

The Back Ranch

The History Museum is embarking on a significant renovation of the upstairs gallery organized around easily recognizable themes—creeks and hills, valleys and neighborhoods, towns and trains. This is a story about the hills.

West of the community of Los Altos, up in the hills amid one-time productive apricot orchards, sits what's left of property my family called "the ranch." I spent each summer there during the fruit harvest beginning in the late 'forties until I was well into my teens.

That property along Taaffe Road stayed in my family into the current century, but much had changed in the meantime. Originally about fifty acres, thirty-four of them were sold to David and Lucille Packard in 1952—it's entirely owned by the Packard Foundation today.

One hundred years earlier, though, the area, like most of Los Altos Hills, was owned by the Taaffe family—it would become known as Rose Hill Farm. Some years later, that which became our specific portion was part of the property belonging to Lt. Col. Bernard Byrne and his family. Our particular chunk of land was purchased in 1926 by my father's aunt and uncle, Adele and Julius Back. "Uncle Back" was a marble dealer who had interests in marble quarries along with gold and silver mines in Plumas County near the north fork of the Feather River. He died before I was born, but Aunt Adele was an enduring member of our family through the mid 'sixties.

When Dad was a youngster, he and his buddies participated in the apricot season. That was summer to him! Later, I would also spend family summers there, at first playing with the bracero kids among the trees, later working the harvest. I got my very first job there, turning the apricot pits with a square-tipped shovel so they would dry and could be sown into burlap sacks, then transported and utilized for their cosmetic and medical properties. I was the pit boy!

Later, I emptied the buckets full of overripe fruit from the cutting shed that was not appropriate for being cut and dried on trays. I was the slop boy!

During the summers, the neighborhood kids worked side-by-side with bracero families cutting the apricots in half onto shallow wooden trays to be smoked in the sulfur shed at day's end and spread out in the dry yard for the next several days. Eventually, I became old enough to drive the tractor, picking up forty-pound lug boxes of fruit destined for the cannery or the cutting shed.

By now, young Julie Packard and her schoolmates were the primary workers in the shed. We all worked together

and learned about responsibility, about cooperation, about teamwork. It's what we did—year-after-year. In the process, though, I acquired a strong sense of personal history.

Fast forward to about ten years ago. As a writer, I had compiled a selection of essays that I'd been creating for my own amusement—and therapy—into a book called *The Delta Breeze*. At the same time, I began exploring my genealogy—I am currently in the process of compiling a second such book that I'm calling *Family Matters*. The stories are highly personal and full of intriguing backstories. Many are associated with the ranch, but they are mostly anecdotal, and some are unconfirmed. I came to realize how little I actually knew for sure.

One Los Altos story that I'd blindly accepted as fact was that the area around Taaffe Road was developed by banking pioneer Amadeus P. Giannini before the turn of the last century. Giannini's father had emigrated to the United States from Italy, lured by the California Gold Rush in 1849, and had settled his family in San Jose. I was told that in time young Amadeo, who would establish the Bank of Italy in 1904 (later the Bank of America), would purchase a substantial portion of land in Los Altos Hills and that he raised a large family there. According to the story, Giannini became devastated when one of his sons was killed during the first World War and sold his Los Altos property. It's a compelling historical account, but, as it turns out, none were lost during the war and there's no evidence he had ever resided anywhere north of San Jose.

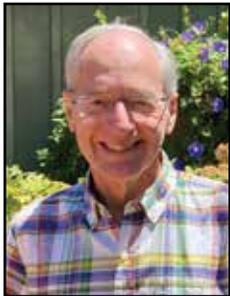
Had I gone down a rabbit hole?

continued on page 2



Cutting shed kids ~ 1964 or 65. Julie Packard is at the lower right. Courtesy Bob Lang.

President's Pen



Beauty and the Beast closed, *Gold Fever!* came and went, and now we are enjoying another great exhibition, *Annie Knapp Fitz Paints*. There is more to Annie than just her art; she used her art to capture stories from our past, leaving a legacy for all of us to enjoy and appreciate.

Of course the grip of the pandemic is still with us. Masks are now required indoors, but at least we are open. We were certainly open for *Pioneer Day*, and what a day it was with lots of volunteers and lots of kids with their parents filling up our courtyard. Many wore pioneer-themed costumes, providing a visual treat for all of us. The kids loved the activities and their favorite one was panning for gold, but washing clothes using an old washboard in a metal tub was surprisingly popular.

Our courtyard was also open and busy for an event that combined art with poetry, an engaging way to capture stories, and the combination is powerful. It makes both more meaningful. The art+poetry combination *What is Home?* came to the Museum in July, showing us the plight of the homeless. Included in this issue is one of the combinations, *Who Cares*.

Two longtime volunteers and supporters of the Museum passed away recently. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to Liz Nyberg and Ann Oliver, and their families. The pictures of Paul and Bud are from the 2017 Crab Feed. They will be missed.

~ Gary Hedden

In Memoriam



Paul Nyberg

Feb. 9, 1932–Aug. 2, 2021



Bud Oliver

July 5, 1931–Aug. 3, 2021

The Back Ranch

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The Back Ranch, 1936. Courtesy Bob Lang.

I'm a data-driven guy—bound by critical thought. I always want to know where a story came from—what was the source? And was that source credible? I'm clearly aware that by inadvertently passing on misinformation, I would be placing my own credibility in jeopardy.

Knowing that I needed to verify my information before seeking to publish my findings, I got in touch with the History Museum and was about to engage them in some fact-finding when COVID changed life as we know it. I eventually connected with Elisabeth Ward, the Executive Director, and we set a date to meet, study some documents, and go on a field trip. I drove to Los Altos from my home in Sacramento and together we visited the ranch site, walked around among the trees, and took in the experience.

I had only visited my family's property twice before during the last fifteen years. Most of the outbuildings, including the cutting shed, are gone. But the orchard remains along with the shell of the old ranch house, and even the olive trees where generations of deceased pets lie sleeping beneath them.

Later, with the assistance of members of Elisabeth's staff, the two of us stitched together a probable scenario for the genesis of the property. We discovered a vintage map of the area indicating that Col. Bernard Byrne's widow had sold parcels of her estate including an area with, perhaps, a one-time barn at the top of a hill that became the home of Adele and Julius Back.

Several questions remain, but discovering the facts, especially if they include little surprises, is part of the joy of any research project. This is a work in progress. Like anything truly worthwhile, it requires patience. It's been nearly a century since Julius and Adele Back made that purchase, so the chance for a surprise or two is ripe. With the help of the History Museum and other cherished allies, the research will continue.

~ Bob Lang

Our Hidden Gems

When I moved to the Bay Area from Los Angeles in 2019, the golden hills and rustic beauty of Los Altos Hills first captured my eye. From swaying grass reeds to humming bees swirling around giant oak trees, it is no wonder so many residents and visitors are enraptured with the rolling landscapes of Los Altos Hills.

Calling Los Altos home for 44 years, artist Bev Jauch also found inspiration in these ethereal hills and decided to capture their beauty through watercolor.

Recently added to the Museum's art collection, Bev Jauch's watercolor series stemmed from her long hikes during the pandemic lockdown. Her watercolors on paper depict old horse sheds and barns of Los Altos Hills. "I noticed lots of old empty horse sheds from times gone by. I was attracted to the aged wood and a desire to make note of them before they are torn down. Taking photos, I started doing watercolors with the addresses on them...some of them have already gone as new homes go up," Jauch recalls.

Bev Jauch grew up in the Middle East and relocated in Dallas, Texas to pursue art at Southern Methodist University. She and her husband later ventured west to attend Stanford University for their advanced degrees. She eventually earned her master's degree to teach, raised two children and continued her art practice through local art shows, boutiques, workshops, community college art classes and the Los Altos Art Club. After serving as the Decorations Chairman for Grad Nite at Los Altos High School, she



Bev Jauch watercolor. LAHM collection.

launched her art business. What began as painted canvases expanded to murals, furniture, and glass works.

The pandemic allowed Jauch and her husband to rediscover nature and explore new hiking pathways in Los Altos Hills. And for that, we are grateful to have documented scenes of the hills through Bev's artistic eye. To learn more about the Museum's art collection, please visit the Collections page on our website.

~ Dianne Shen

What is Home? Hope, Humanity, and Heart – Art and Poetry Exhibition by Allied Artists West and Monday Night Poets, hosted by the Los Altos Library in July, came to the Museum for one night, July 25.



Kaaren Marquez. Who Cares.

Who Cares

what a soul weighs
before or after life
it's the in-between
that counts

and there are questions
to ask ourselves . . .

with a heavy heart
do we weigh more
does it sink
if we turn our back

are we not lighter
when we give
without wanting
something in return

who are we
if not each other
crossing paths, linking arms
lightening the load

— Alison Woolpert

Spotlight on the Oral History Project



Bob Adams, 2021. Photo credit Patti White

One of the enjoyable aspects of being a volunteer for the Museum's Oral History Committee is that we learn new and interesting facts about the people we interview. Many of you know Bob Adams: former President of Los Altos Rotary, member of the El Camino Hospital Foundation Board, YMCA Board, and Los Altos Community Foundation, where he helped start

Partners for a New Generation. But did you know Bob was a basketball coach?

I had known Bob Adams for many years when I recorded his oral interview, but I learned for the first time that one of the volunteer activities Bob most enjoyed was coaching the Alta Vista High boys' basketball team. Alta Vista is the continuation school in the Mountain View-Los Altos Union High School District, a school populated by at-risk kids. Although area continuation schools had formed a boys' basketball conference, Alta Vista did not have a team, and the principal asked Bob if he would be willing to coach.

Not only did Bob coach the boys' basketball team for many years, but also he served as the bus driver, driving the team to games against other schools. Bob soon learned to load the players onto the bus quickly after games to avoid altercations between his team members and the opposing team. Although Bob described his basketball players as a rowdy bunch, he loved coaching them and driving the bus to games. In nine years between 2001 and 2010, Coach Adam's teams won the conference championship five times!

Serving on the Oral History Committee has taught me that every person has an interesting story if only we listen.

~ Patti White

Membership

Welcome to our new members:

Cindy Bogard O'Gorman
Kelly Davis
Tim and Lynne Farrell

Richard Lanman
Andrew Mendoza
Al Rooney

Business Members

Business Sponsorship
BK Collections
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Volunteer Highlights & Activities

It takes a committee to mount our exhibits—especially now, while the Museum is temporarily without an Exhibition Curator. When Dr. Amy Ellison stepped away from the position to pursue her goal of writing a book based on her dissertation, the Museum's Exhibits Committee, led by Eleanor Watanabe, filled the gap.

Upon the closing of our previous exhibition, *Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change*, Committee members sprang into action dismantling the display and packing it for transport back to Exhibit Envoy, the organization that provides traveling exhibitions. Our volunteers then repainted the exhibit panels from purple to red, the color scheme of the incoming exhibition, *Gold Fever! Untold Stories of the California Gold Rush*. When the heavy wooden boxes of exhibition materials for *Gold Fever!* arrived from Exhibit Envoy, the Committee, under a tight deadline, unpacked the artifacts, paintings and text panels, assembled exhibit cases, mounted everything and adjusted the lighting with one hour to spare!



Members of the exhibits committee, Diane, Jan, Pat, Anna, Eleanor and Carrie, on opening day for *Gold Fever!*

"Our creative and dedicated Exhibits committee members have come together to add our own unique Los Altos History Museum signature to all of our traveling exhibits," Eleanor said. "We especially appreciate the expert and energetic support from Gary Hedden and members of his Facilities team! Appreciation too to the Museum's Marketing Committee for their help and advice in promoting the exhibits and programs."

The Exhibits Committee includes Carrie Castro, Doreen Cohen, Jan Davis, Pat Hedden, Judy Hooper, Dylan Ong, Lata Patil, Diane Simmons, Nikki Andrews, and Anna Wu. Two of the team, Anna and Carrie, even have master's degrees in Museum Studies. This dedicated group of volunteers help with everything from planning an exhibition and its corresponding programs, to the installation and deinstallation, right down to sweeping the floor afterwards.

Want to join the team? Just give us a call.

~ Diane Holcomb

History in the News

My new mural at the corner of 3rd and Main, *200 Main Street [an inventory of time and place]*, shows images of people, places, ideas and objects from the past 100+ years. A QR code on the mural allows viewers to learn more about each image.

The research for the mural included many visits to the History Museum, the J. Gilbert Smith House and private homes. Some home visits never happened and I am still intrigued about what has been left out and how a story is never fully told.

Home visits are different from visiting a museum. It involves building a relationship with someone you do not know, gaining their trust and being allowed to look at personal memorabilia. On the contrary, photographing the Smith House was an experience that was in between exploring a museum display and entering a private home. I didn't know what was actually historic and what was replicated for display. I assumed that all findings were part of someone's history, a family's portrait, their pet photo, their suitcases, their clothing. That helped me reimagine a home scene that was halfway between past and present, where laptops, antique toys and last year's photos could form one timeless reality.



Martha Sakellariou and the mural, May 2021.

Some have wondered how the mural is attached. I needed a material that could adhere and mold on an uneven surface and the solution was a commercially available flexible printed film that can be applied with heat guns.

In addition to the Museum, I thank the nonprofit Arts Los Altos and the local Rotary Club for their support.

~ Martha Sakellariou

Ed. note - Sakellariou has a studio at the Cubberly Artist Studios. Her next big project is a dance film production based on a series of murals she installed at the Rinconada Palo Alto Library.

Director's Corner

Welcome to the Neighborhood!

Though there were many hardships around the COVID-19 pandemic and closures, one small blessing in disguise for the Museum was that it coincided with the construction right next door at the new Community Center. It would have been so difficult for the Museum to have operated as normal in 2020 anyhow, with the construction not only to the south of us, but also to the north! But now that it is done, and the construction fences all around us have been taken down, wow, is it wonderful!



We are very excited to welcome to the Civic Center neighborhood a brand new, beautiful building. Several of us have had an opportunity to tour inside, and it will be opening to the public very soon. I'm pleased also with the efforts to tie the building into the local area, not only by naming rooms after our well-known trees—oaks, redwoods, and apricots—but also through historical references. There is a mural depicting the First Peoples of this area, the Muwekma Ohlone, and their lives along the creeks. There is also an installation from the Museum's own collection of historic maps created by the Public Art Commission. So, although the building is new, it is respectfully referencing back to what was before.

Along with a brand-new building next door, we are welcoming new staff members to the Museum and new programs. Maria Crowder, who once owned a shop in downtown Los Altos and who worked as a teacher's aide at St. Nicholas, is now creating amazing events at the Museum as a part of our fundraising team. I'm so excited to have Maria's enthusiasm here at the Museum! She'll be working on our new signature fundraiser which is taking the place of our beloved Crab Feed in February 2022. More details to come about that soon!

The fall is a great time to think about our neighborhood orchard also. The Museum's Orchard Commons Committee is working with the City to install drip irrigation in a portion of the orchard, and to create educational programming around the orchard and water management. We received a grant from Valley Water for this project.

So, as we shake off the dust from 2020 and step into the future, we look forward to nice additions to our Civic Center neighborhood, and to our own big plans for 2022 and beyond!

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery



Janet Klinke, Ineke Ligtenberg and Vicki Holman. July 1, and we are open on Thursdays!



Gerri Acers, Alex Wang and Kelly Davis. Three new Board members voted in at the annual meeting in June.



Karl and Paula Danz, the very last two guests as Beauty and the Beast came to a close, July 11.



Chris Ito with Hope's Corner spoke at the July Art and Poetry event. Intrigued? They can always use volunteers serving food.



The Permanent Exhibition Oversight Committee met with the design teams in July. We are making good progress! Photo credit, Dianne Shen.



Meet two new staff members, "Shawn" Fallah, bookkeeper and office administrator, and Maria Crowder, development events representative.

Photo Gallery



Elisabeth Ward and Mary Kuperman, dressed up for the very successful Pioneer Day, July 25.



Washing clothes with a washboard in a metal tub. Good fun on a hot day for these young pioneers.



Maria Crowder and Kaye Loughmiller explaining how to make butter. Pretty simple, but it takes a lot of shaking.



Vicki Holman showing off some pioneer-era toys with some costumed visitors.



Teen docent William McNamara digitized records and photographs this summer. Next stop, the University of Rochester. Photo credit, Dianne Shen.



Stage Company "Follies 2.0" actors. Pandemic got you down? To the rhythm of Bobby McFerrin, they sang, "Don't worry, eat happy."



UNDER THE OAKS

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Museum and Store Hours

Thursday to Sunday, Noon-4pm.
We are closed Thanksgiving Day.
Check our website for updates.

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(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

Annie Knapp Fitz Paints: A Legacy in Art, opens Thurs., Sept. 9, Museum gallery.

Adventures in Mural Painting, with Morgan Bricca, Thurs., Sept. 23, 7pm.

Community Orchard Art, opens Thurs., Sept. 30, J. Gilbert Smith House.

Artists Reception for Community Orchard Art, Sat., Oct. 2, noon-2pm,
J. Gilbert Smith House porch.

Member's BBQ and Volunteer Appreciation, rescheduled to Sun., Oct. 10, 5-8pm.

Caring for Our Heritage Orchard, with Phil Doetsch and Frank Niccoli, moderated
by Jane Packard, Tues., Oct. 12, 4pm.

Making Time for Art, with Denise Howard and Doreen Cohen, Sat., Oct. 23, 10am.

Arts Los Altos: Public Art and Placemaking, with Maddy McBirney and
Karen Zucker, Thurs., Nov. 4, 7 pm.

Catch the Spirit, Wed., November 17, noon-4pm.



Chef Chu's grandson Braden got a close shave on Pioneer Day - with real shaving cream and a not-so-real plastic blade!

Staff

Dr. Elisabeth Ward, *Executive Director*
Dianne Shen, *Collections Strategist*
Diane Holcomb, *Outreach Coordinator*
Maria Crowder, *Development Events Representative*
Farshad Fallah, *Bookkeeper and Office Administrator*
Faustino Carrillo, *Gardener*

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