

Inspired by Juana: La Doña de la Frontera

The Los Altos History Museum is proud to be participating in a resurgence of interest in Juana Briones' life through an upcoming bilingual exhibit, *Inspired by Juana: La Doña de la Frontera*, opening October 18. To be sure, Juana Briones—entrepreneur, healer, and humanitarian of Afro-mestiza heritage—is a treasure for our community and is of local, state, and transnational significance.

Born to parents who arrived in the Bay Area with the Juan Bautista de Anza Expedition, Juana had strong connections to the Spanish, and later Mexican, Missions in Santa Cruz, Monterey, San José, and San Francisco. Growing up in present-day Santa Cruz and El Polín Spring, located in the San Francisco Presidio, Juana's early-married life began in Yerba Buena (now North Beach). There she began her entrepreneurial career selling dairy and vegetables to sailors, who came from all over the world, and acquiring property for her business. Juana also helped several sailors establish new lives in the Bay Area after jumping ship by providing them sanctuary and social support.



Jeanne McDonnell, author of the 'definitive biography' of Juana Briones with Perlita Dicochea, Luis Ambriz, Elisabeth Ward, and Halimah Van Tuyl. Photo credit Julius Sana, Foothill College Andrew Mellow Fellow and LAHM Intern.

As Juana Briones' business expanded in the hide and tallow trade in the 1840s, she purchased over 4000 acres in present-day Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and Palo Alto, becoming a well-known rancher, traditional healer and midwife. Throughout her life she demonstrated the capacity to welcome, aid, and collaborate with people from different backgrounds. All the while, she faced personal challenges, including many years of struggle with an abusive, alcoholic husband, whom she eventually left. After the U.S. takeover of Alta California, Juana successfully fought her case in the U.S. Supreme Court to retain title to her property located near the San Francisco Presidio, which she had acquired in the Mexican era.

Research Resurgence

Although a well-known figure in the San Francisco area in her day, Juana Briones' name began to slip into obscurity by the late 1800s and she was not included in the early, official stories of the history of California. The first step on this road to obscurity was a decision by Hubert Howe Bancroft,

who conducted interviews in the 1860s for his 39-volume history of the West, to not interview Juana Briones, even though he had been given her name. In the 1922 History of Santa Clara County, Juana Briones was not included in this massive volume filled with many biographies. However, traces of the Briones family, such as place names like the Briones Hills near Oakland where Felipe



Urna, a workshop participant, showing her art depicting the herbs raised by Juana Briones. Photo credit Perlita Dicochea.

Briones, brother to Juana, had a cattle ranch, allowed historians in the 1960s and 1970s to begin to rediscover the names, stories, and historic importance of these early settlers. Historians like Florence Fava, who included Juana Briones in her history of Los Altos Hills, worked to create a more diverse and inclusive narrative of California. This helped convince school officials in Palo Alto, where Juana Briones died, to rename a school in her honor in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the owner of the land on Old Adobe Road just west of Foothill Boulevard offered public tours of Briones' still-standing wattle and dab constructed home. A demolition order in 2007 galvanized local residents in Palo Alto and Los Altos Hills to try to save the building, and their efforts led to several important outcomes, including the publication in 2008 by Jeanne Farr McDonnell of a full biography of Juana Briones and the erection of a State Historic Landmark plaque on the site. Sadly, the house itself was demolished. In 2014, Juana Briones was the subject of a special temporary exhibition at the California State Historical Society.

Co-Presidents' Pen

As we end summer and look to fall, the Los Altos History Museum is abuzz with activity! On July 29, over 130 members filled the patio of the Museum for our annual Membership BBQ. Delicious food, specialty drinks and beverages, along with the sounds of the MaCaJo Band made the evening a roaring success.



Paint the Town II, Echoes of Our Past is drawing great interest from the community as visitors enjoy the art representing many local historic homes and sites. This exhibit continues through October 7. Then *Inspired by Juana: La Doña de la Frontera* opens October 18. Come learn about the remarkable life of a local woman who became a well-known rancher, traditional healer and midwife. Perhaps you live on land that was once her ranch.

We depend on our wonderful staff and dedicated volunteers and we would like to recognize three individuals who help with Collections—**Doreen Cohen, Margie Alving** and **Sande Stuart**. Together they have helped for 20+ years! Now under the direction of Deputy Director Heather Farquhar, they are continuing their research in support our exhibits, follow up on community requests, and label and organize the contents in the vault. Before joining the Collections Committee, Doreen was a project manager at NASA Ames and has a MA in library science, Margie worked for a local aerospace company, and Sande was in the medical field as a surgical nurse. Doreen has focused on oral history projects, while Margie and Sande have focused on research for exhibits and improving the Museum's database. Each brings a love of history and a curiosity about Los Altos! If you would like to join the Collections Committee, please contact Heather Farquhar. Help is always needed and you'll have fun, too!

~ Linda Eckols and Eleanor Watanabe, Co-Presidents

Staff

Elisabeth Ida Ward, *Executive Director*

Heather Farquhar, *Deputy Director and Head of Collections*

Diane Holcomb, *Outreach Coordinator*

Deepti Devanagondi, *Bookkeeper*

Luis Ambriz, *Exhibition Coordinator*

Mark Perry, *Facility & Rentals Manager*

Faustino Carrillo, *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!

Inspired by Juana (continued)

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The Los Altos History Museum has, thanks to the efforts of Nan Geschke, also kept the memory of Juana Briones alive, both in the permanent exhibit and on the Los Altos History Show. Now we are mounting our own exhibition about this historic figure.

Exhibit & Student Workshop

This exhibit is a wonderful opportunity for the Museum and the larger Bay Area community to build new bridges across our diverse population. Toward this end, we are developing the exhibit as a collaborative, community-centered project to bring Juana's unique story to life. Installations created by local high school students during a two-week workshop held at the Museum in July will be key anchors in the exhibition.

During the workshop, students learned about Juana's life and social contexts as well as related current social issues while developing research skills and creating exhibit installations grounded in those aspects of Juana's life that most inspired them. Among the projects students created include an evening gown with a recreation of an historic drawing of the San Francisco Presidio hand painted on the skirt and butterflies that symbolize current social issues; a booklet that features photos of traditional herbs and their healing elements; a collage of various historic maps marking Juana's various properties; and a short film that imagines how Juana's interactions with her abusive husband might have unfolded.

Ongoing Programming

During the six months that the exhibition will be up, the Museum will be partnering with students in the workshop and other community groups to continue to bring the story of Juana Briones to life. Special tours at Hidden Villa are being arranged, an academic symposium at Foothill College is scheduled for March 2nd, and fun celebrations of traditional culture will be offered especially around the holidays. As Juana would say, "Bienvenidos todos!"

~ Co-Curators Perlita R. Dicochea, Ph.D. and Halimah Van Tuyl, with Executive Director Elisabeth Ward, Ph.D.



Workshop students at work 'under the oaks.' Photo credit Perlita Dicochea.

Jim Thurber, A Dear Friend

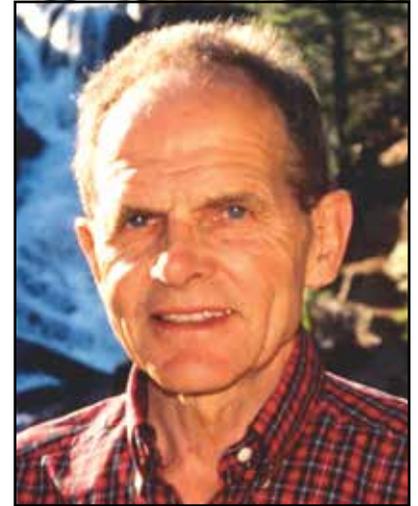
The History Museum and the community lost a dear friend in June when Jim Thurber passed away at the age of 90. After a distinguished 23-year career in the Foreign Service, Jim returned to Los Altos in 1990 to retire. Of course, Jim's idea of retirement included a lot of community service, and as a former city councilman and four-time Mayor, his services were in demand. He joined the Museum Board in 2005 and became President in 2008. Emy Thurber, married to Jim for 68 years, observed that he was active with the Museum, the Library, the Bus Barn and the Los Altos Community Foundation - groups on adjacent land at the civic center. This became "Jim's territory." He was active with other groups too, and it went beyond policy making; he was more than willing to get his hands dirty. Emy said, "He even installed a toilet once at a political campaign headquarters on El Camino." Asked how he could juggle so many activities, Emy simply noted, "He loved Los Altos so we just made it work." Daughter Harriette agreed, "Dad was out a lot."

Dolly Sandoval, friend and colleague of Jim on the Foothill/DeAnza Board captured that thought in a sympathy note to the family, "Thank you for 'sharing' your father with the greater community." ... It "took away family time but I believe this community is so much richer because of your sacrifice ..."

Some of Jim's most dramatic moments came during his overseas duties. He was senior officer at the Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, when it was attacked by rioters and burned to the ground in 1979. Jim and fellow staff members hid in a reinforced vault until they could escape. Emy and daughter Mary were traveling in southern Pakistan at the time and spent 36 anxious hours before learning of Jim's fate. They joined hundreds of Americans who were evacuated to Frankfurt on a commandeered Pan Am 747; Jim stayed back with a small staff. Two soldiers had been killed and Emy still "gets a chill" as she recalls their memorial service and the somber words of President Jimmy Carter.

Now it's our turn to remember. Thank you Jim for your lifetime of service to our community and our country.

~ Gary Hedden



Jim Thurber ~ 2008. Photo credit Thurber Family Collection.

My House

I enjoy painting pictures of historic homes. The one on Cherry Avenue that I painted at the request of Don McDonald became the inspiration for *Paint the Town II, Echoes of Our Past*. For the exhibition I painted the cottage at 86 Pine Lane that my husband Paul and I bought in 1971. It came with quite a story going back to the Gold Rush in Alaska in the 1890s. A man who found his fortune there bought a large apricot orchard on Giffin Road, now called San Antonio Road. He built a big house (now gone) and three summer cottages for visiting friends. Our cottage, built in 1922, is the only one that remains.

Ernest Baker, a building contractor, bought the cottage in the 1940s as a retirement home. He added to the front of the house and switched a bedroom and the kitchen. We met Ernest and his wife Dorothy, in their 90s at the time, and learned that the wonderful painted ceramic tiles in the bathroom were made by Dorothy. She had a kiln, and that solved the mystery of the piles of broken glass in the backyard. Dorothy would grind colored glass to make pigments for her glazes. We still have those glazed tiles.

Out of curiosity, I started calling the Bakers in the local phone book to see if anyone knew about Ernest and Dorothy. I quickly reached Charles Baker, and he said, "Yes, those were my parents." Charles is 100, and clearly got some good genes, or as he put it, "I picked my parents well." He never lived in the cottage on Pine Lane, but he still lives in the area, and why not, it's a great place to live.

~ Cathy Zander



Paul and Cathy Zander in front of their house.

Ten Years and Rolling

"We're delighted to celebrate *Train Days*' tenth anniversary," said Kristen Fuller, event chair. "What started as a small, one-time supporting event for a Museum exhibition *Trains Mean Business* has evolved into a community-wide event that brings people back year after year to enjoy trains and have a good time."

Trains are integral to the history of America and led to the very start of Los Altos in 1907 when Southern Pacific opened a line between Palo Alto and Los Gatos. Trains evolved from the early steam locomotives of that day to the diesel engines of today. *Train Days*, at the Museum Sept. 15-16, will have scale models of all types of trains to see in operation.

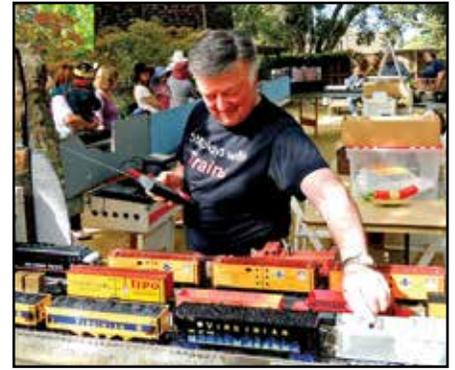
Elisabeth Ward noted our deep appreciation for the dedicated effort of Kristen Fuller over the years and commented, "The success of *Train Days* has really inspired the Museum. We are glad the community embraces events like *Train Days* bringing young and old together in a fun learning environment."

Don't miss it. Kristen Fuller with the help and inspiration of Dick Blanding started *Train Days* ten years ago and the Museum can't thank them enough. They still love it and we think Kristen's t-shirt says it all, "Still plays with trains."

~ Gary Hedden



Kristen Fuller with her niece Charlotte, *Train Days* 2011. Charlotte is ten now and a lead Glitter Gal tattoo artist. Photo credit Rich Zalisk.



Dick Blanding making some adjustments to the trains, *Train Days* 2012. Photo credit Rich Zalisk.

Survey Results Revealed!

In May we sent out a survey to find out directly from our volunteers how they felt about the volunteer program. Volunteers are the heart and soul of this organization and our new mission statement says as much – we can only do what we do by "fostering the creative energy of staff and volunteers." We were thrilled to learn that overall people enjoy their volunteer experience and give it an 8.4 out of 10 rating.

We discovered that 64% of our volunteers found out about Museum opportunities through a Museum volunteer. This shows the power that a positive experience can have on expanding our program. Responders noted that a good volunteer experience meant that they felt appreciated, made good use of their skills, had plenty to do, learned new things and had the opportunity to socialize. When asked how the experience might be improved the majority responded they were happy as it is, but there were some great ideas. Suggestions included getting more volunteers, more training, more interaction with long-term volunteers, more volunteer events, better explanations of the job and better communication. All of these suggestions are important and we will take them to heart. In the near future we will be taking steps to improve in these areas and make the volunteer experience even better!

If you missed taking the survey and would still like to take it, please let me know. It's not too late to give us feedback.

~ Heather Farquhar



Heather Farquhar studying the survey results.

Membership

Welcome to our new members:

Debbie Baker	Kerstin Lindblom
Rodger and Sharon Lynn Barkoff	Grail Nitsch
Trudie Daggett	Lata Patil
Irv Drasin and Xiayan Zhao	Allen Sciotto
Barbara Huston	Jennifer Urmson

Business Members

We are pleased to introduce new ways for the business community to show their support for the Museum. We will be launching the program soon but we already have two members, and we truly appreciate their support.

Corporate Sponsorship

Los Altos Community Investments

Business Sponsorship

Young, Craig & Co., Accountants

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Hau Beiren was recently interviewed by Suruchi Mohan, a volunteer with the Oral History Project.

In a town of accomplished people, distinguishing oneself is a challenge. If Hau Beiren had merely been the Chinese visual artist that the art world knows, it would have been achievement enough, but Mr. Hau has something else – his signature on the Constitution of the Republic of China, the official constitution of Taiwan since 1949.

This intertwining of art and politics goes back a long way. Born in 1917 in Haicheng City, China, Mr. Hau became interested in painting at the age of nine. Later, he discovered his love of writing. Graduating with a degree in sociology from the University of Kyushu in Japan, writing earned him a living, even as he continued to study art.



Hau Beiren in his studio in Los Altos, 2018.

In 1943, Mr. Hau joined the Foreign Affairs Department in China. World War II raged and the Chinese government wanted his insight on the Japanese. The victory of Mao Zedong's Communists promised unwelcome change, so Mr. Hau moved to Hong Kong in 1949.

The U.S. government at the time was offering visas to educated Chinese. In 1956, Mr. Hau boarded a ship to Hawaii with his wife and two young children. On arrival in Hawaii, Mr. Hau was met by a journalist he knew from his work in China covering politics. That friend invited him to San Francisco, where he organized a party for Mr. Hau. An art exhibition followed.

Now he moved full-time into art. He was invited to teach at the Palo Alto Art Club. "I tried to teach Chinese art to American people," he said in his interview for the Oral History Project. Over time, he introduced the traditional Chinese painting style of brush and ink to the bold colors of the West.

In the fall of 2016, the History Museum proudly displayed Mr. Hau's works in honor of his 100th birthday. It was a very popular exhibition. The Museum's current exhibition, *Paint the Town II*, is another exhibition that combines art and history.

~ Suruchi Mohan

Director's Corner

Museums and Democracy

A few months ago, I gave a presentation to the group participating in the Los Altos Community Foundation's LEAD class, organized by Claudia Coleman. The class, Leadership, Education and Advancement, teaches interested citizens how to engage in the community. The Museum is highlighted as a place to get involved and make a difference.



My presentation was about the history of Museums in America, which is different than the European tradition. European museums, usually founded by monarchs, are meant to impress, and to prove the power, wealth, and dominance of a country. By contrast, American museums were founded as educational institutions, as the Founding Fathers understood that democracy only works when citizens are well-educated. The first Museum in the U.S. was located in Philadelphia, site of the Constitutional Congress. Ever since, museums in the U.S. have worked to create interesting exhibits that present new ideas and offer new information.

We know museums are meant to be educational, but the relationship between museums and democracy is perhaps less obvious. What makes museums democratic is the way they educate: it isn't mandatory, it is about choice. Visitor go where they choose and what they learn is up to them. Empowering people to make their own choices is fundamentally democratic.

In that spirit, I want to mention the initiative that will be on the November ballot about City-owned property. Our agreement with the City of Los Altos is a tenant agreement, because the Museum occupies a City-owned building on City property. That agreement has been in place since 2005 and we don't have plans for renegotiating it. If the initiative were to pass, and if our agreement were to come up for renegotiation, it would be subject to the initiative's requirement that the agreement go before the voters of Los Altos. As an institution committed to the principles of democracy, we would of course welcome an opportunity to go before the citizens of Los Altos and ask for their support. We are also proud to be part of a city where active citizens already participate in the community in a myriad of meaningful ways.

~ Dr. Elisabeth I. Ward, Executive Director

**Election Day is November 6 –
Be Sure to Vote!**

Photo Gallery



Kids trying one of the Explorabox experiments at the Apricot STEM Fair in June.



Three of the celebrity tasting judges at the Apricot Fair – Liz Nyberg, Deborah Olson from Olson Cherries and Jeff Harding, Superintendent, MVLA School District.



Pinky Whelan, Julie Rose and Noreen Letts enjoying a sip of Lee Lera's delicious apricot brandy.



Rong Lyu standing in front of her two pictures of the Train Depot, with Elisabeth Ward.



Our three talented judges for Paint the Town II – Karen Druker, Patricia Sherwood and Linda Lum.



Irene and Barry Grenier enjoying the picture of their historic Orange Avenue home.

Photo Gallery



Richard Moll celebrates his birthday at the BBQ with Laura Griswold and wife Ellie.



The Members' BBQ gets a thumbs up!



Ann Nelson, Emy Thurber and Karen Lemes enjoying the Members' BBQ.



Jerre Hitz, past Board President Marilyn Henderson, and Nancy Humpal at the BBQ.



*Reggie Nair and his daughter Namrata, one of the WWI essay contest winners, with Elisabeth Ward and Dr. James Armstead, who skillfully portrayed WWI soldiers as part of the exhibition *Over Here: Americans at Home in WWI*.*



Heather Farquhar and Elisabeth Ward receiving the book of art and memories by the Los Altos Art Club and the ArtVenture group from Aileen Trant and Lenora Valainis. Doreen Cohen, far right, coordinated the project for the Museum.



UNDER THE OAKS

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Los Altos, CA

Assn. of the Los Altos Historical Museum, 51 So. San Antonio Road, Los Altos, CA 94022

www.losaltoshistory.org

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.

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Event Rentals

(650) 948-9427 x12
mperry@losaltoshistory.org

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.

Address Correction Requested

On The Calendar

Heritage Walks, Robin Chapman leads a walk called "Orchard Entrepreneurs" through the Civic Center Orchard every Saturday in September starting at the back door of the Library, 11:30 am, free.

Train Days, Saturday & Sunday, September 15 & 16, 10 am-4 pm, History Museum.

The Business of Apricots, J. Gilbert Smith House, closes Sunday, Sept. 23.

Hallowed Tales, J. Gilbert Smith House, opens Thursday, Oct. 4, through Sunday, Nov. 4. Special tours with costumed docents Saturday, Oct. 27, 7 pm and 9 pm, just in time for Halloween.

Paint the Town II, Echoes of Our Past, closes Sunday, Oct. 7.

Juana Briones, La Doña de la Frontera, opens Thursday, Oct. 18, Reception and Fiesta, Sunday, Oct. 21, 3-6 pm, \$30.

Día de los Muertos Event, Saturday, Oct. 27, 11 am-3 pm, at the Museum. Help create a shrine to Juana Briones.

Catch the Spirit! Wednesday, Nov. 14, noon-4 pm, holiday boutique, local authors, CSA toy drive and historic house tours.

King's Day Celebration, Sunday, Jan. 6, noon-4 pm, at the Museum.



Nomi Trapnell with two awards, Judge's Pick and People's Choice for her Apricot Brie Tartlets. The recipe was published July 18 in the Town Crier.

Board Meetings, First Wednesday each month, 4 pm, everyone welcome

Smith House Tours, Every Sunday, 2 pm

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