

## Once Upon a Time Los Altans Fly Fished Adobe Creek

*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. Here is my story about a creek, Adobe Creek.*

In 1987 my wife and I bought the historic Van Buren House, built in 1925, from Herb Bickell, an interesting character who regaled us with stories about fly fishing on Adobe Creek. Herb had many other stories. In the Navy during WWII, he learned to be a lumberman when he ran a sawmill in Fiji, and upon returning home he founded Bickell Brothers Lumber with his brother Harold. They quickly won a bid to install new wooden bleachers at Stanford Stadium. When Stanford called Herb asking why he had not hauled away the old bleachers, he reminded them it wasn't in the contract. Then he offered to pick them up if Stanford would give him the addresses corresponding to the seat numbers for Stanford Buck Club members. Stanford agreed, and Herb said he made a fortune making tables and chairs for those Stanford alumni out of the bleachers stamped with their seat numbers. Shortly after we met Herb, he invited us to his ranch in Mendocino County. He acquired the ranch by winning a bet with his three fellow bachelor co-investors. The bet was that whoever married last would get the property. Herb married last, won the bet, and became sole owner of Bickell Ranch on the headwaters of the Navarro River. When Herb retired, he built three ponds – one for trout, one for bass, and one for catfish, and would ask our boys which fish they wanted to catch for dinner. They loved the place. One of Herb's magical stories puzzled me for two decades – that whenever he wanted trout for dinner, he could fly fish year-round in the creek behind our Los Altos home.

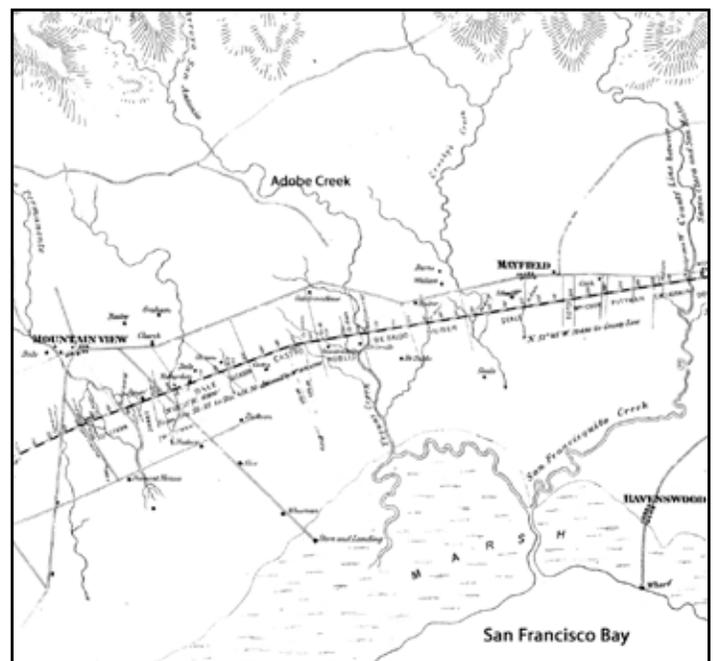
Adobe Creek was the playground of our five sons who played in the dry creek bed 7-8 months of the year. How could it have supported steelhead trout, whose young need to spend a year growing in freshwater before returning to the ocean? I remember asking the Santa Clara Valley Water District staff if Adobe Creek had ever been a trout stream. Their response was no, "and besides, it would be impossible, as Adobe Creek historically never reached the Bay, and instead just dried up in its lower reaches in Palo Alto." Had Herb Bickell been telling me tall tales?

Curious by nature, I kept investigating, and located the 1862 George F. Allardt Map of the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad. The map revealed that Adobe Creek did in fact reach the Bay's tidal marsh. The map shows that upper Adobe Creek was named Arroyo San Antonio, likely after St. Anthony of Padua, ironically the patron saint of lost things. Juan Prado Mesa, a commander of the San Francisco Presidio, was granted Rancho San Antonio de Padua in 1839 and he renamed the creek Adobe Creek. Mesa's adobe home was located just east of Adobe Creek at what is now Summerhill Avenue and El Monte Road.

Another clue was uncovered as I walked the dry creek bed. Under El Camino Real there is an impassable six-foot drop with a fish ladder for trout. If the Water District did not believe trout used Adobe Creek, then why had they built the fish ladder?

I called Dr. Robert Leidy, Environmental Protection Agency biologist, for help. His report on steelhead in Bay Area streams cited an article touting trout fishing in Adobe Creek in the Sportsman's Gazetteer in 1877. In 1898, Stanford Professor John Otterbein Snyder reported collecting steelhead trout specimens

*continued on page 2*



*Adobe Creek, historically known as San Antonio Creek or Yeguas Creek, ran to the Bay's marshes in 1862.*

## President's Pen



As I write this, we are in the Yellow Tier, the upstairs gallery is open, and we have extended our hours. By the time you read this, the colored tiers should be gone, and I can't wait for our first in-person event, even with masks firmly in place.

In sad news, we lost a good friend in April. Chuck Geschke passed away and he will be missed. Our sincere condolences to Nan and the Geschke family. Chuck and Nan were among the small group of key, early founders of the Museum. More recently, they, along with Pamela and Ed Taft, have led the effort to renovate the permanent exhibit. To tell the story of Los Altos, the new exhibition will be organized along recognizable landscape themes like creeks. In this issue we have a story about Adobe Creek. Chuck Geschke and John Warnock named their start-up after that creek and Adobe went on to become a leader in digital print technology. Donations to the Museum in honor of Chuck will be gratefully appreciated.

The current exhibition, *Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change*, still has a few weeks to go before it closes July 11. The amazing photography is not to be missed. Already seen it? Come back for a second look. The exhibition has had some great programming. One talk that got my attention was by Mary Ellen Hannibal on Citizen Science. After that, I joined a "Bioblitz" with Grassroots Ecology to find as many species as possible in a short amount of time. Good fun, but it can be more than that, the crowdsourced data is worth hours of research for the scientists trying to manage our natural resources. There are lots of interesting projects that need the participation of regular folks, including families with children. Now that I have two grandchildren, I'm keeping my eyes open for such opportunities!

~ Gary Hedden

## 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*

### 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!

## Adobe Creek

*continued from page 1*

in Adobe Creek. Los Altos historian Don McDonald wrote in his book about a 1909 land office brochure that promoted Los Altos for its "never-failing mountain trout stream." I found many historical records indicating that trout were once present, but I had no physical proof.

Then it dawned on me, I had been searching museum records for Adobe Creek and *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, the modern names of the creek and the fish, instead of their historical names, San Antonio Creek and *Salmo irideus*. With that, a California Academy of Sciences curator found a steelhead trout specimen collected in 1893. Herb Bickell was vindicated!

Could trout still run in Adobe Creek? There are several impassable barriers beginning with the tidal gate at the mouth of the Palo Alto Flood Basin, then a 2.4-mile-long flat-bottomed concrete channel constructed in 1958, and impassable drops caused by concrete culverts under bridges. Restoration of steelhead trout spawning runs would be a terrific challenge.



*Concrete culverts, here under O'Keefe Lane, create scour pools that become lovely waterfalls but are impassable barriers to fish. Credit, Lanman, Oct. 2012.*

Steelhead can survive in a land-locked form, known as rainbow trout. Searching for rainbow trout, Dr. Robert Leidy, his team, and I electrofished the creek from bottom to top in 2011. Sadly, the number of native fish gradually declined the further upstream we ventured. Above Redwood Grove, we found three native fish species: three-spined stickleback, Sacramento sucker, and California roach minnow, and no steelhead. Above Foothill College's parking lot we found only two species, above Rhus Ridge Road bridge only one species, and above the Hidden Villa entrance bridge, no fish at all.

Removal of the fish barriers, banning well water withdrawals, replacement of storm drains with street-side swales to slow and sink rainwater, and stocking with rainbow trout would require a major civic commitment, but restoration of "the never-failing mountain trout stream" we once enjoyed could be achieved.

~ Dr. Rick Lanman

*Dr. Lanman, a retired physician and biotech company executive who specialized in cancer genomics, currently serves as Board President of the Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District, and President of the Institute for Historical Ecology. He researches and publishes on California's historic fauna and has had a long-standing interest in the Adobe Creek watershed.*

## Our Hidden Gems

### Objects and Social Justice: Asian America in Los Altos

Today, over 30% of Los Altos and Mountain View residents identify as Asian American Pacific Islander. This is a short excerpt from the Museum's blogpost on the recent surge in racial violence against the AAPI community and the role history museums play in advocating for social justice.

Asian immigrants made up over 30% of the workforce in the mid 1880s and Chinatowns and Japantowns developed rapidly in San Mateo, Menlo Park, Mayfield (south Palo Alto) and San Jose. In the Museum's art collection, scenes of Mayfield's Chinatown can be found in the oil paintings of local artist Anna Knapp Fitz. With almost 200 pieces in the collection, her paintings typically depict local street scenes or idyllic orchard landscapes recreated from old photographs and her memories of Los Altos. Her painting of the Chinese man holding a carrying (shoulder) pole is an obscure painting and I wondered if it was created from her imagination or an old photograph - and if so, where that photograph might be today. Mayfield's Chinatown barely survived anti-Asian hostility for many years and disappeared by the early 1900s.



Anna Knapp Fitz painting. LAHM Collection.



Ben and Fred Furuichi in WWII uniforms. LAHM Collection.

The Museum also houses a collection of family photographs, memorabilia and keepsakes from notable Japanese American families of Los Altos, including the George Furuichi family, Shoichi Kagawa family and Charlie Hamasaki family. At the onset of World War II, Japanese and Japanese American residents of Los Altos were sent to internment camps. Pictured here are military service portraits of Ben Furuichi and Fred Furuichi in U.S. Army and U.S. Navy uniforms.

Objects hold an immense power in dictating how we imagine and understand global cultures and identities. We are continuing efforts with the Social Justice Collection to acknowledge the existence of institutionalized racial discrimination, disenfranchisement and marginalization of communities of color. We are seeking artifact donations of family photographs and materials for the Permanent Collection that will expand our understanding of AAPI

history. With your help, I look forward to the impact a small museum can make in our community.

~ Dianne Shen

## "Gold Fever!" Sweeps Los Altos!

It has been more than 150 years since the Gold Rush galvanized California. Now *Gold Fever!* is sweeping Los Altos!

*Gold Fever! The Untold Stories of California's Gold Rush* is a fascinating exhibition presenting a treasury of Gold Rush-era photos, documents, and hands-on activities. Stories and objects offer a glimpse into California before the fateful discovery of gold in the American River: the frenzied rush to the gold fields over land and by sea, the experience of vigilante justice, life in the rowdy gold camps, and the shaping of California's future. The exhibition spotlights the remarkable stories of individual Californios, women, Native Americans, and gold seekers who emigrated from all parts of the world. James Marshall's discovery changed the West irrevocably, and the legacy of the Gold Rush continues to shape our culture.

This traveling exhibit will be on display for six weeks beginning July 22. Organized by Exhibit Envoy in partnership with the Cal Humanities, Exhibit Envoy provides traveling exhibitions to museums throughout California with a mission to build new perspectives among Californians, create innovative exhibitions, and advance institutions in service to their communities.

~ Dr. Amy Ellison



Miners Near Nevada City, 1852. Photographer Unknown. Collection of the California State Library.

## Spotlight on the Oral History Project



Jean Gillette, 2019. LAHM Collection.

Jean I. Gillette's stories are a blend of nostalgia, glamour, and pragmatism. Listening to her talk about her life in her native Republic of Ireland is a journey to a world when people had the leisure to have tea and cake in the afternoon, listen to stories about America, and dance in a barn.

She herself broke into the glamorous life when, after a year of finishing school, she was hired by the famous Portuguese actor Antonio Vilar to teach his children

English. It was a star-studded life for a young woman who had been brought up under the strict tutelage of the Loreto order of nuns.

But it wasn't until she came to the United States in the early 1960s and married her husband that Gillette came into her own. After moving to Los Altos in 1965, she joined the Garden Club of Los Altos in 1968, became a board member and for the past 50-plus years has served on the board or as president.

Established as a club for making flower arrangements in 1929, the Garden Club transformed itself two decades later into the Garden Club of Los Altos. With this came a focus on community engagement, and Gillette reached out to Los Altos to become involved in gardening.

If you enjoy the flowers in the triangle where San Antonio and Main meet, you have Gillette's Garden Club to thank. And those beautiful flower boxes in downtown that showcase the season's finest are also the brainchild of the Club members.

Here at the Museum, we love our garden. Gillette and the Club landscaped the History House in 1977, later paid for the bricks and benches, and even today they weed and help out.

Still on the board, though no longer president, Gillette says that one of her aims is to "find members who are elderly, can't drive, and can't get to meetings, pick them up, bring them to the club, get them a cup of tea and something nice to eat, and watch a meeting and bring them home. I think that's something that we would all get some good from."

~ Suruchi Mohan

## Volunteer Highlights & Activities

Since the Education Committee has not been able to conduct its in-person educational tours for 3rd and 4th grades for a second year, we have produced three virtual tours and activities which are available on the Museum website.

We enjoyed working with the firm Virtual Eyes Media to produce a tour of the J. Gilbert Smith House. Sharon Barkoff and Lindsay Carpenter created a wonderful virtual tour featuring rooms in the house which are particularly interesting to young students.



Sharon Barkoff by the Smith House sign. Photo credit Anne Roberts.

The second virtual tour, also produced with Virtual Eyes Media, highlights our "Cal Aggies" agriculture tour, featuring old farm equipment, walnut hullers, and the apricot cutting and sulfur sheds. Kaye Loughmiller and Anne Macpherson did an excellent job presenting agriculture in our valley.

The third virtual tour, prepared by Kaye Loughmiller, features Annie Knapp Fitz's wonderful paintings of the Los Altos area in the early 1900's. The museum is fortunate to have several hundred of her paintings.

We are pleased that these tours will reach many public, private, and home-schooled students and their families, and we hope you will have an opportunity to enjoy these special tours on our website.

~ Anne Roberts



Anne Macpherson and Kaye Loughmiller by the agricultural sign, Transforming the Land. Photo credit Anne Roberts.

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## History in the News

Since 2013 the Los Altos Historical Commission has recognized people who have helped preserve and protect the story of Los Altos. People like Margaret Thompson, Marion and Bob Grimm, Pinky Whelan, Nan Geschke, Jane Reed and others have been recognized for truly significant work to save our history and the charm it provides. This year the honor went to a project, the adaptive restoration of the 1913 Craftsman style farmhouse at 1365 Grant Road. The house was built for Oliver Holt on an apricot orchard. The house stayed with the Holt family until it was sold to Daniil and Divya Reouk in 2015. The two-story farmhouse features shingle cladding, a distinctive entry porch and an attractive river rock foundation.



*The Reouk family, Divya, Daniil, Lea and Dominic. May, 2021.*

The Reouks appreciated the importance of owning and protecting such a gem and set about restoring it. With professional guidance, they developed a plan to maintain the historic significance of the property. That was the start of a challenging four-year journey. Removing the river rock exposed a brick foundation that did not meet current earthquake standards. The house was raised to allow the installation of a reinforced concrete foundation, then the bricks and cobblestones were carefully replaced. Halfway through the project the Reouks moved from a rental house in Mountain View to a detached in-law unit at the back of their property. The family of four, with children of ages three and eight at the time, lived in one room for over a year. The Reouks love that they are living on an old orchard, and they have planted many new trees to capture that history. They have apple, cherry, peach and of course, apricot. This restoration shows what can be done and seeing nicely restored historic homes is a great source of community pride.

~ Gary Hedden

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## Director's Corner

### *Changing Times*

A few months ago, we changed the clocks forward to Day Light Savings time, for what might be the last time if a proposed bill passes Congress. The history of Day Light Savings Time is anchored in the post-World War II moment of America, when President Roosevelt called it War Time and asked us to save electricity, and then many States, out of a feeling of patriotic duty, kept it going. Like so many things in our daily lives, this simple ritual actually has a story behind it, but we can so easily assume it always was and always will be.



At the Museum, I noticed months after the fact that some of our clocks were still on standard time, because so few of us had been in the building with the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. In years past, the City workers were good about coming and changing the clocks for us, but not this year or last. I believe it will take a long time for things to adjust to a new rhythm, a new pattern of what is normal.

For the Museum, there are many other changes afoot, some welcome and some not so welcome. The loss of Chuck Geschke was a blow to not only the Geschke family and Chuck's many friends and admirers, but also to the Museum. We are deeply grateful for all he gave to the Museum, and blessed by the ongoing support of his wife, Nan. I am saddened to not be celebrating other, more welcome, changes with Chuck in the future. He was looking forward to our new Permanent Exhibition, as are so many of us. Nan has suggested that donations in Chuck's name be made in support of that project.

In the months ahead, as the COVID restrictions get lifted and the Community Center opens its doors, the Museum will begin again offering some of its in-person events, like the Membership Barbeque. That event will take place in late August and will be quite a celebration of not only our members, but also of the fabulous volunteers who have kept working so hard during the pandemic to keep the Museum vibrant and relevant, and operational! Although we will be missing beloved Museum members, it is certainly about time we saw one another face-to-face again. Mark your calendars for the 29<sup>th</sup> of August!

*With best wishes for you,  
Elisabeth*

## Photo Gallery



*Back in business! We opened again in April with volunteers Wayne Hooper, Vicki Holman and Jay Sharma.*



*Marilyn Henderson, center, with two teen docents in early May.*



*Pinky Whelan, Jane Reed and Julie Rose at Pinky's drive-by birthday celebration in March.*



*Pinky and her family celebrating her 90th.*



*Peggy Davis and Brigitte Ahlfeldt delivering a "We Love Our Volunteers" gift to Pat Hedden in March.*



*Tom Chay, a volunteer with Friends of the Library, visits on opening day for "Beauty and the Beast."*



1939-2021

We mourn the passing of a Silicon Valley legend and a dear friend of the Museum. We will miss Chuck Geschke.



*Nan and Chuck at the May 2016 "Garden Party Gala."*



*Chuck toasts Chef Chu at the February 2020 Chef Chu 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Banquet.*



*Chuck and Nan at the Grand Opening of the Los Altos History Museum, 2001.*



*Chuck and Nan at home.*



# UNDER THE OAKS

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

### 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  
[weddings@losaltoshistory.org](mailto: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

*Beauty and the Beast: California Wildflowers and Climate Change*, open through July 11.

**Annual Meeting of the Members**, Thursday, June 10, 4-5:30 pm, Zoom, hear from our leaders, elect new directors and thank those whose terms are ending.

**Los Altos Goes Green**, Thursday, June 24, 5pm, Zoom, join this panel co-hosted by GreenTown Los Altos to hear local environmental leaders.

**Gold Fever! The Untold Stories of California's Gold Rush**, July 22–Aug. 29, with outdoor activities for kids and families Sunday, July 25, 12-4.

**Journey to Gold Mountain**, Thursday, August 12, 6-7:30 pm, in person and virtual, a talk by Connie Young Yu.

**Member's BBQ & Volunteer Appreciation**, Aug. 29, 5-8 pm, Museum Courtyard.



*Vicki Holman, with a new way to get to work, by electric bike!*

### Membership

#### Welcome to our new members:

Jennifer Basiji  
Sydney Marsden  
Paul H Meredith  
Richard Strock  
Claire Taylor  
Carol Thurston  
Cecilie Vaughters-Johnson

#### Business Members

**Business Sponsorship**  
BK Collections  
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Garden Club of Los Altos  
HomeLight Inc.  
Los Altos Town Crier  
Young, Craig and Co., LLP CPAs

#### Partner Sponsorship

Janis Ahmadjian-Baer,  
Ph.D., Sereno

#### Corporate Sponsorship

Nicole Andrews  
Chef Chu's  
Kiwanis Club of Los Altos  
Rainmaker Real Estate

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