

Seeing Global Connections

While serving as a Museum volunteer docent, I had the opportunity to learn of the Museum's significance as a history resource. I read the stories in the Museum's oral history archives of Paul Hau, Isamu Kagawa, Marge and Mike Bruno, and Chef Chu and saw how their stories were intertwined with the story of Los Altos and the global influences that helped shape Los Altos.

Sai Moothy and I came to the Museum as interns from the Anthropology Department at San Jose State University (SJSU), under the mentorship of SJSU Professor Danae Khorasani, to help make the oral history archives more accessible for researchers. By reading through transcripts and properly digitizing the collection, we hope to make the collection readily available online and searchable.

Sai and I presented our work at the 92nd annual South Western Anthropological Association (SWAA) in Long Beach in early April. We joined other SJSU students in a panel discussing "Exhibiting Urban Cultures, From Museums to the Digital Commons," organized by Dr. Jan English-Lueck.

We focused on how Los Altos residents link to the local scene and international places. We introduced the mission to expand the museum's oral history digital database for future public research by organizing, digitizing, recoding, and indexing relevant social metadata, including demographics. We highlighted the interviews that are key to framing local places like Los Altos at the intersection of global and cultural exchange.

I began with the oral history of artist Paul Hau, who taught his mastery of traditional Chinese art at the Palo Alto Art Club. His talents include splash ink-style painting, inspired by artist Zhang Daiqan, who had in turn been influenced by Pablo Picasso. Not just an artist, Hau contributed to what is now the Taiwan Constitution.

Next, I jumped into Isamu Kagawa's story, a second-generation immigrant whose father, Shoichi Kagawa, worked for wealthy local businessman Paul Shoup. Isamu's oral history explains how he helped build a koi pond along Adobe Creek with his father. The koi pond exemplifies the integration of Japanese spatial design into the Los Altos landscape.



Mayela Sanchez presenting at the South Western Anthropological Association in April. Photo courtesy Mayela Sanchez.

Another example of global ties is Marge and Mike Bruno's dedicated support of the Los Altos Sister City program. Artifacts from Sister City gift exchanges are on display in the new Permanent Exhibition.

Sai began her presentation with the story of Lawrence Chu, who brought his knowledge of Chinese food from Hong Kong. Chu immigrated to the US when he was 20, worked hard at Trader Vic's, a restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown, and then started his popular restaurant, Chef Chu's, in Los Altos.

We followed with important steps to organize and record demographic information and pointed out the significance of including national identity to shed light on Los Altos' demographics and allow researchers to obtain a more accurate depiction of the historical growth of the City's diversity. From the transcripts we worked on, we noted the interconnections of the Kagawas, the Brunos, Paul Hau, and Lawrence Chu and the positive integration of diverse demographics into the Los Altos community.

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continued from page 1

We also noted some challenges when preparing oral histories for digital archiving and editing profiles in the database. We are evaluating how to attach search terms of each transcript to identify distant connections while maintaining the local history source. Paul Hau's oral history provided an imperative insight into political and artistic mindsets in global history, which begs the question of which oral history details should be digitized in a local history museum.

We wrapped up our presentation with ideas for future research, such as using the internship program to expand the Museum's records to present a more holistic view of the city's history or developing outreach programs to encourage more community engagement.

For me, becoming a Museum docent has provided another way to connect and engage with the community, allowing for enriching and authentic insights as visitors express their own experiences and interest in our history. Sai and I are grateful for the opportunity to present our research at the SWAA conference, and we look forward to continuing our work so that curious minds can easily access the Museum's oral history archives.

~ Mayela Sanchez

Her Side of the Story

Opening June 15

The Museum is pleased to host the exhibit *Her Side of the Story: Tales of California Pioneer Women*, which highlights the hardships, joys, and lives of female pioneers in California. Open through July 23, this traveling exhibit features 30 accounts collected from women who arrived by land or sea to settle throughout California prior to 1854.



Courtesy Society of California Pioneers

Formed in 1900, *The Association of Pioneer Women of California* set out to collect and preserve the reminiscences of California's pioneer women in a single ledger. This ledger, which is the inspiration for this exhibit, creates a more complete and balanced understanding of our shared history by highlighting women's voices and experiences as they made their way to California. In addition to the exhibition, there will be an online resource where visitors can access the ledger's contents and search through the transcriptions to learn more about the women.

~ Jordan Grealish

President's Pen



The history of the Museum starts with the Smith House, a Los Altos landmark building in the Civic Center. Just a few years after Margaret Smith died in 1973, the house, built by her late husband J. Gilbert Smith, became the headquarters for those interested in local history.

In 2001, the new privately funded Museum building opened next door, where

the growing collection could be preserved and diverse exhibitions shared. This year, a new Permanent Exhibition debuted that tells the stories of our local places and the people who've lived here—from the Ohlone to the Spanish, from the orchardists to the technologists. Word of mouth about this exciting new exhibit has spread rapidly, and we are welcoming many new visitors to the Museum.

Lately, the Museum is turning increasing attention to the heritage apricot orchard that fills the quad in the middle of the Civic Center. As stewards of the Smith House, we care about the legacy of the surrounding orchard. In recent years, we've welcomed visitors to the Apricot STEM Fair, a celebration of both our local agricultural heritage and our spirit of scientific innovation. And we mourned the 2022 passing of Phil Doetsch, the orchardist who long tended our apricot grove.

Now the Museum is working with the City of Los Altos to discern new ways to enhance our heritage orchard through adaptive management—beautifying it, making it more productive, introducing new sustainable practices, and creating orchard programs to engage all our residents, particularly young people.

All of this is made possible through the support of members like you. I hope you're proud of what your membership is bringing to our community, and I hope you'll take a moment to suggest a Museum visit to your friends and neighbors and to join you as members.

~ Larry Lang

LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM

"UNDER THE OAKS"

Gary Hedden, *Editor* Judi Eichler, *Graphic Design*

Gloria Geller, *Copy Editor*

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.

Our Hidden Gems

Margaret Smith's 1920s Cookbook

It's summertime in Los Altos, and what better way to celebrate the beginning of summer than with a freshly baked berry pie? Even more interesting—it's a pie recipe taken from a 1920s cookbook owned by Mrs. Margaret Hill Smith herself! The cookbook, called Piggly Wiggly, was sold by the grocery market of the same name for only 50 cents. The cookbook has recipes ranging from soups and salads to sauces and desserts and even includes cooking techniques.



Sophia holding the century-old cookbook.

Piggly Wiggly opened in 1916 in Memphis, Tennessee, and was America's first self-service grocery store. Before that, shoppers would give their orders to a clerk, and the clerk would pick the items off the shelves for them. With Piggly Wiggly, shoppers were allowed to go inside the store and shop for themselves. Today, Piggly Wiggly has more than 500 stores across 18 states located in the South and the Midwest.

How Margaret Smith acquired the cookbook is a mystery, but it is in our collection along with many other books owned by the Smiths. I love the detail of Margaret Smith's handwriting on the front cover and her notes throughout the book.

Please let us know if you want try the berry pie recipe!

~ *Sophia Abarca*

Meet Lillie

Meet Lillie Moore, our newly hired Assistant to the Executive Director. Lillie was born in Tennessee and lived in several places in the US, most recently in Georgia, where she spent four years volunteering at the Fernbank Natural History Museum in Atlanta. She now resides in Santa Clara where she worked as a private history tutor before joining the Museum staff. Lillie holds a BA in History from Virginia Tech, along with a minor in GIS/Remote Sensing. GIS stands for Geographic Information Systems, referring to the tools used to store, visualize, analyze, and interpret geographic data. For her capstone project she tracked the urban growth and development of a town in Wyoming using maps generated from satellite images.



Please help us welcome Lillie to the Museum family!

Volunteer Highlights and Activities

Part of the Museum's vision is to aspire to be the premier local center for intergenerational connections. The manifestation of that vision is apparent in our docent program, where teens work alongside adults to welcome visitors of all ages.

History Docents and Teen Docents act as ambassadors of the Museum, providing an overview of the exhibits and leading tours. They guide visitors to interesting aspects, such as the iPads that enrich the experience of the train diorama through augmented reality, or point out the various features of our Museum complex, including the outside agricultural exhibit and garden.



The Teen Docent program's popularity has grown since its inception in 2018, with over 40 applicants for the current year. Two teens from last year's program, Michael Shtrom and Priscilla Chan, pictured here, recently led walking tours to historical sites along University and Orange Avenues. The tours were well attended and we hope to offer them again!

Docents work four hours per month, which can be divided into two two-hour shifts. The training for History Docents consists of two hours in the Smith House and one-and-a-half hours in the main building and occurs on an as needed basis. The training for the Teen Docents takes place in early Summer for one week.

"Visitor numbers have increased since the new Permanent Exhibition opened," said Liz Nyberg, co-chair of the Docent Steering Committee, who has been training a new crop of adult volunteers. "I'm very pleased with the quality of the docents in training. They're eager to get started."

"We still have empty spots on our calendar, so we need more docents!" Liz implored. To apply, go to losaltoshistory.org/support/volunteer.

~ *Diane Holcomb*

Spotlight on the Oral History Project

Belinda Chung

Belinda is the face greeting shoppers at her State Street store—BK Collections. “BK” stands for “Belinda” and her husband “Kenneth,” but it is also a combination of Belinda’s English name and her Chinese name, “Belinda Kai-Mei.”



Belinda at home. Photo credit Ann Rando.

She arrived in Menlo Park from Hong Kong in 1966 at age 15, along with her mother, siblings, aunts, and cousins. Her grandparents bought a five-unit apartment to house the 30+ family members. After high school, Belinda went to San Jose State while helping

her parents run their Chinese restaurant in Menlo Park. She married, started a family, and on the advice of her good friend Ruth, who married Lawrence “Chef” Chu, she opened a gift store in Los Altos. She felt her own store could give her the flexibility to take care of her three children. That was nearly 45 years ago! When Belinda signed her lease in 1978, she recalls that Los Altos was a very small village, and Peet’s Coffee across the street was just a field of wild grasses.

The downtown store owners are a tight-knit community, and Belinda has been active with the Los Altos Village Association for many years. Belinda admits that downtown Los Altos has changed with development, but she doesn’t see this as a decline in the community that’s so important to her. When Covid-19 happened, she visited each business to share ideas and strategize a plan to build parklets to help the shops and restaurants. This is how she supports the village atmosphere where she knows many customers by name, and where she and her fellow business owners support each other and are supported by the community.

Building on her love of art, Belinda was delighted to work with Arts Los Altos to choose Apricot Blossom as the theme for her building’s mural, again contributing to the village atmosphere and charm.

Belinda is very grateful that she landed in Los Altos and plans to continue filling her store with lovely jewelry, gifts, greeting cards, and clothes.

~ Toni Bassett

History in the News

The theme of this year’s *Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest* was based on the popular outdoor exhibition *Wallace Stegner: A Path to Conservation*. Stegner, a Pulitzer Prize-winning local author, had a visionary passion for environmental conservation and was one of the founders of Green Foothills. Our contest asked 3rd through 6th grade students what inspires them to take action to protect the environment.



On the left, Paul and his mom, Laura. On the right, Ayda and her dad, Matt. Both Almond Elementary School students.

On reading the essays, I was struck by how many reflected on the peril of climate change, with concerns ranging from ocean pollution to losing habitat to simply being scared. This from children only 9 to 12 years old! Fortunately, most offered ideas and solutions. Ellie (3rd grade) wants to be a marine biologist, Vihran (4th grade) puts together “Community Kitchen Kits,” Shanbu (6th grade) wants to raise butterflies, and Ayda (6th grade) wants to plant trees.

Mingkai (5th grade), thinking about the floods in Yellowstone and the fires in Sequoia, feels inspired by “the ability of nature to thrive and flourish under the harshest conditions,” and Paul (6th grade) concludes that together we can provide the one thing we all need: hope.

I am sure Wallace Stegner would agree.

~ Gary Hedden

Staff

Dr. Elisabeth Ward, *Executive Director*

Diane Holcomb, *Director of Communications*

Sophia Abarca, *Curator of Collections*

Jordan Grealish, *Exhibits Specialist*

Lillie Moore, *Assistant to the Executive Director*

Janna Land, *Special Projects*

Faustino Carrillo, *Gardener*

Welcome to our new members:

Richard Adler	Alexandra Niederauer
Allison and Steven Aldrich	Julie Pearce
Jan Baer	Kent Randall
Russell Bartlett	Susan and Douglas Roberts
Wynn Belton	Mark Rogge
Andrea and Andrew Bocking	Susan Rosenberg
Belinda and Kenneth Chung	Karen Rudolph
Jennifer and Brian Cilker	Mimi Salkola
John and Cindy Cook	Samantha and Mark Sandler
Jean and Andy Danver	Judith Wald Seeger
Thomas Dehaan	Iham Sheen
Karen Dickenson	Jessica and Leonard Speiser
Maureen Drobot	Kathryn Stephens
Juliane and Adam Evans	Margaret Stow
Farshad Fallah	Betsy Templeton
Bernardo Ferrari	Jay Thomas
Jann and Graham Freeman	Susan Wojcicki Troper
Nan and Laura Gao	Antonia and Norman Tu
Connie Hooper	Laure and Thomas Tuchscherer
Jake Hsen	Donna Verna
Elena Infeld	John Vidovich
Vikas Kapur	Plato Wang and Catherine Fang
Victoria Levine	Marva and John Warnock
Catherine Liu	Janet Weiss and David Wilson
Judy and George Marcus	Cheng Xie
Steven and Katy McCormick	Nancy and Thomas Yang
Jessica and Shaw Mead	Warren Yang and Jung Yoon
Pat and Rob Meneely	
Bart Nelson	

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So much open space. We miss our tree.

Director's Corner

When Great Trees Fall

For us at the Museum, the felling of the great oak tree that stood majestically beside the J. Gilbert Smith House—and predated the Smith House by over 100 years—was a terrible shock. We understand and appreciate the safety hazard posed by falling branches and are happy the City took proactive action to protect our many visitors.



Still, the way this oak came down was not as we would have wanted. When J. Gilbert Smith acquired this property in 1901, he named it “The Oaks” for the stand of native oaks in the area, and our newsletter is named *Under the Oaks* for that reason. Of that stand of five majestic oaks, two old-growth trees remain. We hope that they will be able to live out their natural life cycle.

I'm reminded of Maya Angelou's moving poem *When Great Trees Fall*. Her poem begins this way:

*When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
lions hunker down
in tall grasses,
and even elephants
lumber after safety.*

*When great trees fall
in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses
eroded beyond fear.*

Trees falling is a natural part of life—part of the cycle of birth, growth, death, and renewal that marks every species in their own time frame. For me, this poem has been echoing in my ears. My niece read it at my father's funeral two days before the City removed the Museum's beautiful oak. Angelou's poem goes on to say:

*When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.
We breathe, briefly.
Our eyes, briefly,
see with
a hurtful clarity.
Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks
never taken.*

...

*And when great souls die,
after a period peace blooms
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
better. For they existed.*

The Museum and many in our community mourn the loss of the beautiful oak. But our community is resilient, and we are already talking about ways to fill the space left by its departure.

~ Dr. Elisabeth Ward

Photo Gallery



Dennis Milligan and Cindy Bogard O'Gorman. Dennis helped with set up and take down for the "Dancing Through the Decades" Gala and Cindy's company was a major sponsor.



Jennifer Springer, Jessica Speiser, Kendra Muscarella, Michelle Sturiale and Valerie Cairns - Welcome to the Gala! Jen and Val helped run it! Photo by Jason Pun.



Jung Yoon and Warren Yang. Jung helped organize the Gala and Warren provided the vintage automobile out front.



Marvin and Ellen Schwartz. Ellen is wearing the United Airlines uniform that she wore in the 60s!



The "Dancing Through the Decades" Gala included lots of dancing, and here, front and center - Janet and Ray Klinke! Photo by Jason Pun.



Spirited bidding by Jeanine Valadez helped make the Gala a grand success. Photo by Jason Pun with Paper Nautilus Studios.

Photo Gallery



Juliana Rodriguez, Foothill College intern, cataloging some of our record cylinders used with old-time Edison phonograph record players in the 1920s.



Four-year olds from Tiny-Tots nursery at the Community Center loving our train diorama in the freshly reopened upper gallery.



Judy Doty and Lindsay Carpenter playing the parts of Margaret and J. Gilbert Smith for third-grade students from Covington Elementary school.



Gerri Acers as Tommy Heath, manager of the San Francisco Seals in the 1950s, giving a baseball history lesson to fourth-grade students from Springer Elementary school.



Historical Commissioner Liza Coe with Margaret Thompson Essay Contest winner Ellie. Proudly looking on, Anne Roberts and Carole Flores, two members of the hard-working Education Committee.



A private tour of fascinating space-age artifacts collected by Steve Jurvetson (l) was presented to some lucky Museum auction winners. Photo credit Ed Taft.



UNDER THE OAKS

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Museum and Store Hours

Thursday to Sunday, Noon-4pm

We are closed New Year's Day, Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

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Event Rentals

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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

Her Side of the Story: Tales of California Pioneer Women, through July 23, Main Gallery.

Drip, Dry, Flood: Orchard Water Management, on display June 29 to Oct. 8, in the J. Gilbert Smith House.

Annual Members Meeting, Wed., June 21, 4:00pm, in person and online.

Apricot STEM Fair, Sat., July 1, 10am-3pm, at the Museum.

The Architecture of Silicon Valley, on display Aug. 3 to Oct. 22, Main Gallery.

Train Days, Sept. 16 and 17, 10am - 3pm, at the Museum.

Member's BBQ and Volunteer Appreciation, Sun., August 27, 5-8pm, at the Museum.

100 Years and Counting: Los Altos Country Club, opens Oct. 12, in the J. Gilbert Smith House.

Board Meetings, Third Wednesday each month, 4 pm, in person and online

Third Thursdays. Join us for stimulating conversations, 5:30-7pm.
June 15, Orchard Irrigation
July 20, North Los Altos Block Party
August 17, Silicon Valley Architecture



Julie McPherson, dressed for the 60s at the April Gala.