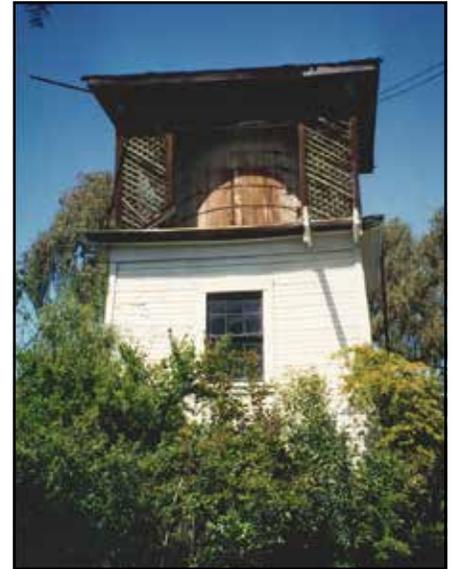


## Agricultural Roots

Driving up San Antonio Road every day on my way to the Los Altos History Museum, I often think about how perfect the long, flat expanse of land extending to Los Altos Hills must have been for orchards. Names like Almond Avenue and Sylvian Way remind me of that agricultural time period. But nothing brings this more to mind than driving past Pine Lane, where the Spagnoli Tank House once stood. In 1993, a group of Museum members, led by Bob and Marion Grimm, got together to move the Tank House from the corner of Pine and Los Altos Avenue to the Museum.

The Spagnoli orchard had originally spanned west of Los Altos Avenue all the way to Adobe Creek, and was one of dozens of orchards along what was then called Griffin Road. Tank houses were a technology associated with the work of an orchardist; by storing water pumped up from a well into a tank high above ground, tank houses created water pressure that was useful when irrigating fields as well as other domestic needs. Though originally invented in the Midwest by pioneering immigrants, tank houses were adapted to Santa Clara County because of the shortage of rivers in the area and the relatively shallow water table, fed by the rains along the Santa Cruz Mountains. So many wells were sunk into that water table between the 1870s and 1930s that it actually sank by 14 feet! It was the combination of available fresh water and plenty of sunshine that made “The Valley of Heart’s Delight,” and a booming agricultural industry, possible.

On March 21, the History Museum will be hosting a celebration of our new permanent outdoor agricultural exhibition, the centerpiece of which will be the unveiling of our newly restored Spagnoli Tank House. Since coming to the Museum in 1993, the Tank House has been well-loved by school children, who get to go inside of it during the 3rd grade tours, and by visitors who take a tour of the Smith House. But five years ago, the Museum staff noticed that the roof was leaking, and the City put a tarp over the Tank House during the rainy season.



*Spagnoli Tank House on Pine Lane. LAHM Collection.*



*Flood irrigation at the J. Gilbert Smith orchard. LAHM Collection.*

We are glad, thanks to a generous grant from the County of Santa Clara, that we will now be able to present to the public a water-tight, professionally restored tank house. Historic restorations like this require thinking about buildings in a different way than everyday projects. For instance, we will not be stripping off all the old paint and repainting it to look like new. Instead, we will preserve the original wood and paint, with a section behind Plexiglas to allow visitors to easily appreciate that this is not a replica of an old building, but rather an authentic piece of the past we are working to preserve.

The new outdoor exhibition delves into the relationship between water, technology, inventions, preservation, transportation, labor, and the many other elements that came into making this valley blossom 100 years ago. Some new signs around the Cutting Shed, Sulfur Shed, and Workshop were installed last year, but we have more to

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## President's Pen

Hello Museum Members and Friends,

Happy New Year to you and yours! If you're like me, the first months of the year are the hardest. The days are short and frequently cold and damp. The dark and damp make the end of the year holidays feel cozy and lovely but the stretch between the first of the year and the return of spring can feel—well, just dark and damp. It helps to have something to look forward to, and we did, with the opening of the Gallery 9 art exhibit, the celebration of Chef Chu's 50 years in Los Altos, and the opportunity to ride the Big Shaker. These have kept me smiling heading into 2020.



Gallery 9 was started in 1970 by nine local women who wanted to pursue their passion and establish a cooperative art gallery. It continues today and we had an opportunity to meet some of the artists at a reception honoring them in February. The Museum also offered art classes for young budding artists through the Los Altos Art Docents.

Chef Chu's has been a Los Altos destination since 1970 and we were honored to be chosen as the beneficiary of a celebration of their 50th anniversary. The Chu's are an amazing Los Altos success story and a multi-generational local business. Even if you weren't able to attend the February 9 celebration, you'll always have an enjoyable experience when you visit Chef Chu's.

Like the Chu family, so many Los Altans originally came from far away. I attended last year's first *International Mother Language Day* celebration at the Museum where community members read poems in their language of origin. We heard German, French, Mandarin, Spanish, and many others. This year the theme was *Peace Around the World* with people sharing messages of peace in their native languages.

If you are suffering from the winter blahs, stop by the Museum. Visit the exhibits, participate in some of our programs, walk through our garden. Spring is right around the corner!

I look forward to seeing you at the Museum!

~ Julia Lovin

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### 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!

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## Agricultural Roots

*continued from page 1*

install near the Tank House and walnut huller. We also will be installing a new windmill, thanks to a generous anonymous donor and the Garden Club of Los Altos. The windmill, built by one of the few remaining windmill manufacturers in California, will be placed next to the Tank House. Signage will help explain to visitors that 100 years ago, clever orchardists were using wind power to pump water up into a tank high above ground. We hope this will remind everyone who strolls through the gardens that the ingenuity of those who shaped this valley 100 years ago was as impressive then as it is today.

Guests will also be able to view the new traveling photo exhibition, *In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte*, opening that same weekend.

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

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## History in the News

The effort to save the Halsey House in Redwood Grove Nature Preserve took a step forward with the publication of a report by Lacey Bubnash with the Architectural Resources Group. Bubnash found historical significance and offered a list of restoration measures. The Historical Commission formed a task force to review the measures, obtain bids and be prepared to apply for grant funding in June. The subcommittee will work with the Parks and Recreation Commission in this effort.

In other good news, the application to place the American Legion Hall at 347 First Street on the Historical Resource Index is nearly complete. Built in ~1937, Los Altos Post 558 still holds its meetings there, and offers the facility for community events. The City of Los Altos used the building for meetings before City Hall was built and the City Charter was signed in the Legion Hall.

In less cheerful news, the historic bungalow at 67 Lyell Avenue was demolished in early February. Lost but not forgotten.

~ Gary Hedden



*The historic bungalow at 67 Lyell Avenue just days before it was demolished.*

## Committee Highlights

You may have noticed recent planting activity in the Los Altos Heritage Orchard behind the library or attended a guided agricultural tour last spring. Or perhaps you've simply appreciated this preserved grove of apricot trees through the seasons as you strolled from the Museum to City Hall. Raising awareness of this vital resource through educational and fun programs is the objective of The Orchard Commons Committee.

The Committee beautifies the orchard, educates about the agricultural heritage of our community, and helps produce apricots, which are available for purchase at DeMartini Orchard. One year old, the Committee is led by Jane Packard, who holds a Ph.D. in Ecology and Behavioral Biology from the University of Minnesota.

The idea for the Committee came after the first Apricot STEM Fair. Volunteers expressed an interest in orchard activities as part of the "Museum without Walls" concept. The orchard brings together people with diverse interests and perspectives, and the Committee provides a forum for their voices. The Committee also supports the City's Orchardist, Phil Doetsch, in maintaining the health of the orchard, one of only three heritage orchards remaining in Santa Clara Valley.

The Committee offers programs year-round, including guided walks, marshmallow roasting, tree pruning, and how to care for trees in your own backyard. The Committee collaborates with Foothill College's Environmental Horticulture and Design department and has interns working on two projects: The Pop-up Pollinator



Frank Niccoli, Katie Grandy, Sandy Morgans, Viji Jagannathan with Orchard Committee Chair Jane Packard, by the Pop-up Pollinator Plot near the Library.

Plot at the back of the Library using plants provided by Grassroots Ecology, and a concept design for a Heritage Learning Landscape connecting the J. Gilbert Smith House with the orchard.

If you love our orchard and wish to be a part of this blossoming committee, please visit our website and fill out a volunteer request form. Your help with our beautification projects and other orchard activities will be greatly appreciated.

~ Diane Holcomb

## In the Fields of the North



Maria Antonietta Gonzalez and Jose Angel Martinez Gonzalez, two migrants from Carranza, Chiapas, top and bag onions. María Antonietta González y José Ángel Martínez González, dos migrantes de Carranza, Chiapas, retiran los tallos y empaquetan las cebollas. Photograph by David Bacon.

Join us as we travel with migrant workers following the fruit and harvest season as it moves from the Mexican border north through California to Washington. *In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte* reveals the stories of contemporary migrant farm workers on the West Coast. How much do we know about the lives of the people who feed us? How does it feel to do some of the hardest repetitive labor imaginable? What will it take to end the poverty and endless migration?

Moving oral narratives and evocative photographs will take you into the contemporary world of migrant farm workers. *In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte* features the work of photographer and journalist David Bacon. Produced in partnership with the California Rural Legal Assistance, the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, and History San Jose, the Exhibit Envoy traveling exhibiton opens March 19.

## Spotlight on the Oral History Project

In early February, Chef Chu celebrated the 50th anniversary of his eponymous restaurant with his characteristic generosity: He donated dinner for 100 people to the Museum for its fundraiser.

A pillar of the Los Altos community for decades, Chef Chu's is the ultimate immigration success story: A young man comes to America with a "burning desire," works hard, and realizes his dream.

Born in mainland China, Chef Lawrence C. C. Chu moved to Taiwan as a young child, soon after his mother's death. At 16, as the rest of the family left for the U.S., Chef Chu moved to Hong Kong to study photography. It was in metropolitan Hong Kong, then a British protectorate, that he fell in love with the stories food tells. In the U.S., Trader Vic's gave him his first chance to work in the culinary world. The rest, as they say, is history.

The Oral History Committee was eager to interview Chef Chu on the occasion of his restaurant's major milestone anniversary. I had the pleasure to do so at his home and in his restaurant. Strong and athletic, he was the captain of his high school basketball team, he said. As a young man in Taiwan, he listened to Paul Anka and Elvis Presley. And he danced the Charleston, which impressed his then-girlfriend enough to become his wife, he joked.

We are proud to be recipients of his story, which is to be archived at the Museum and will be available to

anyone. Seeing him at his restaurant in his chef's uniform, you'd never be able to tell from his unassuming manner that he is a renowned restaurateur with three cookbooks to his name.

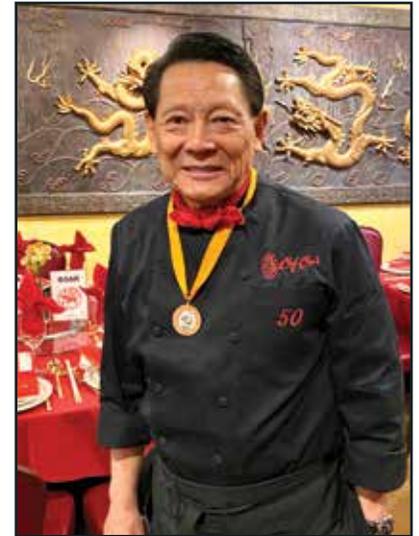
This humility may be the key to his success. After five decades, he is still unwilling to consider himself as any more than a provider of food to his customers. He has maintained a consistently high standard at his restaurant, which, according to him, means that the food taste the same every time. And he is always eager to receive feedback.

All patrons of Chef Chu's restaurant are familiar with the wall of photographs in the foyer: Maggie Thatcher, Benazir Bhutto, Mikhail Gorbachev posing with Chef Chu. If you've wondered at the connection with Mandarin-style Chinese food, you're not alone. I asked him about Gorbachev.

It had to do with his donations of food to community fundraisers. One year, he was asked to host Gorbachev at his home. And he did.

And the gala on February 9 simply continued that tradition.

~ Suruchi Mohan



*Chef Chu at the 50 Year Celebration Dinner.*

### Membership

#### Welcome to our new members:

Connie Brookner  
Sherie Dodsworth  
Carolyn Huang  
Nadja Jackson

Frederick Vallaes  
Arvind Venkateswaran  
Janice Verity

#### Business Members

##### Corporate Sponsorship

Kiwanis Club of Los Altos  
Los Altos Community Investments

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### 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*



*Chef Chu honored with a gift of original art painted by world-renowned artist Hau Beiren.*

## Our Hidden Gems

A new exhibit in the Smith House explores the photography of J. Gilbert Smith. An orchardist and a builder, Gilbert was also an avid photographer, shooting a variety of subjects ranging from coastal landscapes, to Yosemite vistas, to the apricot orchards in his own backyard. While Gilbert's love of photography is well documented at the Museum, new research reveals that Margaret Smith (nee Hill) was also a photography enthusiast. In a letter to her father, Margaret's excitement is almost palpable:

"Mother and I went up to Berkeley Saturday and I bought a camera, at a place where they advertised the teaching of amateurs. The man gave me a lesson and I have now taken pictures to the extent of a roll of films. He will develop them and tell me where I have made mistakes. After a little while he will teach me how to develop, enlarge and color. It is an Eastman Kodak, postcard size, and cost \$24—a present from you. It's lots of fun. Jennie and I took a car ride out to Piedmont on Sunday and I got some nice pictures—at least it remains to be seen whether I got them or not. The man said I would probably spoil all of the first roll. Did you know that there are flat films made for cameras which use plates? He showed me some. I should think they would be more convenient than plates. I am anxious for you to come home so that we can go photo hunting together. Mother is going to learn, too. We bought three little books on Photography, and a magazine called 'Kodakery' comes every month upon the purchase of a new camera."



Margaret Hill (later Smith), ~ 1912.  
Courtesy, Oregon Historical Society.

Margaret's sense of adventure and curious mind emboldened her to try unfamiliar things and pick up challenging hobbies. This hidden gem of a letter, held in the archives of the Oregon Historical Society, reveals a new side of Margaret, who has long been something of a mystery.

~ Dr. Amy Ellison

## Director's Corner

### *Museum without Walls*

One of the best parts of being the Executive Director of the Los Altos History Museum is getting to hire the staff. It is also one of the hardest parts of my job! Certainly being in the midst of Silicon Valley during a historically-low unemployment rate makes it even more



challenging; talented people have so many options of where they could work. Non-profits, however, have an advantage over other workplaces: employees know they can make a real difference doing good work they believe in.

Finding people with the right skill set and passion for what we do here at the Museum is one of the greatest joys I've experienced as E.D., and each new hire helps the organization grow and adapt as we strive to meet the needs of our community.



I am pleased to introduce Dianne Shen, who joined our staff just before the holidays. Dianne's full title is "Museum without Walls Collection Strategist" and as that title suggests, she wears two hats. One is about caring for our collection—making sure it is properly inventoried and stored—and the other is about making sure the collection is available to the public. We have over 15,000 records in our

collection storage area, a space in the Museum basement sometimes referred to as our "vault." That term is apt in terms of suggesting that the artifacts, photos, archival records, art works, and maps we store are valuable, but in another way, it is unfortunate. It suggests locking something up and never letting it out again. Dianne's passion is about making sure everyone knows what is in our "vault"; indeed, the Museum without Walls initiative is about making it permeable. Before you get too worried, the primary way that is done is by putting photographs and records online so they are available to the public. But it does also mean using our collections in exhibitions, making them more available to researchers and students, and lending them out to other locations as appropriate.

As a strategist, Dianne is also tasked with making wise decisions about how to store them, what to keep, and what not to keep as we work on our Collection Policy. Please join me in thanking her for joining our staff, and bringing her passion for material culture and education to Los Altos!

~ Dianne Shen and Dr. Elisabeth Ward

## Photo Gallery



*December docent appreciation party.*



*History House Book Club discussing The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society.*



*The talented cast of teen docents from last December's Smith House Escape Room adventure, with intern Jocelyn Lambert, second from the left.*



*Dennis Young, Kathy Lera, Chris Redden and Howard Bischoff, the new owners of the historic Los Altos Town Crier.*



*Foothill intern Viji Jagannathan describing the Heritage Learning Landscape plan to intern Sandy Morgans, Duncan Macmillan with Friends of the Library, and Foothill Chancellor Judy Miner.*



*Two scouts offering samples of freeze dried emergency food. Delicious, and it keeps for 25 years!*

## Photo Gallery



*Gallery 9 artists at the kick-off reception in January.*



*Diane and Bob Simmons with artist Jan Meyer at the Gallery 9 exhibition kick-off reception.*



*Vicki Reeder, Dave and Marie Backs standing by the elegant doorknocker crafted by Judy Miller Johnson.*



*Linda Eckols with Ed and his mother, artist Judi Keyani. Ed was in Linda's first grade class back in the day.*



*The Gallery 9 exhibition's curatorial team: Jan Meyer, Judi Keyani, Cecilia Mases, Maria Pazos, and Amy Ellison.*



*Ron Richardson with raffle winner Garry Guske, Amy Ellison and Elisabeth Ward. The prize was a fire extinguisher and a backpack loaded with emergency supplies.*



# UNDER THE OAKS

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Los Altos, CA

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[www.losaltoshistory.org](http://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.

## General Inquiries

(650) 948-9427 x14 or  
[hello@losaltoshistory.org](mailto:hello@losaltoshistory.org)

## Collections/Research

(650) 948-9427 x11  
[research@losaltoshistory.org](mailto:research@losaltoshistory.org)

## Event Rentals

(650) 948-9427 x12  
[mperry@losaltoshistory.org](mailto: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.*

## On The Calendar

**Extra Hours! Starting in May the Museum will open on Saturdays at 10 am.**

*In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte*, opens Thursday, March 19, through June 21. Opening reception Saturday, March 21, 2-5 pm.

**History House Book Club**, Tuesday, March 24, 4 pm, Smith House. A discussion of *Daughter of Fortune* by Isabel Allende. Registration required.

**Life in the Fields**, Tuesday, March 31, 6:30-8 pm, a lecture at the Museum.

**Dolores**, Wednesday, April 22, 6:30-8:30 pm, a film screening at the Museum.

**Heritage Orchard Workshop**, Thursday, May 14, 6:30-8 pm, at the Library.

*The Photography of J. Gilbert Smith*, closes Sunday, May 24.

**The Legacy of the Bracero Program**, Wednesday, June 3, 6:30-8 pm, a lecture at the Museum.

**Rise Up!** opens Thursday, July 2, through November 8. The story of local women leading the fight for equality from 1920 to today.



*Pat and Jan enjoying the opening reception of Gallery 9: Celebrating Art in Los Altos.*

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

**Board Meetings**, Third Wednesday each month, 4 pm, everyone welcome  
**Teen Docent Tours**, Saturday and Sunday, 2pm