

The Heart of Early Los Altos

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 town.

One of the stories that struck me while researching Los Altos history has been that of the little *San Antonio Club*. Formerly known as the Music and Literary Club, it was the first civic endeavor to provide interesting activities to entertain and educate the community. Since about 1900, it seems that Los Altos and Los Altos Hills residents have been interested in cultural experiences that showcase the talents within the community and provide entertainment and educational opportunities. As examples, we have or have had a movie theater, a long-running live theater, symphony groups, Scholar Opera, student chorales, orchestras, bands, award-winning individual talent, the Ng Tong Temple events, Morning Forum, Celebrity Forum and the History Museum, plus all the cultural amenities of both San Francisco and San Jose. What a rich history of cultural experiences!

Here is a little bit on how the San Antonio Club began. I have been helped in this history by reading Los Altos historian Joe Salameda's book, *Memories of Los Altos*.

A civic-minded resident opened up his home to youths for reading, singing, dancing, and social events around 1905. The concept proved so popular with the entire community that a Constitution and Bylaws were written, signed on June 14, 1907, and by July 1, the charter listed 56 signatures. Agnes Urban, a young Los Altos girl at the time, was one of the first signers.

The land for the club is located on what is now called San Antonio Road, formerly Griffen or Giffin Road, and earlier



Members of the San Antonio Club in 1931, ninety years ago!
LAHM Collection.

Peck's Road. It was donated by Mrs. Julia Hill, who owned approximately 45 acres around the site. Julia Hill was the mother of Mrs. J. Gilbert Smith (Margaret Hill Smith). The Hill and the Smith families were long-time friends who moved to the Los Altos area from Portland, Oregon.

The club members held a fundraising bee to raise money for a clubhouse, and young J. Gilbert Smith helped. Using his carpentry skills, he and members of the community in the "do it ourselves" character of Los Altos built it in 1908-10. The clubhouse was a simple wood-framed cottage with an entertainment stage. It is said that over the intervening years, J. Gilbert Smith helped maintain the structure.

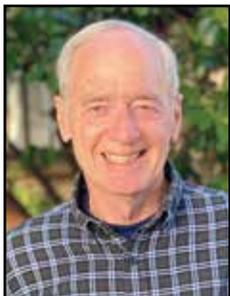
From its inception, this social and civic organization served as a center for community action and debates. Entertaining its members and invited guests was important as well as promoting cultural interests and making the community a more desirable place in which to live. As the social and political center, the club attracted some Stanford University faculty members (several had purchased and built homes in the Los Altos area). Jordan Avenue is named after Dr. David Starr Jordan, Stanford's first President. The organization also applied pressure on the Santa Clara County government to water down dusty San Antonio Road in summer and gravel its muddy surface in winter.

Joe Salameda noted interesting details in the club records, such as a letter sent in 1907 to the Electric Light Company regarding the proposed lighting of the neighborhood. In 1908, a system of lighting the new clubhouse by gasoline was demonstrated. Another note in 1908 reported that "the Piano Fund amount had reached the amount of \$95.55 leaving \$14.45 to be raised as soon as possible." There were notes on talks, too. In 1907,



Julia Hill Chandler in 1933 at the age of 89. LAHM Collection

President's Pen



The pandemic just won't go away. Yes, we are open and we are hosting outdoor events, but inside, masks are still required. I salute the many volunteers who have stuck with us —docents, store volunteers, and all of our many committee volunteers. Thank you, we could not have managed without you. Thanks to our staff and our Board members too.

We just added two more Board members to fill vacancies, Kuljeet Kalkat and Dr. Margo Horn. We look forward to their participation.

Despite the pandemic we were able to have some fun. The opening of *Annie Knapp Fitz Paints* in September brought many of us together. Annie painted folksy pictures of people and places, mostly in Los Altos. In October, the Volunteer Appreciation was a lively event with good food from Holy Cannoli, wine poured by the Kiwanis and great music. The farewell for past Co-President and long-time volunteer Linda Eckols was fun, although we will miss her. We enjoyed the talk by muralist Morgan Bricca. She is such a talented artist, and if you missed it, you can watch the recording on our website. You can also see her art at the new Community Center. She painted two murals, each showing some history of Adobe Creek. The Museum also loaned the artifacts in the little pop-up Museum. Thanks to Elisabeth for making that happen. Finally, the Donor Appreciation at the State Street Market was wonderful. The renovation of the building looks great, and it was nice to honor some of the donors supporting the upgrade of the Permanent Exhibit.

In our cover story, *The Heart of Early Los Altos*, we learn about civic-minded residents in 1905. Over a century later we still have such folks, and there you have it, the not-so-secret sauce to our success: great volunteers and generous donors.

~ Gary Hedden



Kuljeet Kalkat and Dr. Margo Horn, two new Board members.

The Heart of Early Los Altos

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J. Gilbert Smith with his tandem bike, ~1901. LAHM Collection.

"A Trip to Yosemite" followed by "The Hawaiian Islands" and, "Why Quakers Are Called Friends." Also in 1907, a debate "Resolved that the United States has Reached Its Zenith," in 1908, a talk on "Child Labor," and in 1909, an extemporaneous talk on "Shall Women Vote?"

So you can see that Los Altos started with a very interesting cultural exchange and has more than lived up to the Club's motto of creating a more desirable place in which to live.

The *Music and Literary Club/San Antonio Club* was in existence until 1923. The *San Antonio Club* continued to be a hub for activities and a place to meet. In 1950 the *San Antonio Women's Club* began *The Morning Forum of Altos* with 49 women members. Four years later it was opened to men. It soon outgrew the clubhouse for meetings and today is a strong organization meeting at the First Methodist Church sanctuary at Magdalena and Foothill. The *San Antonio Club* is owned by the City of Los Altos and is now primarily used for preschool programs and rentals for children's birthday parties.

~ Jane Reed

ed. Jane Reed has been a long-time volunteer with the Museum as Board member and President, curator of many exhibits, and so much more!

Staff

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

Our Hidden Gems

I have the great honor and responsibility of choosing artifacts for the *Jewel Box* in our new permanent exhibition. The *Jewel Box* will be a large glass-walled room full of artifacts showcasing changing themes. We will present the many facets of Los Altos and its influence not only to the *Valley of Heart's Delight* but to California and even the world! I have chosen objects from our *Sister Cities* collection to represent our global focus.

Sister Cities was started by Dwight Eisenhower during his 1956 White House Conference on citizen diplomacy; he felt that bonds could be formed between people throughout the world from different cultures by appreciating their differences and building partnerships. Los Altos had such a relationship with four sister cities – Shih Lin in Taiwan, Syktyvkar in Russia, Bendigo in Australia and Rustington in England. We hosted delegations from all four and were given some truly beautiful friendship gifts by the ambassadors. None of these items have been seen by the



Alecia Thomas with gifts from the Los Altos sister cities.

public since the very brief time they were shown in presentation ceremonies. We have a variety of art from Shih Lin with a horse theme, as the horse is a symbol of that city. Taiwan is also represented by unique porcelain art and carved sculptures of dragons, lions, and farmers working the land. There are pottery samples from each city, all very different in reflecting their country. Other items include wall hangings, plates, sculpture in various mediums, and dolls.

An earlier *Our Hidden Gems* article explored the world-spanning doll collection of Barbara Hall Lindsay. We have well over 100 dolls in our collection, and some of the rarest will be featured in the Jewel Box. Other items will come from International Festivals we have

hosted, photos of the delegations and even some surprises. This exhibit will be like nothing we have shared before and I can't wait for everyone to experience it.

~ Alecia Thomas

Meet Mr. Bear

A special Rotary Club bear arrived at the History Museum in October. Our Mr. Bear represents the grizzly bears that once lived in California and whose ancestors roamed the Wild West from Central Mexico to Alaska. Prior to the Gold Rush, there were 10,000 grizzly bears in California, becoming extinct 75 years later. Contributing to the extinction were Ohlone Native peoples who hunted bears for food and fur and Spanish and Anglo-American settlers who hunted for fur and to protect their livestock. Fear and capturing bears for the sport of bull and bear fights were also contributing factors. The last known grizzly bear in our area was seen in the 1880s near Bonny Doon, north of Santa Cruz. Monarch, the model for the bear on our state flag, was in the San Francisco Zoo until 1911.

Mr. Bear would have wandered from the Baylands through the chaparral in the foothills, sometimes encountering Ohlones and settlers. He hunted wild salmon in the streams, and rodents and small animals in the grasses and forest.



Mr. Bear loved berries and frolicking amongst the colorful flowers, ferns, and grasses. Some of the flora and fauna I had the pleasure of painting on Mr. Bear are the Sequoia Redwood, Western Trillium, California Poppy, Western Blackberry, Steelhead Salmon, Yellow-Legged Frog, Red-Winged Blackbird and Pigmy Blue Butterfly. Take a look—Mr. Bear is between the pergola and J. Gilbert Smith House.

~ Bonnie Sorenson

ed. Bonnie Sorenson is a Los Altos artist, specializing in watercolor and monotype/monoprints. Interested in protecting the environment, she has a deep appreciation of our local plants and animals.

The bear is one of the Rotary fundraising bears, purchased by a group of Rotarians led by Dick Henning, and given to Jane Reed in honor of her many years of service to the community. She loaned it to the Museum and it found its home in an effort orchestrated by Marie Backs.

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

I work with the Museum's oral histories, and have been given a front row seat to the rich and loving history of the town through the eyes of its residents. It has been a joy to listen to long-time residents like Gordon Ansley in his 1998 interview relate fond memories of escapades of his youth in Los Altos. Ansley laughs through his interview as he tells tales of the good-natured mischief he and his cohorts wrought on the community as adolescents. "One year," he relates, "near the Fourth of July...we had gotten hold of some illicit fireworks and decided to set them off. We set some off, and it didn't occur to me that if I lit them in the tall grass, it might just catch the grass on fire!... which it did! We tried to put it out ourselves, but it was getting out of hand. I ran into the house and...just picked up the phone and yelled, 'FIRE!' and that's all it took! The fire engine was down there in about two minutes and the volunteers had that fire out in no time. There was a good-sized black hole in the poppy field, about fifteen yards square, I guess!" He goes on to say that instead of reporting the incident, the fire department lingered and

played a game of baseball, an event indicative of the kind of close-knit community only found in a small town.

I'm a Texas girl, born and raised. I grew up in Houston, one of the country's largest cities, but my family lives in small towns across the state. I love those small communities, and when my husband and I moved to California, we didn't expect to find them. As I research the oral histories, I often smile and now, working in beautiful Los Altos, my small-town longings are satisfied in the best possible way.

~ Jordan Grealish



Jordan Grealish on a recent trip to celebrate her mom's 60th birthday. Photo credit Debbie Grealish, aka mom.

Volunteer Highlights & Activities

The Museum's Orchard Commons Committee is working to replace the antiquated heritage apricot orchard's sprinkler system with a new, micro irrigation system that gets the water exactly where it's needed—at the trees themselves—without wasting water by spraying beyond the trees. According to Committee Chair Jane Packard, "We haven't pinned down what the design will be; a drip system with lines along the rows of trees, micro sprayers at each tree, or a drip system with a loop around each trunk." The Orchard Commons Committee is working with Manny Hernandez from the City, Frank Niccoli from Foothill College, and Orchardist Phil Doetsch to come up with a plan. Visits to two working orchards, J & P Cosentino Family Farm in San Jose and Andy's Orchard in Morgan Hill, have been useful.

This project will help preserve our Heritage Orchard, and it will demonstrate how irrigation technology has changed over the years. When J. Gilbert Smith planted the apricot trees starting in 1901, he used flood irrigation, a practice that contributed to a drop in the water table. Phil Doetsch uses spray irrigation. Frank Niccoli, who trains landscape technicians in a Foothill College program, will advise on the new system, and some of his students will work as interns on the installation and maintenance of the system.

Thanks to a grant from Valley Water, the Museum is able to proceed with this project. At a ground-breaking ceremony in October, City officials sprinkled water at the base of a tree to represent this new effort to reduce our outdoor water use. "We're inviting the community to join us on this adventure of discovery and learning," Jane said.



At the ground-breaking. Top row: Council member Sally Meadows, Phil Doetsch, Frank Niccoli, Manny Hernandez. Bottom row: Council member Lynette Lee Eng, Jane Packard, Elisabeth Ward.

The Committee is also researching integrated pest management for the ground squirrels who chew the irrigation system and the tree roots, and best approaches for protecting trees from fungal diseases.

An exhibit of Community Orchard Art, on display in the gallery of the J. Gilbert Smith House, is another project which involved Jane and her volunteers. The artwork, by Los Altos ArtVenturers, is available for viewing through Feb 20, 2022.

Want to volunteer? Fill out the form on our website under support/volunteer.

~ Diane Holcomb

History in the News

Twenty-five years! The Day Worker Center of Mountain View just celebrated that historic milestone. Since 1996, the Center has done more than match willing workers with local jobs; it has also provided education, job skills training and meals to workers, typically immigrants, who just want some work.

Jean Mordo was part of a group of Rotarians which raised \$1 million in 2007 to establish the Day Worker Center. The mostly private fundraising effort was kick-started with a \$25,000 donation by the Los Altos Hills City Council, conditional on a proportional donation by Los Altos (\$75,000) and Mountain View (land donation). Another \$900,000 was raised from private residents. Dave Ludtke, pro bono, directed the remodeling, which included a commercial grade kitchen. This gave the workers a safe place to meet and wait for their daily work. Before that they simply lined up on the street and there was no easy way to match jobs with skills. It was chaotic and frankly, a bit intimidating. The Center provides daily meals for workers and family and help with medical and legal issues.



Jean Mordo and Maria Marroquin at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Day Worker Center.

The History Museum has hired Day Workers. It's a quick drive to the Center on Escuela Avenue in Mountain View, and just like that, for \$25/hour, we have strong workers ready to give us a hand.

Maria Marroquin is the Executive Director. She remembers her first job many years ago and says, "I felt that I was capable of changing my life. I became passionate about the day workers. I saw how they struggle, and how they suffer." She gave workers rides to work, helped in the office, took English classes and eventually became the Director. Her mission is more than finding jobs for the workers, it is helping them and their families become full members of the community.

~ Gary Hedden

Director's Corner

FUNdraising

One of the best parts of my job is fundraising, although I will admit that filling out grant applications can be pretty stressful! Then there is the kind of fundraising that is really FUN-raising because it is about bringing together donors to celebrate successes and opportunities. As the COVID vaccine's ability to keep serious illness down becomes apparent, it is great to see those kinds of events making a comeback.



On October 25th, the Museum held an event at the Paseo Courtyard of the new State Street Market, full of good food and great conversation. The event was in appreciation for the generous lead donors to the Capital Campaign for the new Permanent Exhibition in the Upper Gallery. With their incredible support, that project is now well underway. Once completed, it will revolutionize our Museum and brand our excellence in two areas: *Object-Based Learning* and *Place-Based Storytelling*.

It was fun to share with our donors examples of object-based learning, which comes from closely examining artifacts in our collection. We have some great things in our "vault" and we look forward to highlighting them in the new Permanent Exhibition. Place-based storytelling is a new term, but is something we have been doing for a long time. The train diorama is a good example and it will not be going away. The story starts with a familiar contemporary location, then traces the historic events that influenced its creation and evolution. It is fun to weave these two approaches into our new Permanent Exhibition, and we look forward to inviting all of our members and the general public to support this effort in 2022 as we launch the public phase of the fundraising campaign.

Fun is also the name of the game for our new signature fundraising event, *Dancing through the Decades*, our replacement for the Crab Feed. Each year, we will pick a different theme from a different decade, diving deep for fun facts and authentic artifacts. The inaugural theme will be "Entertaining the 20s," and we hope everyone will enjoy putting on their flapper outfits and zoot suits as they step into an experience reliving the entertainment industry of the 1920s. There will be themed music, food, drinks, and auction items to make the evening especially memorable, and of course, fun! Please mark your calendar for February 5th, and look for the postcard invitation!

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery



Dave Backs and Harry Guy installing new extension "wings" on the back gate.



Linda Eckols (center) with Carole Flores, Lori Tuttle, Peggy Davis and Brigitte Ahlfeldt at Linda's farewell party.



Maeja Lange with her sister Elisabeth Ward and Board member Nikki Andrews at the opening of 'Annie Knapp Fitz Paints.'



Laura St. Laurent with the Annie Knapp Fitz painting of her as a child.



Steve Houtchens trying the kid-size drinking fountain saved from Hillview School and now in the pop-up exhibit at the Community Center.



Morgan Bricca, Paula Rini and Monica Waldman at the grand opening of the new Community Center.

Photo Gallery



The excellent Kiwanis wine-servers at the Volunteer Appreciation included Art Carmichael, Doris Padilla and Tim McClenahan.



Suruchi Mohan, Liz Nyberg, Marcia and Ted Adams at the Volunteer Appreciation party.



Larry Lang, Board member, at the Lead Donor Reception with Jerre Hitz and Brianna Cutts.



John Warnock, Nan Geschke, Ed Taft and Marva Warnock at the Lead Donor Reception.



Doreen Cohen describing the beauty of art at the talk on 'Making Time for Your Art.'



Liz Nyberg, Diane Simmons, Margie Alving, Janet Klinke and Kristen Fuller, dressed for a 1930s style outing.



UNDER THE OAKS

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Museum and Store Hours

Thursday to Sunday, Noon-4pm.

We are closed Christmas Eve,
Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

Check our website for updates.

General Inquiries

(650) 948-9427 x14 or
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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

Civil Rights in Early Silicon Valley: The Chicano/a Experience, Wed., Jan. 12, 7pm on Zoom.

Orchard Walk with Dr. Jane Packard, Los Altos Heritage Apricot Grove, Sat., Jan. 22, 10am to noon.

Dancing through the Decades: Entertaining the 20s, Saturday, Feb. 5, 2022.

Annie Knapp Fitz Paints: A Legacy in Art, open through Feb. 6, 2022, Museum gallery.

Community Orchard Art, open through Feb. 20, 2022, J. Gilbert Smith House.

Every Wrinkle Tells a Story, opens Feb 17, 2022, Museum gallery.



A fond farewell to Linda Eckols. Thank you, Linda!

Welcome to our new members:

Molly Anderson	Kuljeet Kalkat	Karen Scussel
Rachel Botsford	Kirk Paige	Jack and Barbara
Gloria Burke	Laura Rosas	Tooley

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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!