los altos history museum

# UNDER THE OAKS

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## Commemorating America's 250th Anniversary

In the United States, the Fourth of July has always occasioned mixed emotions. In a July 3, 1776, letter to his wife, Abigail, John Adams predicted that "succeeding Generations" would commemorate America's independence with "Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other." And indeed, many of us do find joy in the holiday, celebrating with big family cookouts, pool parties, and fireworks.

Yet many Americans have also felt a sense of anger or sorrow on the Fourth. As Frederick Douglass said in 1852, "The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn."

This question—to rejoice or to mourn, to celebrate or to protest—is always heightened during big anniversaries of our independence. In 1876, Philadelphia hosted the Centennial Exposition, a World's Fair and massive celebration of the nation's anniversary. As crowds flocked to Independence Hall on July 4 to hear a reading of the Declaration of Independence, a group of women, led by Susan B. Anthony, interrupted the ceremony, stormed the platform, and passed out their own Declaration of Rights. Anthony later referred to this as her "centennial growl." One person in attendance noted the significance of the moment—"so that the women of 1976 may see their predecessors of 1876 did not allow this centennial year of independence to pass without protest."

*Penny Lave dressed as Betsy Ross at the Bicentennial Program held at the old Los Altos movie theater on Main Street. LAHM Collections, 2016.054.*

The bicentennial also gave rise to complicated emotions. In the 1970s, Americans were deeply divided, with many distrustful of their government, weary of the Vietnam war, and angry about persisting inequalities. After Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974, a wave of hope swept over the nation, and people began to see the bicentennial in a more optimistic light. Bicentennial celebrations sprang up across the country—in big cities and small towns, red states and blue. The bicentennial brand was everywhere: flags and Founding Fathers could be found on everything from food and flatware to license plates, clothing, and toys. This is not to say that everyone was happy with the state of the nation. Many Americans continued to air their grievances in protests and rallies from coast to coast. Yet, in general, there was a greater optimism to this resistance—a belief that things could get better and that speaking out could effect positive change.

*Women's suffrage was one of the significant events reenacted in Los Altos' Bicentennial Parade. LAHM Collections, 1976.006.019.*

This was the case here in Los Altos, where bicentennial optimism gave rise to both celebrations and protests. Residents remember feeling hopeful and lighthearted, throwing huge parties and planning community-building events to celebrate. On September 16, 1976, a "Two Hundred Years in Review" parade ran from Los Altos High School, along San Antonio Road, and ending in the downtown area. Floats depicted significant events from the nation's history, Boy Scouts carried flags of all 50 states, and several marching bands from local high schools

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## Commemorating America's 250th Anniversary

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and various branches of the armed forces played patriotic songs. Others marched or attended dressed as historical figures; the mayor at the time, Roy Lave, even grew a very convincing beard for his role as Uncle Sam!

The hopeful spirit of the bicentennial also helped to inspire local community-building efforts. Roy and Penny Lave combined patriotic festivities with a fundraiser by hosting a bicentennial-themed party to help save the Main Street movie theater, a beloved downtown business facing closure. While their efforts failed and the theater closed that same year, it inspired the Laves to eventually create Los Altos Tomorrow (today the Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation).

Other community members showed their optimism through peaceful protest. In 1974, a group of women in Santa Clara County gathered to express their anger over being told "what leaders and events we should be celebrating." They decided to create a People's Bicentennial Quilt, depicting a warts-and-all version of America's 200-year history and championing the stories of ordinary Americans. Connie Young Yu, one of the quilters and author of *Patchwork History: The People's Bicentennial Quilt*, recalls feeling a great sense of optimism around this act of protest. The quilt celebrated the diversity of the nation, and the quilters felt hopeful that after over 200 years, freedom and equality might finally be extended to all.

Fifty years later, Americans are struggling with how to commemorate the 250th anniversary. Do we rejoice or mourn? Celebrate or protest? Perhaps a little of each. The most important thing is that we do not indulge in indifference and ignore the question altogether. We must take the time to reflect, with open minds and open hearts, on all that has been achieved, and on all the work that remains to be done. In our upcoming exhibition commemorating the 250th, visitors will have the chance to do just that by sharing their own perspectives and questions about the nation's past, as well as their hopes for its future.

*~ Amy Ellison, Curator and Director of Exhibitions*

## Meet Our Newest Board Member

We are delighted to welcome Mira Sharma to the Board of Directors, filling the vacancy left by Christopher Fling. A 26-year Los Altos resident, she has served with the Los Altos Art Docents, on the Los Altos Educational Foundation Board, and as an Ambassador for Loyola Elementary School. She began her career in India as a literary editor at *Katha*, and now contributes to oral history projects and exhibitions at the Museum.

## President's Pen

We are approaching the close of our fiscal year at the end of June and eagerly planning for what we can deliver to our community next year. My term as Board President also ends on June 30th. Our biggest achievements this year have been a renewed focus on our goals, clarity of roles and responsibilities among staff and volunteers, and better definition of Board responsibilities. All of these activities reflect our commitment to operating as a professionally-run museum.

With the help of our amazing volunteers, our staff has consistently delivered meaningful and relevant programs that receive great accolades. Be it the Third Wednesday programs, the changing exhibits, the venue rental program, local student tours, the Teen Docent Program, or our outdoor concert series and family events—all of these programs are now part of the fabric of what makes life in this area so great.

Now the question arises: How do we pay for the new opportunities we want to create?

While we have some very generous donors who have been committed to the long-term success of the Museum, much of our operational funding comes from small contributions within the community. The City of Los Altos is our largest funding source, covering a little more than one tenth of our annual budget. We are truly grateful for the broad support we receive from everyone.

With the changing demographics of the area, we will enhance efforts to engage new community members—namely, younger families—a cohort that is potentially our future set of patrons and visitors.

We will also embark on a more structured development program in the upcoming fiscal year. The future stability and viability of our beloved Museum depends on it. We hope you will continue to support this great local gem and will tell a friend about it, too!

*~ Kuljeet Kalkat*

## Staff

Anna Toledano, PhD, *Executive Director*
Amy Ellison, PhD, *Curator and Director of Exhibitions*
Diane Holcomb, *Director of Communications*
Sophia Lujan, *Curator of Collections*
Lisa Porter, *Rental Events Marketing Manager*
Barbara Klein, *Bookkeeper*

**LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM**
**"UNDER THE OAKS"**

Nora Haley, *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.

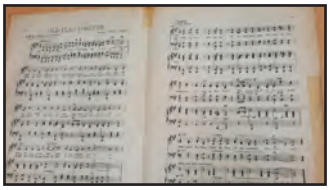
# Our Hidden Gems

*A Local Song of Old Glory*

*Sophia Lujan with* "Old Flag Forever" *sheet music.*

The Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 in Pennsylvania and, over time, American patriotism traveled across the country and found its way to Los Altos. Published in 1908 in Los Altos, the song "Old Flag Forever" reflected the reverence for and connection to the USA flag even 132 years after the United States of America declared its independence.

Los Altos was establishing its roots in 1908 when "Old Flag Forever" was published. At that time, Los Altos was defined by agricultural lands being auctioned off for purchase. The railroad (its train track now Foothill Expressway) was the only means of transportation between cities. Eschenbruecher's Hardware & Post Office and Robinson's Groceries were the sole establishments at the corner of Main and Second Streets. The oak tree that once stood tall at the intersection of Main and First Streets was newly planted. The Orange Avenue neighborhood was starting to develop. And Elite Music & Co. of Los Altos was publishing music.

One particular song published by Elite Music & Co. is "Old Flag Forever," with lyrics by Frank L. Stanton and music by Leila France. These are the lyrics to this patriotic song:

She's up there Old Glory where lightnings are sped:
She dazzles the nations with ripples of red;
And she'll wave for us living, or droop o'er us dead
The flag of our country forever!

CHORUS
She's up there Old Glory
No tyrant dealt scars,
No blur on her brightness
no stain on her stars!
The brave blood of heroes hath crimsoned her bars
She's the flag of our country forever!

She's up there Old Glory how bright the stars stream!
And the stripes like red signals of liberty gleam!
And we dare for her living, or dream the last dream
'Neath the flag of our country forever!

*~ Sophia Lujan, Curator of Collections*

# Volunteer Spotlight: Carole Flores

Los Altos History Museum is fortunate to have many dedicated, long-term volunteers from the community. Very few have been more active than Carole Flores, who began volunteering in 2010. Flores taught at Santa Rita Elementary School in Los Altos for 38 years and, after her retirement, brought her teaching expertise to the Museum.

Flores started volunteering with the Education Committee. She has helped with the 3rd- and 4th-grade school field trip tours, as well as the administration of the annual citywide Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest. In 2012, Flores added the Membership Committee to her list of commitments and chaired that committee until 2025. In addition, Flores has served on the Board of Directors and was the secretary on the Executive Committee during her six years on the Board.

Flores recently moved to Davis to be near her daughter and grandchildren, but she continues to volunteer with the Museum. School tour season occurs in April and May, and Flores helped refine this year's curriculum. In addition, Flores coordinated the 42nd Annual Margaret Thompson Historical Essay Contest.

The essay contest takes place each year and is open to all 3rd through 6th graders who attend Los Altos School District schools, reside in Los Altos, or attend a Los Altos private school. With the help of the Museum's Education Committee, Flores creates a topic, which is generally related to the changing exhibit at the Museum. When the essays are received, Flores facilitates the judging of the contest using a rubric this committee has created. The judges are members of this same committee and the City of Los Altos Historical Commission. There are 12 winners—three from each grade. Each May, the Museum hosts an awards ceremony and ice cream social for the winners and their families.

Thank you, Carole Flores, for your years of dedicated service to Los Altos History Museum. We are grateful for your talents.

*~ Rebecca Lowell, LAHM Board Member*

*Jan Thomas (left) and Carole Flores (right) sign letters to members.*

## Spotlight on the Orchard and Garden

*Introducing Cristina Prevarin, Our New Orchardist*

Spring is bringing new life to the Los Altos Heritage Orchard and the Museum's courtyard garden, with Cristina Prevarin—an orchardist, agronomist, and horticulturalist—overseeing their care. The Museum has hired Gachina Landscape Management of Menlo Park to take on these caretaking duties, with Prevarin managing the day-to-day work of the Gachina team.

Raised in the Italian countryside among orchards and vineyards, Prevarin brings 30 years of expertise in organic practices—from compost teas to beneficial insects—and knows how to nurture both young and mature trees. To protect the orchard long term, her team prunes in summer when the sun helps seal wounds that could invite disease, and plants native clover to feed pollinators and enrich the soil naturally.

*Cristina and team from Gachina Landscape Management*

Sustaining a historic orchard requires both optimism and realism. "Expecting fruit trees to last 100 years is like wanting grandpa to live forever—it's not feasible," Prevarin says. "Apricot trees put a lot of energy into growing fruit and are prone to disease." As an agricultural scientist, she studies the trees, soil, and other factors that affect production and growth. "We'll care for the older trees and train the younger ones—like a family—so the orchard can thrive for generations."

Her first year will focus on observing the trees and learning from both the orchard and the people who have cared for it, while adjusting practices to the seasons and weather. In the Museum's garden, Prevarin's team will work with the Garden Committee to prune, fertilize, and plant new flowers, keeping the space healthy and vibrant for visitors.

*~ Diane Holcomb, Director of Communications*

## History in the News

*The Planning of the Museum Building, 2001*

On the 25th anniversary of its opening, we can thank the late Bob and Marion Grimm (especially Marion) for our 8,200-square-foot building now called Los Altos History Museum.

*The Museum under construction*

Marion had long felt that the J. Gilbert Smith House was too small to be able to present Los Altos' multifaceted heritage, enhance its educational programs, and provide community gathering spaces.

Bob managed to convince the Los Altos City Council to donate the orchard land where the Museum currently sits, provided that the Association of the Los Altos Historical Museum could successfully raise the $3.2 million needed for the construction, exhibit space, and interior build-out.

The Museum's working name was Education Center at History House. Ginny Lear was chair of the capital campaign committee. Once the funds had been privately raised, with major contributions by both the Grimms and Nan and Chuck Geschke, construction by Conrado Home Builders started with a groundbreaking ceremony in June 1999.

Planning for the building was well underway before then. I was Board President for four years and oversaw how our many committees were progressing. Fortunately, the naming committee felt the word "education" was too boring for what would become such a hub of knowledge and vibrancy. Bob, along with Nan Geschke, worked on the design of the building with noted local architect and builder Goody Steinberg. Nan was also the chair of the large committee planning the Permanent Exhibition, with help from The Sibbett Group, a Bay Area exhibition design company.

The beloved train diorama, now part of the Permanent Exhibition in the Geschke Gallery on the second floor, was a stroke of luck. Bob knew Fred Vertel, a Los Altan, who could provide the model train with its turn-around, and Fred knew Bob Brown, who could construct buildings to scale with miniature moving people doing tasks.

Once our new building was finished, we held a well-attended grand opening for the community in March 2001. In 2002, ownership of the building was transferred to the City of Los Altos, which provides annual support to the Museum and maintains the facility.

*~ Liz Nyberg, Chair, Docent Committee*

## Teen Perspective

*Gen Z and the Museum: A Match Made in TikTok Heaven*

*TikTok Team Riya Srivastava and Maddy Chu*

What do Gen Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) and Los Altos History Museum have in common? At first glance, you may think, "Not much." However, through their new TikTok account for the Museum, high school juniors Riya Srivastava and Maddy Chu are showing that social media trends and local history are compatible.

Srivastava has been serving as the youth representative for the Museum's Board of Directors since June 2025. In her current term, she has been focusing on increasing teen engagement with the Museum. Srivastava explained, "One of the things I wanted to work on was a TikTok account because I think that's a great way to reach our generation."

She enlisted the help of Chu, a new teen docent, who has aided in filming and producing the TikTok videos since the account's creation on February 7. As of this writing, they have posted three TikToks: "Day in the Life of a Teen Docent," "Five Best Teen Date Spots in Los Altos," and an advertisement for the Museum's gift shop. As a member of Gen Z, I think they are not only funny and clever but also extremely informative.

But how do they balance being both educational and humorous for an audience of high school students? Srivastava and Chu faced this daunting task while filming a recent video about three items in the Smith House that are older than their grandparents. "We took that educational side and tried to make it something that's fun and relatable for the audience," Srivastava said.

I'm sure this next video will attract even more viewers than the others. Like me, you're probably already doomscrolling, so why not check it out? Find your next favorite video at @losaltoshistorymuseum on TikTok.

*~ Derrick Harris, Teen Docent*

## Director's Corner

*Online Fundraiser: Spring into Giving*

For this year's annual fundraiser, we're doing things a little differently. After working with a development consultant last fall to strategize for our future, we've decided to host a spring fundraiser that meets you exactly where you are—literally. We're trading in the dress shoes for fuzzy slippers and moving this year's drive online. There are no set ticket prices and no need to dress up. Support the Museum from the comfort of your own couch!

Simplifying our approach this year allows us to maximize staff and volunteer time while ensuring that every contribution goes directly to where it is needed most. Our "Donation Registry" includes essential items that will help us keep the Museum running smoothly, such as new folding chairs for our events, professional modular walls for our exhibit space, and even window shades to block the intense sun at the docent desk. You can also support our dedicated staff by funding their professional training or conference attendance. Whether you choose to fund a specific need or give where it's needed most, no contribution is too small to make a meaningful impact.

This strategic shift also lets us focus our energy on a massive milestone: our 50th Anniversary fundraising gala! Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 15, 2027, for the biggest celebration in our history. We want everyone in our community to feel welcome at this golden anniversary blowout. If you want to get a head start by helping us plan the gala, please let me know at *atoledano@losaltoshistory.org*! In the meantime, put on your favorite robe, grab your laptop, and help us gear up for the future. Visit our website today or scan the QR code below to view our Donation Registry and share your support of our mission. We're grateful for you!

*~ Anna Toledano*

**Spring into Giving! Browse our online Donation Registry and fund what inspires you.**

## Welcome to our New Members

Cindy Anderson
Theresa Brown
Helen and Dennis Chan
Betsy Childrey
Patty Dick
Juliet Ezzati
Joyce Larson
Sandy Mingia and Gary Maggard
Michelle Morris
Meris Ota and John O'Brien
Andrea Reichert
Christa Simon
Pauline Tseng

## Business Members

**Corporate Members**
Bogard-Tanigami Team
BriteCo, Inc.
Cloudinary
Kiwanis Club of Los Altos
Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation
Recor Medical

**Business**
DJM Inspections
Christopher Fling, Realtor
Garden Club of Los Altos
Illuminate Properties
Los Altos Town Crier
Pine Cone Lumber Co, Inc.

**Partner**
BK Collections

# Photo Gallery

*Board members strike a pose on the steps of the J. Gilbert Smith House during a donor appreciation photo.*

*Girl Scouts earn badges in the garden by following the design layout, learning about plants, and spreading seeds.*

*Charro Christian Navarrete demonstrates rope tricks at Rancho Day. Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

*A young visitor taps into his creative side while crafting tin art at Rancho Day. Photo by Malcolm Taam.*

*Schola Cantorum fills the Museum with holiday cheer at Catch the Spirit. Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

*Egan Junior High School chorus sings festive favorites at Catch the Spirit.*

# Photo Gallery

*Medicinal, culinary, and pollinator plants flourish in the Apothecary Herb Garden.*

*Oral historian Farhana Afroz shares techniques for capturing lived experiences at the Oral History Workshop.*

*Executive Director Anna Toledano and Board President Kuljeet Kalkat preview* 10,000 Memories.

*Baljit Dhillon Vikram Singh shares her Partition story at the preview of* 10,000 Memories.

Portraits of Los Altos *brings early residents and families into focus in the Community Corner display.*

*Volunteers wrap up the garden shed cleanup.*

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*www.losaltoshistory.org*

**Museum and Store Hours**
***Thursday to Sunday, Noon-4pm***
*We are closed New Year's Day, Easter, Juneteenth, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.*

**General Inquiries**
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*hello@losaltoshistory.org*

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

**Event Rentals**
*(650) 948-9427 x12*
*weddings@losaltoshistory.org*

**Mission Statement** *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

***10,000 Memories: Partition, Independence, and WWII in South Asia,*** on display in the Main Gallery through May 24.

**Online Fundraiser: Spring into Giving**, May 1–Jun 15.

**Interpreting the Partition through Poetry and Art**, Wed, May 20, 5:30–7pm.

***America's 250th***, on display in the Main Gallery Jun 18–Nov 8.

**Annual Meeting of Members**, Tues, Jun 23, 4–5:30pm.

**Apricot STEM Fair**, Sun, Jun 28, 11am–3pm.

**Members' Summer Social**, Sun, Aug 2, 5–8pm.

**Train Day**, Sun, Aug 30, 11am–4pm.

***The Road I Call Home***, on display in the Main Gallery Nov 19, 2026–Jan 24, 2027.

Stay tuned for our **Concerts in the Courtyard** series and **Third Wednesday** programs during the summer!

*Who can't resist a tasty treat? Certainly not this young visitor at Catch the Spirit. Photo by S.M. Lieu.*

**Board Meetings** Fourth Tuesday of each month, 4 pm, in person and online.