

Rise Up! The Fight for Women's Suffrage

When we think about the women's suffrage movement, the usual narrative tends to focus on East Coast stories: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony gathering at Seneca Falls, Alice Paul's hunger strike, White House picketers in iconic "Votes for Women" sashes.

But in fact, it was the West that paved the way for the 19th amendment, beginning with the territory of Wyoming in 1869, and followed by Colorado, Utah, and Idaho in the 1890s. When women's suffrage passed in California in 1911, it opened the floodgates, reinvigorating the suffrage movement throughout the country. Within California, the struggle for women's suffrage looked different in every county. There is still so much to uncover about the movement in Santa Clara County, but we do know that local suffragists rose up and were pivotal to the fight.

The California Suffrage Movement

California suffragists worked tirelessly for decades before winning the vote in 1911, and Santa Clara County's leadership was particularly strong and active. When Susan B. Anthony and other national leaders toured California in 1895 to campaign for suffrage, they were hosted at the Palo Alto home of Sarah Armstrong Montgomery Green Wallis, as well as Elizabeth Lowe Watson's farm in Cupertino. Wallis had been elected president of the newly formed California State Woman Suffrage Educational Association in 1873, and her efforts helped enable women to practice law in California. Watson was a powerful orator and would become president of the California Equal Suffrage Association in 1910. Their early efforts met with some success in 1896 when suffrage appeared on the ballot, but voters rejected the measure.

Nevertheless, Bay Area suffragists continued to fight, and welcomed a new generation of women eager to join their ranks. Often mothers and daughters campaigned together. Eliza "Lida" Hood Talbot (1848-1937) and her daughter, Mae Talbot Winchell (1868-1942) were both ardent suffragists and frequently provided the entertainment at Mountain View suffrage meetings. Talbot was known for her funny skits that parodied contemporary social norms, highlighting prejudices and double standards faced by women. Winchell, a teacher and actress, also gave out "Votes for Women" buttons to men who promised to wear them and vote for suffrage. Sophia Durst (1885-1929) and her daughter Ethel (1885-1929) were also well-known in Santa Clara County for promoting the cause. Both were frequent speakers at Mountain View suffrage rallies, often held in large social halls like Swall's Opera Hall on Castro Street.



Los Altos/Mountain View suffragist, Lida Hood Talbot. Courtesy, Los Angeles Times.



Swall's Opera Hall, where many suffrage meetings took place, still stands at 219 Castro Street in Mountain View. Courtesy, Mountain View Historical Association.

When a more progressive Republican administration came into power in 1910, suffragists lobbied to put the question to the voters again. They faced steep and well-organized opposition, especially from liquor interest groups, which feared that women voters would favor prohibition. The measure passed by only 3,587 votes. Many Bay Area counties, such as San Francisco, San Mateo, and Alameda, voted against suffrage. Support was also weak in Southern California, barely passing in Los Angeles County. Ultimately, it was rural Californians that tipped the scales, making California the sixth state to grant women the right to vote. Thanks in large part to the efforts of suffragists like Wallis, Watson, Talbot, Winchell, and the Dursts, Santa Clara County was one of the few Bay Area counties to vote in favor of the measure—4,762 to 3,120.

President's Pen

Everything is upside down. That's how it feels right now. Our hard-working staff continues to bring you new exhibitions and online events, keep you up-to-date with the latest news and add new artifacts to our collection, but it feels hollow not to have you with us. Zoom meetings and virtual handshakes and hugs aren't very satisfying.

This pandemic took us by surprise, although we have encountered infectious diseases many times in the past. The bubonic plague devastated Europe in the 1300s, the 1918 Spanish Flu killed 50 million, and more recently we have had AIDS, SARS, and MERS. Assault by acronyms. There are 827,000 known animal viruses capable of being transmitted to humans, so although rare, it will happen again.

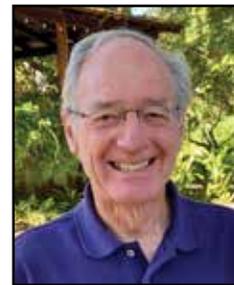
The current pandemic will pass, they always do, and I can't wait. I can't wait to see you back at the Museum. Docents

greeting visitors. Store volunteers helping customers. Museum guests enjoying the exhibits. The kids coming back. Events. Programs. Parties! Yes, loud, busy wedding parties getting in the way of our daily routine, and won't that be wonderful!

We recently honored our *Volunteers of the Year* with gifts, balloons and a drive-by celebration. That was fun, but we want you back and we look forward to that happy day when we can see each other, talk to each other in person and not by zoom, and yes, even offer real handshakes and hugs.

Stay safe,

~ Gary Hedden



Rise Up! continued from page 1

Acts of Exclusion

In Santa Clara County, as well as around the country, African American women played an important but often overlooked role in suffrage campaigns. Doubly disenfranchised, Black suffragists fought for the vote in order to gain equality and improve the conditions of their communities. In San Jose, Sarah Massey Overton campaigned for equality in politics and education while advocating for Black youth. Overton worked with the Political Equality Club of San Jose and served as vice president of San Jose's interracial Suffrage Amendment League. As president of the Victoria Earle Matthews (Mothers) Club, she also provided aid for African American women who were victims of sexual abuse. For Overton, gender and race could not be separated in the fight for equality.

Despite helping to win the 19th amendment, African American women continued to struggle for the right to vote well after 1920. African American men were granted suffrage in 1870 by the 15th amendment, which stated that US citizens cannot be denied the right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." However, many states imposed literacy tests, poll taxes, and other Jim Crow laws that prevented them from exercising that right. In other communities, many African Americans stayed away from the polls due to the threat of violence. Despite the 15th and 19th amendments, the disenfranchisement of many Black men and women continued at the state and local level. It was not until 1965 that the Voting Rights Act prohibited legal barriers from

blocking African Americans from voting, although to this day voter suppression continues to make it difficult for many communities of color to exercise the right to vote.

Chinese immigrants and Native Americans in Santa Clara County were also not protected by the 19th amendment. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act barred Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens, and was not repealed until 1943. Native Americans were granted citizenship in 1924, but some states continued to block Indigenous peoples from voting until 1957. For those in Santa Clara County with limited English proficiency, protections were not put into place until the Voting Rights Act was extended in 1975. While we celebrate what was gained in 1920, we also have to recognize the limitations of the 19th amendment and who was left out.



Santa Clara County suffragist, Elizabeth Lowe Watson. Public domain.

The Feminist Capital of the World?

Women in Santa Clara County had always been politically active, and after winning the vote in 1920, they put that to good use as voters and as elected officials. Audrey Fisher became the first woman mayor in Los Altos in 1967. Janet Gray Hayes became the mayor of San Jose in 1975, the first woman elected to that office in a major US city. They ushered in a wave of elected female representatives in California's government, prompting Newsweek to label Santa Clara County the "feminist capital of the world."

continued on page 4

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!

Congratulations Jane Reed

An honor richly deserved, Jane Reed received the 2020 Historic Preservation Award.

Jane is one of the most important people to have worked on behalf of the Los Altos History Museum. She joined the History House Auxiliary in the 80s at the urging of Bob Grimm and Nan Geschke, worked on the plans and the fundraising for the new Museum in the 90s and helped with the design and content for the permanent exhibit in the upstairs gallery. She was on the Board of Directors for many years, twice serving as Board President! She chaired many fundraising benefits and worked on many exhibitions. Tireless, she is now involved with planning and fundraising for a major renovation of the upstairs gallery.

Jane has always enjoyed working on exhibitions. I met her and worked with her in 2011 as we worked with Linda Gass on the award-winning exhibition *Shaped By Water: Past, Present and Future*. Jane helped with research, display design, reception, fundraising and mentoring. Jane has always had great ideas, but in addition she will pitch in and get her hands dirty. She is not shy about picking up a paint brush and helping out, or finding just the right spot to hang a picture as we did with *Paint the Town II*.



Jane and John Reed at their Los Altos home. August, 2020.

I really valued her help when I curated the exhibition *Pedal Power: From Wacky to Workhorse* with my friends from GreenTown Los Altos. Jane handed me a book with the unpretentious title, "Exhibit Labels," and said, "Read this." As it turns out, it is a very good little book about creating an impactful exhibition. One message I took to heart, "Keep the text short" as most people want to look at the objects and not spend a whole lot of time

reading. Thank you Jane for such good advice.

Jane and John are leaving Los Altos in October, retiring to Claremont, California, the city where she grew up. Make a donation in Jane's name during the month of September in support of the changing exhibit program and you will be invited to a special farewell parade.

Jane will continue to work with the Museum remotely, and she and John promise to return to Los Altos often. We hope so, and we wish them well.

~ Gary Hedden

Volunteer Highlights

Since the Museum first opened its doors in 2001, visitors have been able to purchase gift items in the small shop located in the lobby. While the store's inventory has grown through the years, the 20 volunteers who ring up the purchases are as dedicated as ever. They range in age from college students to lifelong members, and many are retired teachers, real estate agents, professionals and some have previously owned shops of their own. They all enjoy seeing the changing merchandise and some are among the very best customers!

In the store's early days, a handful of volunteers traveled to San Francisco twice a year to buy merchandise. Now, Vicki Holman, the store's committee chair, makes the decisions, bringing us an eclectic mix of enjoyable items. In her ten years of volunteering she has made some changes, including a pivot from an old-fashioned cash register to Square, a mobile point-of-sale system. Another challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic. With the Museum closed, Vicki moved the store's inventory online to allow shopping from home. Since money from purchases supports the Museum, Vicki is hoping to boost sales by raising awareness of the new online shop. "I'd like to see the store get back on its feet." The store's layout also received a recent upgrade. The store counter was rotated to offer visitors a more open and welcoming shopping experience, and the store volunteers will now face the customers as they shop.

When it comes to appreciating the store's volunteers, Vicki goes all out. She holds a high tea every year, as well as a summer barbecue, and every Christmas she presents each person with a chocolate truffle and card. "We have a good group of volunteers," she said. "They feel very connected to each other and to what they're doing."



High tea with Anne Roberts, Kaye Loughmiller, Vicki Holman, Pinky Whelan and Sande Stuart. Photo credit, Mary Kuperman.

If you'd like to join the store committee, please visit our website and fill out a volunteer request form, and help us spread the word about our online shop! Share the website link with family and friends—you'll find it near the top right of our home page. And remember to use your member discount when making your own purchases!

~ Diane Holcomb

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Doyne Mraz founded LACT—Los Altos Conservatory Theatre—in 1977. He arranged with the City to use a neglected former school bus barn and created the Bus Barn Theater, building a stage and risers with seats the Palo Alto City Council had discarded. Doyne was the Dean of Performing Arts at Foothill College, and when he retired in 1994, he and his wife Connie moved to Rogue Valley Manor in Medford, Oregon. The theater he built is still here, however, now used by the Los Altos Stage Company and Los Altos Youth Theater. Doyne also directed the Los Altos Follies for the first two years, an annual show that was continued by Vicki Reeder and the Los Altos Stage Company for 25 years.



Doyne Mraz, October 2019. Photo credit Patti White.

In October 2019, before the travel restrictions, my husband Ed and I flew to Medford with a History Museum recording device, and I did an oral history interview of Doyne. No Museum funds were expended on this trip, and we enjoyed seeing Doyne and Connie, who were good friends of ours. Doyne made a significant contribution to the Los Altos Arts scene, so I thought it was important to acquire his story.

Doyne's parents were Czech immigrants, and his first language was Czech. When he was a child in Chicago during World War II, he sang and danced in a USO performance to entertain the troops with a young woman whose last name was Gumm—Judy Garland before she adopted her stage name.

When Doyne was eleven, he and his family traveled to Florida. Without the knowledge of his parents, who would have been horrified, Doyne walked to a house where he had learned Tennessee Williams lived, and he knocked on the door to tell the playwright that he had enjoyed seeing *The Glass Menagerie*. Tennessee Williams invited him in and offered the boy a gin and tonic. Doyne took one sip and did not like it. Later he directed plays for Williams, and he studied under Tennessee Williams when he was working on his PhD in Theater from Stanford and USC.

Doyne is passionate about theater. He loved making costumes and directing plays. Living in Los Altos for many years, Doyne and his wife and two children used to picnic on the stage. He has left a legacy of community theater in Los Altos, which we hope will continue for many years.

~ Patti White

Rise Up! continued from page 2

Currently, Los Altos is the only city in California to have an all-woman city council, and just the third city in California history to do so. This historic event happened in November 2018, when Neysa Fligor and Anita Enander were elected to join Jan Pepper, Jeannie Bruins, and Lynette Lee Eng as the city's representatives.

Women have made huge strides since 1920, but many glass ceilings remain. The tech industry has a notorious reputation for gender inequality and in Santa Clara County, women, especially women of color, lag behind men in political representation and are paid less than men for the same work. As we celebrate 100 years of suffrage and the progress women have made, we must not lose sight of the work that remains.

Rise Up!

In every county in America, this year was supposed to be full of joyful celebrations marking the centennial of women's suffrage. Instead, we find ourselves comparing each county's shelter-in-place orders. Facing the challenges of this overwhelmingly difficult year helps us be even more appreciative of local suffragists. After all, they were also facing a global pandemic!

So let us each, in our own socially-distanced way, rise up in gratitude for our foremothers and the struggles they endured to give women a voice. Let us rise up in celebration for the 19th amendment and the huge step forward it represents in the longer battle for gender equality. And finally, let us rise up in renewed commitment to continuing the fight for equality, both here in Santa Clara County and around the world.

~ Dr. Amy Ellison

Staff

Dr. Elisabeth Ward, *Executive Director*
Dr. Amy Noel Ellison, *Exhibition Curator*
Diane Holcomb, *Outreach Coordinator*
Dianne Shen, *Collections Strategist*
Andrew Mendoza, *Office Administrator*
Faustino Carrillo, *Gardener*

Membership

Welcome to our new members:

Tyler Furuichi

Janet Jorgensen

Business Members

Corporate Sponsorship

The Andrews Family

Chef Chu's

Kiwanis Club of Los Altos

Los Altos Community Investments

Business Sponsorship

BK Collections

Epicurean Group

Erika Ameri, Compass Realty

Los Altos Town Crier

The Garden Club of Los Altos

Our Hidden Gems

While researching the archives, I came across an elegant portrait of Audrey Fisher in our art collection. Painted in 1968 by a visiting artist from Europe, this framed oil painting is currently preserved in the Museum's permanent collection and was being prepared for display in the main gallery prior to the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order.

A 62-year Los Altos resident, Audrey Fisher ran for City Council in 1964 and became the first-ever woman mayor in 1967. She had no children and said, "That's one reason I was always able to be so active in so many things." Fisher left the council in 1980 after serving for 16 years (there were no term limits at that time). Throughout her life, she felt a true calling as a public servant and advocated for women's involvement in politics. In a Los Altos Town Crier obituary published on December 2, 1997, Lee Lynch, the second woman to be mayor of Los Altos (1973-1974) said, "She was definitely my mentor. She was always gracious, always listened to people, even people she disagreed with. ... She was always a lady."



Audrey Fisher, the first woman elected mayor of Los Altos. Los Altos History Museum Collection.

Since her passing, personal photographs, documents and memorabilia have been donated by her family and are preserved in the permanent collection today. This portrait captures Fisher's shy smile and signature cat-eye horn-rimmed eyeglasses. She is dressed in a dark taupe blouse and adorned with a burgundy, perhaps a ruby, necklace and a pair of matching earrings. The wooden frame is brushed in a rusted silver-gold and presents a regal style matching the oil painting portraiture. Interestingly, she was not too fond of the painting because it displays such regality.

As we celebrate the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, we reflect on the work of brave women throughout our nation's history, as well as local women like Audrey Fisher, who dedicated their lives to civic duty and women's empowerment.

~ Dianne Lee Shen

Director's Corner

Ethics of Leadership

Recently, new Board President Gary Hedden and I participated in a two-day seminar (online of course!) hosted by Santa Clara University about ethics in non-profit governance. Ethics is different than morality or religion, in that the latter is about how we negotiate our relationship with the divine, while ethics is about how we negotiate our relationships with our fellow human beings. The ethical goal is, basically speaking, to always try to be fair and considerate.



It is interesting how ingrained the sense of fairness is in human beings; toddlers are experts at spotting when something is unfair. But as we get older and maybe more jaded, we get used to doing things that help ourselves but may hurt others.

As the Executive Director, I'm grateful to be working at an organization that is encouraging me to be an ethical leader. Non-profits operate in the public trust, so it is especially critical that we have our ethics straight. Mostly this refers to not taking unfair advantage of the many tools we have at our disposal, including our tax-free status and public forum.

During the training at Santa Clara University, we discussed, among many other things, the ethics around the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. What is the ethical obligation of a non-profit during this moment in history? The answer came down to this: all nonprofits are required to fulfill their mission as publicly filed with the IRS. Here is our mission: "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."

The words that stand out for me in this mission statement are the adjectives compelling, creative, engaging and the verbs bridge, challenge and produce. This is not a passive mission statement; it is an active one. It encourages the Museum to make a difference and to contribute to the civic discussions happening in our area. For instance, the Museum has been asked about the history of local street names and housing practices, and we are pleased to be engaged in these issues.

Please let me know what stands out to you about our mission statement. As a member, your opinion is vital to our ethical compass.

Thank you! ~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery



Pinky Whelan and Julie Rose hanging festive bunting.



Mayor Jan Pepper ready for the Women's Equality Day parade.



With the Museum closed, we are remodeling the store – we moved the desk!



Dean Furuichi and Dianne Shen with old farm equipment at the Nursery.



Nancy Kosinski, gardening while masked.



Recent donations from Karen Druker's hand-painted rocks project. Photo credit Collections Committee.

Photo Gallery



Peggy Davis and Brigitte Ahlfedt ready for the drive by volunteer appreciation with balloons and gifts.



Belinda Chung, a long-time Museum supporter and one of our volunteers of the year.



Armond King, the Museum's volunteer of the year train expert.



Eric Greenhut, a new volunteer with the Oral History Committee and a volunteer of the year.



Teen docents checking out the agricultural tools.



Teen docents learning the history of the Smith House.



UNDER THE OAKS

NonProfit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 12
Los Altos, CA

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

Address Correction Requested

www.losaltoshistory.org

Museum and Store Hours

Our open hours are pending guidance from the County Department of Public Health. Check our website for updates. We are closed Thanksgiving Day.

General Inquiries

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

Collections/Research

(650) 948-9427 x11
research@losaltoshistory.org

Event Rentals

(650) 948-9427 x12
weddings@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.*

On The Calendar

Rise Up!: The Fight for Women's Suffrage. The story of local women leading the fight for equality from 1920 to today. At the Smith House.

Elected Women Speak Up, Saturday, Sept. 12, 5pm, on Zoom. Join Los Altos' all-women City Council for a discussion about women in politics.

Women's Suffrage in Santa Clara County, Thursday, Sept. 17, 12-1:30pm, on Zoom. Stanford historian Margo Horn on the role of local women.

History House Book Club, Tuesday, September 22, 4pm, on Zoom. A discussion of *Historic Bay Area Visionaries*. RSVP to aellison@losaltoshistory.org.

Jane Reed Tribute, Thursday, October 1. A parade honoring Jane Reed with details available to Tribute donors.

Race and the Suffrage Movement, Tuesday, Nov. 10, 12-1:30pm, on Zoom. Foothill College historian Dolores Davison on the 19th amendment.

Catch the Spirit Online! Wednesday, Nov. 18, 1pm, on Zoom. David Mariani discusses his new book; other events planned.

Online Art Auction, Friday-Sunday, Dec. 4-6. Reserve your spot to bid on one-of-a-kind works and help support the Museum.

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



Amy Ellison modeling the Museum facemask while reading a very good little book, "Why They Marched."

Board Meetings, Third Wednesday each month, 4 pm, by Zoom, everyone welcome