with the new Stanford Shopping Center.

In 1958, Alan was elected California state controller, and the family moved to Sacramento. In 1968, Alan was elected to the U.S. Senate and served four terms. In 1984, Alan ran for president, a campaign that helped make nuclear disarmament a significant national issue. Alan’s many accomplishments in the US Senate included advancing peace, environmental protection, education, and care for veterans, children, and others. One day Alan and his granddaughter, Evan, were walking in Los Altos when Alan pointed to a curb cut and said, “Do you see that dent in the sidewalk? I put that there.” He then explained the “dent” came from the Americans with Disabilities Act that he helped create.

Alan retired from the senate in 1993, returned to Los Altos Hills in 1994 and became chairman of the Gorbachev Foundation USA, chairman of the State of the World Forum, and founding president of the Global Security Institute, with a focus on nuclear arms control.

Shortly before his death in 2000 at the age of 86, Alan wrote The Sovereignty Revolution, on global challenges that can only be resolved at the global level.

It has been an honor to be Alan’s son, and continue the family tradition of civic involvement.

~ Kim Cranston

Two Docents

Docents are the first people guests meet when they visit the Museum, providing that ever so important first impression. Here’s the story of two of our wonderful docents.

As a young Stanford student in 1907, John Beman’s grandfather may have crossed paths with J. Gilbert Smith or perhaps heard about the young carpenter and orchardist who chose to plant apricot trees rather than study at Stanford. The Bemans have maintained their connection with Stanford over four generations of alumni and now John and his wife Ginger have solid connections with J. Gilbert Smith and the Los Altos History Museum, Ginger as past Board President and John serving on both the Education and Docent committees.

John is a self-described sports nut. He’s a “low” handicap golfer and has been a loyal, Stanford season ticket holder through thick and thin, but baseball is his passion. He grew up across the street from Gilmore Stadium, home of the Hollywood Stars minor league team, and has fond memories of sitting in the stands with his dad watching games and tracking player stats.

Norm Kordsmeier, John’s regular docent partner, moved to Los Altos in 1974. Norm completed his graduate studies at Stanford with degrees in both chemical and structural engineering, preparing him well for a 38 year career at Lockheed and his pioneering work on the space shuttle tiles, as well as development of the fade-resistant fabric required for the American flag planted on the moon. Norm enjoys his grandchildren, golf, reading, gardening, and especially the “quality and commitment of fellow Los Altos History Museum volunteers who care so deeply about our community.”

~ Eleanor Watanabe
Many people will remember Marge Bruno as a member of the Los Altos City Council. She was the top vote getter in the 1987 election and twice served as Mayor. In 1995 she was elected the first woman President of the Los Altos Rotary Club, and was only the fourth woman Rotarian when she joined in 1988.

Marge recalls, “… most of the men were very welcoming, …there were a few who not so much, but one of the funny rules that we laugh at now is that we were not allowed to sit together. … We never knew why. They said we want to share you, but we thought that they were afraid we’d get together and plot their overthrow or something, … Today about a third of the membership is women.”

As President, Marge had several goals in mind. At that time Rotary met at the Elks Club on El Camino Real. Women were not allowed to be members of the Elks and could not enter through the front door. Marge thought, “If I do nothing else, we are leaving that Elks Club. We are not going to meet in a place where we’re second-class citizens.” Piccolo Mondo restaurant became the new venue for Rotary meetings.

Marge also had a community-wide goal. When it was announced she would be the next Rotary President, her good friends Jane Reed and Ginny Lear said to her, “You are going to be the first woman. Make this count.

You should do something important as the first woman.” Marge wanted to do something with education. “Coming from a blue-collar background myself, I felt like I knew the power of getting a good education and what it could do for the rest of your life.” At her first meeting as President, Marge announced an elementary and high school program called Partners in Education. “The response from the Rotary Club was just outstanding.” Fifty people signed up to be volunteers at that first meeting. The program is now called the Mentor Tutor Connection, and continues to be very successful.

Marge received well-deserved recognition as the Town Crier’s 1995 Los Altan of the Year.

~ Marcia Adams

Hello from Yazoo City

John and I left California and moved to Mississippi. We drove our hybrid car across Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Louisiana, over 2,000 miles and it only cost $100 for gas. We now live in Yazoo City, a fairly small and poor community of about 11,500 inhabitants but the landscape is beautiful with green fields, trees, rivers, streams and swamps.

We found a 2-bedroom duplex for $745 a month - one-third the cost of a much smaller apartment in the Bay Area. Most people here are very friendly and welcoming, and take the time to chat with you, ask where you’re from and tell you a little bit about Mississippi. That’s been a lot of fun! Many people assume that moving to Yazoo City must be such a culture shock; however, I grew up in an even smaller community in Southern Germany, and when I got stuck behind a tractor recently, I was reminded of home.

We have seen a few of the local attractions and activities. We attended the Yazoo County Fair, the second-oldest county fair in Mississippi (since 1928). We visited the Medgar Evers Home Museum, received a wonderful tour by the Archivist from Tougaloo College and learned about the civil rights leader and his tragic death. At the Yazoo Antique Days event, we listened to blues music and bought local honey and Mississippi-grown rice.

I miss my friends at the History Museum, but it has been refreshing and relaxing to be close to nature and escape the stress of the Bay Area. So all in all a good move for us!

~ Johanna Fassbender
History in the News

The effort to receive Historic District Designation for the Fallen Leaf Park neighborhood took another step forward when the preservation group led by Tracy Gibbons and Nate Johnson met with the Historical Commission in October. The Fallen Leaf Park neighborhood is a community of 37 homes developed by Joseph Eichler in 1968, and was featured in last year’s Winter issue of Under the Oaks.

The preservation group reviewed their efforts to date, including hiring a professional, Seth Bergstein, whose assessment is that Fallen Leaf Park represents one of the most “intact” collections of Eichlers in all of California. The group reported that they have developed a set of guidelines to describe the characteristic features that need to be maintained in order to meet City requirements, and they are in the process of receiving feedback from homeowners. The goal is to submit a formal application by the end of the year.

Of interest to Museum members, an exhibition on Eichlers is in the works and will open next April. Eichler Homes: Preserving a Legacy, curated by Steven Eichler with graphic design by Judi Eichler, will help us understand the unique and rich place in history that the Eichler homes hold in their communities.

~ Gary Hedden

Farewell to Laura

Laura Bajuk, the museum’s Executive Director for nearly 11 years, departed in October to take a position at the new Palo Alto History Museum.

During her tenure, Laura has overseen significant growth in the museum’s development and programming. The staff has grown, the budget has more than doubled, and annual giving and fundraising events have all increased. More importantly, the museum has grown in mission-related areas, including collections, exhibitions, educational programs, and community events.

“The museum is well positioned for future growth,” Laura said. “Our programming has won recognition beyond the Los Altos borders. This community’s support is amazing and has made this success possible. You have helped to create the best small history museum in the Bay Area.”

Over the years, Laura has excelled in recruiting highly-qualified professional staff. Current staff members include Crystal Taylor and Gena Hunter, who were highlighted in the Fall newsletter. Johanna Fassbender and Stefanie Midlock made major contributions to the museum’s programs, before moving on to other career opportunities. Sam Scott has overseen preparations for the current and next exhibitions. All of these people have strong museum backgrounds and a passion for history.

“Laura loves history and is a great storyteller,” said museum president Marilyn Henderson. “She has enthusiastically represented the museum and its programs at every opportunity. As the public face of the museum, she has been an outstanding ambassador.”

Please join the museum’s board and volunteers in thanking Laura for her devoted service to our museum and our community.

Laura remarked, “Since the Los Altos History Museum has been my ‘home’ for so long, you will still see me around - shopping at DeMartini’s and downtown, serving Kiwanis, and attending the Crab Feed - this time Doug and I will be guests!”

~ Ed Taft, past president


Sam Scott is our newly arrived interim Collections Manager, watching over “Hau Beiren@100” and in January, the installation of “Seaweed, Salmon & Manzanita Cider,” an exhibition that explores traditional California Indian food sources. Sam has 15 years experience as a museum curator, including time at the Peabody Essex Museum near Boston.
Our Hidden Gems

Jitze Couperus of Los Altos Hills contacted the History Museum about a collection of beautiful photographs taken in the late 1970s and 1980s by Gordon Penfold, Chief Security Officer in Los Altos Hills at the time. Gordon was an avid photographer, and his slides were loaned to Jitze by Gordon Penfold’s daughter, Leslie Lambert, on the passing of her father.

We immediately expressed our interest in obtaining digital images of the slides, and they are now catalogued in the Museum’s collection and are available for future use. In fact, one of the images appeared in a recent Peek into the Past for the Los Altos Town Crier.

This is an example that shows how working with local community members like Jitze and Leslie help preserve our history, and how the hidden gems that we collect benefit us all.

~ Stefanie Midlock

Behind the Scenes

One of the museum’s most successful exhibits, Touching Lives, The Duvenecks of Hidden Villa, celebrated the lives of Josephine and Frank Duveneck. It highlighted their many achievements and contributions to our community, most notably Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills, the home they shared with family, friends and others less fortunate than themselves. Today, Hidden Villa is a 1,600-acre wilderness preserve and working farm that offers educational programs, multicultural summer camps and philanthropic activities.

The museum exhibit team spent many months working closely with the Duveneck family to collect and identify objects that would tell their story. In the process, the museum became the steward of hundreds of letters, photographs, awards, clothing and tools belonging to the family. Many relate to the museum’s mission; many do not. Before any these objects can be added to our permanent collection and used for research, public inquiries and future exhibits, we need to inventory the objects and obtain formal direction and permission from the family on how we can use these materials and dispose of the ones that don’t apply.

As a museum volunteer, I spent the last year reviewing all the objects currently stored in thirteen “bankers” boxes and six box tops in the museum’s vault and preparing a detailed inventory. The museum staff has made initial contact with one of the heirs and sent them an inventory summary.

These boxes contain a wealth of information including over three hundred early personal letters and telegrams written by Frank and Josephine to each other while he was deployed during WWI. I summarized, scanned and catalogued one third of these letters into the museum’s database. They provide invaluable insight into the life of a young family living in the local area during the early 20th century as well as their thoughts regarding war and the military. Frank’s WWI diary and one of Josephine’s diaries written after they moved to Hidden Villa have been transcribed and catalogued. We are eager to gain formal permission from the heirs and continue our fascinating work organizing and cataloguing the objects that remain in our care.

~ Margie Alving
Photo Gallery – Train Days

Kristen Fuller gets a glitter tattoo at Train Days.

Glitter gals Kaitlyn, Mackenzie and Caitlyn.

Conductor Jennifer Berg helping out

Time for some adjustments.

Kayla making paper lanterns at MoonFest.

Mom gets some glitter.
Museum and Store Hours
Thursday to Sunday, Noon–4 pm
We are closed New Year’s Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

General Inquiries
(650) 948-9427 x14 or hello@losaltoshistory.org

Collections/Research
(650) 948-9427 x16

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

Hau Beiren@100: Works from the Old Apricot Villa, exhibition closes December 31.


30th Crab Feed & Auction, Saturday, February 4, St. William Parish Hall, 6-10 pm.

Essay Contest, Grades 2-6. March. Check the website for details.

School Tours, Grades 3-4, weekdays, 9 am–noon, April & May. Teachers and homeschoolers, contact the Museum as soon as possible to sign up.

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

Board Meetings, First Wednesday each month, 4 pm, everyone welcome
Smith House Tours, Every Sunday, 2 pm

A fond farewell to Stefie Midlock, leaving in search of new adventures.