

Reconstructing the Past

An ordinary Tuesday would become a monumental day in Santa Clara County. On March 17, 2020, with the rising public health crisis of COVID-19, a county shelter-in-place order was mandated. Two weeks later, a near nation-wide shutdown would take place. As entire communities throughout the world anxiously scrambled to prepare to self-quarantine at home, museum curators took notice. Will we accurately remember this rare moment in our global history? How will we recollect and reconstruct our memories?

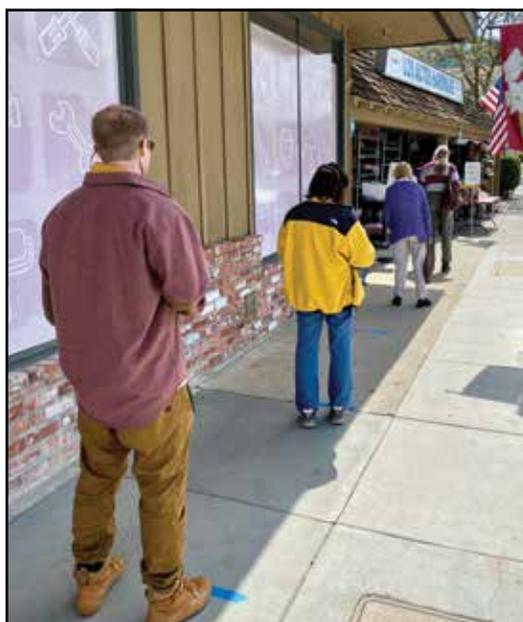
Museum collections are powerful tools to reconstruct and interpret the past. As curators of collections, we deeply consider the ways in which artifacts are chosen, preserved and presented. As such, we have a moral and civic duty to preserve histories through these “leftover items” from multiple perspectives.

On April 1, the Museum began a collecting initiative called Documenting COVID-19 in Santa Clara County in an effort to collect people’s experiences through open digital submissions. From artworks and photographs to poems and journals, all of the pieces in this collection will be turned into a digital archive for our future selves to look back on. Traditionally, we think of museum collections to be physical objects behind a glass collected post factum. In the digital era, it is clear we have shifted to new modes of collecting and documenting our history. Museum collections are pushing boundaries and rapidly evolving to include intangible ideas and digital creations, real-time.



Jung Yoon, Warren Yang and family. Working, studying and exercising at home as we shelter-in-place. Photo credit Maud Daujean.

Around the world, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed the connective power of sharing images and words on social media. In the modern era, our social media platforms are essentially our personal collections of curated content.



Lined up with social distancing at True Value Hardware in Los Altos.

Many Los Altans, like photographer Maud Daujean, have been inspired by this creative call to action. While staying six feet apart, Maud documents ordinary families living through this extraordinary time through a series of family portraits taken on their front doorsteps. Her online project, *Life in Quarantine*, is a beautiful example of how the digital space has become a platform for human connection during times of loneliness and tragedy. There have also been developments of new websites and Instagram accounts devoted to emotionally surviving this pandemic together. Exemplary Instagram account @losaltosart6feetapart offers a digital scavenger hunt of public art installations around Los Altos while @signsofkindness has curated a collection of homemade signs showing community support in our neighborhoods.

Despite this challenging moment we are facing, it is remarkable to know we have agency and freedom in writing our own history. From this lens, it was personally important to me that we seek submissions from all ages, languages, cultural backgrounds and mediums that are representative of Silicon Valley’s international diversity. In graduate school, I grew fascinated about the development of and psychology behind collections. I became curious about why people collect things and wanted to better understand how certain private collections are chosen to become public.

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President's Pen

Hello Museum Members and Friends,

At the beginning of March, a typical weekday found me at the Mtn. View Caltrain station to catch the 7:00 am bullet train to my job in San Francisco. Even at that early hour, the train was packed and seats weren't available until people got off at the next stop in Palo Alto. During the first week of March, it started to be easier to get a seat right away. By the second week, there were many available seats for the entire trip.



At the beginning of March at the Museum, Amy and her team were putting the finishing touches on *In the Fields of the North/ En los Campos del Norte*, a wonderful exhibit highlighting the migrant workers we rely on to harvest our food. The plans for the opening reception and a lecture featuring the photographer, David Bacon, were almost complete.

By the third week of March, we all began our journeys at home. And so we remain as I write this in mid-May. The Museum's doors are locked and the building is quiet.

As I've mourned what we weren't and aren't able to do during these times, I've also been dazzled by what has been accomplished. The staff quickly mastered working from home. The volunteer committee members and Board members, many of whom previously had not had much online presence, mastered Zoom video-conferencing. We've continued to fulfill our mission to gather and present compelling stories and artifacts that bridge the past and the present through the creative power of our staff and volunteers. You can now visit that exciting exhibit, *In the Fields of the North/ En los Campos del Norte*, on our website and, while there, take a virtual tour of the Smith House.

This is my last President's Pen column, as my term ends at the end of June. I hope you were able to join us at our annual meeting and virtually meet our new roster of Board and executive committee members and hear more about the innovative work behind the scenes to bring more of our treasures online and become a Museum without Walls. I've enjoyed meeting many of you this year and your connections to the Museum have been truly inspiring. Thank you.

I look forward to "seeing" you at the Museum!!

~ Julia Lovin

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!

Reconstructing the Past *continued from page 1*

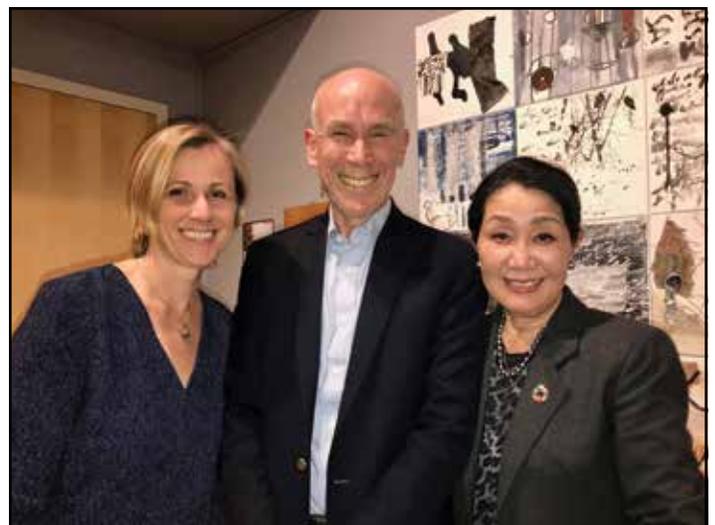
I explored the lives of collectors and enthusiasts of Asian art and gardens in California during the early 20th century and how personal tastes transformed what we deem "museum-worthy" collections today. In Santa Clara County, local collections and gardens belonging to Leland and Jane Stanford, Oliver and Isabel Stine, and Paul and Rose Shoup legitimized Asian art for the museum space.



The power of museum collections is enormous, but if memories are undocumented or forgotten, they cease to exist. It is for this reason we hope members of the community will submit their experiences in order to contribute to our history. As the new Collections Strategist at the Museum, I look forward to continuing our mission in presenting a collection that sparks meaningful conversations about Los Altos. We look forward to receiving your submissions and thank you for taking an active part in writing history!

Mary Kessler and her brother Charles Hickman on the family farm in Indiana in 1918. Mary lived in Los Altos from 1961 until she passed away in 2008. Note the acidfast dye bags they are wearing, meant to ward off the Spanish Flu. The principal ingredient is derived from fennel root and has a very powerful odor. Photos like this are the reason we collect memorabilia today – to help us make tomorrow's history. Photo courtesy Mary Lou Neumann.

~ Dianne Lee Shen



Elisabeth Ward, Ambassador Larry Greenwood and Nobuko Cleary at the showing of the truly inspirational documentary Paper Lanterns in February. Photo courtesy Nobuko Cleary.

Rise Up!: The Fight for Women's Suffrage

*O, hark the cry for freedom in our far-famed Golden State,
It is ringing from the mountains to the matchless Golden Gate,
And behold! a new star rising now, all fair and sure as fate,
The world is marching on!*

*Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
The world is marching on!*

*Our Country's maids and mothers are fast coming to the fore,
And are asking for the ballot, twenty million strong and more,
We'll send them hope and courage from the broad Pacific Shore,
The right is marching on!*

—Lyrics to the song “California,” written by Elizabeth Lowe Watson

This summer, the Los Altos History Museum will open an exhibition celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. *Rise Up!: The Fight for Women's Suffrage* will show how women like Carrie Chapman Catt, Alice Paul, and others won the right to vote in 1920, while also exploring California's earlier battle for suffrage in 1911. Suffragists in Santa Clara County faced steep opposition, and the bill ultimately passed only by the narrowest of margins. Through historic artifacts, documents, and photographs, the exhibition will highlight the stories of local suffragists like Elizabeth Lowe Watson, Alice Park, and Ethel and Sophie Durst, illuminating their tireless efforts to shake the



Suffragists picketing in front of the White House, 1917. Courtesy, Library of Congress.

widespread culture of inequality that shackled them.

Suffrage was an important victory, but it was only one fight in a much longer and greater struggle for equality. The exhibition will also explore the legacy of the 19th amendment and the ongoing battles for women's equality, and especially for women of color—not just in the voting box, but in the workplace, the classroom, and the home. Today, it remains as important as ever for women to vote and run for office, to fight for equal pay and a seat at the table, and to improve the system for all.

~ Dr. Amy Ellison

Volunteer Highlights

A museum can't exist without its collections and the people who receive and archive historical objects. Our Museum has 4,000 artifacts and works of art, 8,000 photographs, 200 oral histories and scores of newspapers, maps, and other written materials. The Collections Committee of seven volunteers maintains this vast collection.

The volunteers receive donated items, assess the historical value and catalog them in our database. They set guidelines and parameters to ensure that each object we accept will enhance the collection. They also answer the numerous questions we receive. You may have seen some of the volunteers working in the Museum's vault.

Doreen Cohen, who chairs the committee, catalogs and indexes the transcribed oral history interviews, enters the information in the Museum's database, writes the abstracts and identifies search terms so if someone wants to know how many oral histories mention a particular person, that name will pop up.

Margie Alving, who joined the committee in 2014, specializes in the photography collection and sends in the pictures for Los Altos Town Crier's column *Peek into the Past*. She also transcribed the letters Frank and Josephine Duveneck wrote to each other during World War I. "The letters revealed their thoughts, their dreams, their everyday activities," Margie said. "After working on the project, I felt like I knew the Duvenecks personally."

Connie Brookner researches and catalogs illustrated maps, Suzanne Maguire-Negus examines and archives the Anna Knapp Fitz Paintings, Ginny Badros, also a Board member, volunteers, and Jerry Tomanek, a professional photographer, helps.

The collections committee is excited about the prospect of moving forward with the Museum without Walls initiative. "It will make our treasures much more accessible," said Doreen.

"I am incredibly grateful to be working alongside such dedicated archivists and researchers," said Dianne Shen, who joined the Museum last year as Collections Strategist. "I am empowered knowing I have the support and expertise of my team to do this important work."

Interested in joining the team? Let us know!

~ Diane Holcomb



Margie Alving organizing photographs, part of the process of adding them to our collections management database, Dec. 2019. Photo credit Dianne Shen.

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

What could be more interesting than interviewing people who have lived through many noteworthy experiences? That led me to interview a WWII veteran who lives in Los Altos. He is over 100 years old which made it even more fascinating.

Joseph (Jay) Brandon was born in 1918. He attended North Carolina State College, earned an Aeronautical Engineering Degree and started work as a naval architect in Norfolk, VA. He worked on the design of the plumbing for the battleship U.S.S. Alabama, created a formula to decide on the thickness of new deck plates on old rusted WWI ships heading to Great Britain in the Lend-Lease program, and tested how far ships could tip before capsizing.



Jay Brandon receiving his Oral History book from Eric Greenhut. Photo credit Dianne Shen.

When war broke out, Jay was inducted into the Army and learned how to launch and operate barrage balloons, which were designed to prevent aircraft from flying low in military areas. Later, he worked on designs to allow airplanes to accept radar, guns, and bombs. Transferred to Great Britain in 1943, he evaluated aircraft that had been damaged in combat to decide to fix or scrap the plane. One plane had 400 bullet holes in it, but it still brought its crew home. Back in the U.S., he implemented a training course for engineers on the repair of combat damaged aircraft, for which he received the Air Commendation Medal.

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*

As a civilian, Jay worked for Air Force Research and Development in Baltimore, MD, on many rocket projects including the Atlas I.B.M. In 1954, he joined Lockheed in Van Nuys, CA, as manager of long-range planning for their new guided missiles business. Transferred to Sunnyvale in 1956, he shifted to satellite systems. The satellites were designed to send radio signals around the world and included military data collection, a topic still off-limits. Jay finished his career in management. He was assigned to brief congressmen in Washington and then was the Assistant to the Vice President of Lockheed. Jay retired in 1985, but stayed in Los Altos. He and his wife Jean have lived in the same house for 64 years.

With Bill Henderson and Tom Anderson, Jay brought a veteran's memorial called the "Cradle of Liberty" to Shoup Park. Rebecca Truman, a local sculptor, designed and cast the bronze statue, and Jay got Secretary of Defense Bill Perry to do the dedication on the 4th of July 1998.

Jay, thank you for your years of service. We salute you!

~ Eric Greenhut

Meet Andrew Mendoza

Andrew Mendoza joined the Museum's staff as Bookkeeper and Office Administrator after a long search to replace Deepti Devanagondi, and we are so pleased to find someone with strong accounting skills and a friendly personality. Born and raised in the San Jose area, Andrew received a B.A. in political science from San Jose State University. He took on the bookkeeping for his family's business in San Jose and started with us in mid-February. Not fully trained, he transitioned quickly, along with the rest of the staff, to working remotely! We are delighted to have his smiling face on our weekly Zoom meetings. Andrew is staff support to the Store, Orchard Commons, Garden, and Facilities committees. Welcome!



Membership

Welcome to our new members:

Yoshiko and Takeshi Amemiya
Girard Chandler
Alissa Erogbogbo
Thomas Surbridge

Business Members

Corporate Sponsorship

The Andrews Family
Chef Chu's
Kiwanis Club of Los Altos
Los Altos Community Investments

Business Sponsorship

Epicurean Group
Erika Ameri, Compass Realty
The Garden Club of Los Altos
Los Altos Town Crier

Our Hidden Gems

I joined the History Museum in early 2019 as a Collections Intern with the Humanities Mellon Scholars program at De Anza College and later as a project-based Collections and Research Assistant. I enjoyed seeing how objects are selected, assessed and cataloged. The absolute pride and joy of my work was with the Barbara Hall Lindsay International Doll Collection recently donated to the Museum. I spent many months photographing and researching well over 100 dolls from all over the world. Collected between the 1930s-1960s, this is a very unique collection that truly spans the globe. The dolls hail from every continent and numerous countries around the world, and acquiring them was not an easy task during that era.



Alecia Thomas photographing dolls in the Museum's Foldio Light Box. Photo credit Dianne Shen.

The care that Barbara took in keeping every doll safe and clean is remarkable. She elevated many of them from the level of *disposable objects* to *collectable artifacts*. The Thai temple dancers are made of simple paper mâché with basic clothing, yet with their careful storage these dolls have kept their luster for sixty years and can still show the characters of the Ramayana.

Many of these dolls are products of their time. The dolls from Mexico or the Native Americans often depict negative cultural stereotypes that show these people as an inferior class. These toys allow future generations to reflect on how our cultural values have changed – and for the better.

My research in the Museum's vault is a special memory and I feel proud of my contribution. My wish is that this collection will be exhibited for the public to see and enjoy. During my time at the Museum, I met wonderful people who became my friends and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have observed the day-to-day operation of a museum.

~ Alecia Thomas

Director's Corner

View from my Window

Did you join the Facebook Group *View from my Window* during the Shelter-in-Place order? I did. People from all over the world were posting photos from their front door, kitchen window, or living room window, all at the same time. The site administrators could not keep up, and the comments from strangers all over the world poured in so quickly that the page kept scrolling as I tried to write my own message of, "Stay safe, and greetings from California!"



Times like this show the amazing human capacity to both embrace those who are in our tribe, and welcome in newcomers. In my simple message to that Facebook group, I represented my home state of California, while also sharing in a global experience in solidarity with everyone else trying to stay safe and healthy.

I am incredibly grateful and honestly relieved that everyone I know has stayed safe and healthy. And the staff of the Museum has been amazing; everyone pivoted to working at home in a heartbeat, and the projects, outreach, and productivity has continued non-stop.

But now isn't the time just to think about our own tribe; it is also time to think about the wider community and indeed, the world. That's why I'm glad we put extra effort into our online experience, and we will continue to do that after this is over.

The Museum participated in GivingTuesdayNow, an international day of giving, on May 5, as part of an effort to bring attention to the work of non-profits during the COVID-19 situation. Thanks to wonderful board leadership, a matching donation from Ginny Badros, and the support of dozens of donors, we raised over \$12,000 to help digitize our collection. With the need to photograph, scan and index thousands of artifacts, photographs and documents, the funds raised mean we will now be able to bring our collection online, with a searchable database and beautiful pictures.

We love it when local people come to the Museum, but it is just as exciting to think that strangers, newcomers, and a person living half a world away can also be welcomed into the story of Los Altos when they come to our website, Facebook page, or Instagram account. If you haven't joined us on social media, please do. We are doing the work of building community there too, and you are welcome!

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery

Here are a few favorite photographs from *In the Fields of the North / En los Campos del Norte*. Visit our website to see more.



A Oaxacan dance group.

Uno grupo de danza oaxaqueño.



Outside the labor camp, the children of strikers at Sakuma Farms set up their own picket line on a fence at the gate.

Los hijos de los huelguistas de Sakuma Farms realizan su propia protesta sobre una cerca en la entrada del campamento de trabajo.



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.



Just after arriving from Mexico, a Mixtec farm worker lives with her son in a tent on the hillside in Del Mar.

Justo después de llegar de México, una trabajadora agrícola mixteca vive con su hijo en una tienda de campaña en la ladera en Del Mar.



Manuel Garcia, a farm worker from Esteli, Nicaragua, shows the juice from trimming tobacco plants on his hands and arms.

Manuel García, un trabajador agrícola de Estelí, Nicaragua, muestra sus manos y brazos manchadas de jugo por recortar las plantas de tabaco.

In the Fields of the North/En los Campos del Norte features the work of David Bacon; is produced in partnership with the California Rural Legal Assistance, the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, and History San Jose; and is traveled by Exhibit Envoy.

Photo Gallery



Tom and Barbara McCarthy showing proper physical distancing! Photo credit Maud Daujean.



Larry and Judy William, sheltering at home with lots of books. Photo credit Maud Daujean.



Our agricultural equipment, sadly off-limits during the pandemic.



Elisabeth Ward and contractor Mike Brady discussing the tank house work in early March.



Opening day at the Los Altos Farmers' Market, May 7. Shopping while masked!



A happy thank you to our essential workers. Photo credit Amanda Cheng.



UNDER THE OAKS

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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 Fourth of July.

General Inquiries

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hello@losaltoshistory.org

Collections/Research

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

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.*

On The Calendar

Annual Meeting of the Members, Thursday, June 11, an opportunity to hear from our leaders, elect new directors and officers, and thank those whose terms of service ended. Visit our website to see the recorded event.

History House Book Club, Tuesday, July 14, 4 pm, on Zoom. A discussion of *Why They Marched: Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote*, by Susan Ware. RSVP to aellison@losaltoshistory.org

The Photography of J. Gilbert Smith, currently closed.

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

Members' Barbeque, ~ September.

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



Maud Daujean and family, sheltered at home, but still finding a way to have some fun.

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