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# The Tall Tree

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

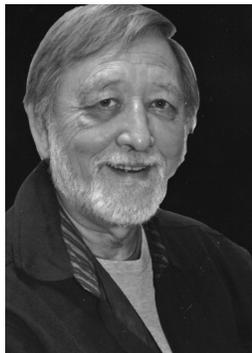
## GENERAL MEETING

Sunday, January 28 at 2:00 p.m.  
Children's Theatre  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Free & open to the public  
Cookies & coffee

*Note: The usual first-Sunday-afternoon meeting of PAHA has been rescheduled to avoid conflict with the SuperBowl.*

## 75 Years of Children's Theatre Magic



**SPEAKER:**  
**Michael Litfin**  
Associate Director  
Palo Alto  
Children's Theatre

With this month's program, the Palo Alto Historical Association and the Children's Theatre jointly celebrate "75 Years of Children's Theatre Magic." What more fitting location could be chosen than the Theatre itself? Michael Litfin, associate director, will present a program of reminiscences followed by an Open House and backstage tours.

Friday, January 26, is opening night for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first play performed when the present facility opened in 1937. An alumni reunion is scheduled for

Saturday, January 27. Pat Briggs, the director since 1961, and Michael Litfin, are planning with the Friends of Palo Alto Children's Theatre and alumni, to hold celebratory events throughout 2007.

Hazel Glaister Robertson first proposed the idea of a theater in which children perform for children in 1932. She persuaded the City of Palo Alto to let her use the community center (now MacArthur Park restaurant) that was originally designed by Julia Morgan as a hostess house for Camp Fremont during WWI.

The present Children's Theatre was a gift of Mrs. Louis Stern (Lucie Stern). Designed by Birge Clark, it is a fully-equipped theater. Thousands of children have taken part in the Theatre's activities since its opening in 1937.

Palo Alto was the first city in the United States to have a tax-supported children's theater. It has received national honors and publicity, and serves as a model for similar ventures throughout the country.



*The 1936 production of Peter Pan at Children's Theatre.*



*Hazel Glaister Robertson, c. 1903 - 1983, founder and first director of the Palo Alto Children's Theatre. Co-author (with Caroline Fisher) of the book, Children and the Theater. (Photo: 1950)*

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PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The Palo Alto Historical Association, a non-profit organization, was established in 1948 as successor to an earlier organization founded in 1913. Its main objectives are:

- Collect, organize, and preserve materials pertaining to the history and heritage of Palo Alto.
- Spread information about Palo Alto's history by means of programs, displays, and publications.
- Recognize and preserve historic sites and structures.

The Guy Miller Archives of the Palo Alto Historical Association are stored at the Main Library, 1213 Newell Road.

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except for August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 p.m.

General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (Oct.–Dec., Feb.–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 p.m. The final general meeting of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all meetings.

## PAHA HERITAGE PROGRAMS

CHANNEL 30

JANUARY: SILICON VALLEY,  
AFTER WWII

FEBRUARY: 75 YEARS OF  
CHILDREN'S THEATRE  
SCHEDULE

Wednesdays	8:00 p.m.
Thursdays	Noon
Saturdays	1:00 p.m.

Videos of past PAHA meetings can be checked out from the Main Library's History Desk during historian's hours:

Tuesday evenings  
Thursday afternoons

# What the Palo Alto Children's Theatre Means to Me...

## VOICES OF CHILDREN'S THEATRE PLAYERS

"This is my first show at the Children's Theatre and when I walked up to the group at auditions, I assumed that I would be an outcast [as] a newcomer. Instead, people asked me questions, talked to me, and tried to incorporate me into the group. That made me feel comfortable and happy that I was going to be part of such a fun cast."—*Emelyn Hicks, age 12*

"To me, the Palo Alto Children's Theatre is a place where I can learn about acting and grow as an actor, all the while having fun in the process. My nervousness in front of an audience has almost melted away because of all the encouragement I have received here."—*Nick Ziebell, age 14*

"The Children's Theatre has been like a second home to me. There are many people there who care about me and I feel like I fit right in. Almost like a piece in a puzzle. I know I will forever be influenced in my future by my time at the Children's Theatre."—*Tucker King, age 13*

"To me, the Children's Theatre is where I can socialize, dance, make bad jokes, meet new people, and sing. It's a place where I can go to occupy my time and sometimes have intellectual conversations. To me, Children's Theatre means home."—*Jenny Dally, age 11*

## FROM THE DESK OF THE HISTORIAN STEVE STAIGER

Theatre goers in Palo Alto have enjoyed the benefits of Lucie Stern's series of gifts to the people of Palo Alto that created the Lucie Stern Community Center. For 70 years, Palo Altans have attended plays in the complex's two theaters. But, this center was not the first home for community-based theater in town.

In the early days of Palo Alto, audiences could attend amateur productions in one of the local halls. Nortree Hall, located in the 300 block of University Avenue, was a large, open room on the second floor used for meetings, church services, dances, and musical and dramatic performances. On occasion, a traveling professional troupe would perform at one of the halls.

During World War I, The YWCA funded the construction and operation of a Hostess House at the U.S. Army's training facility in Camp Fremont, in what is now downtown Menlo Park. The building was designed by Julie Morgan and operated for a few months in 1918 until the camp was shut down that fall, at war's end. The people of Palo Alto offered to save the building and move it to Palo Alto.

In 1919, the building was divided and moved by teams of horses to its new site on University Avenue, just west of the train tracks. The Hostess House became the Community House, the first municipally-run community center in the United States with a variety of programs in recreation, athletics, concerts, lectures, child care and an active employment bureau. A newly-established amateur theatrical group offered plays in the large main room.

Lucie Stern, who reportedly enjoyed the plays, was irritated by the trains roaring through Palo Alto in the middle of evening productions. So, she hired Birge Clark to design a large community center theater on Middlefield Road, far enough from the tracks to avoid interruptions. Her gifts funded the community theater and rehearsal space, the wing with the Children's Theatre, an area for the Boy Scouts, the wing with the ballroom and offices and, finally, in 1940, the Children's Library.



Look for this plaque next time you attend a performance at Children's Theatre!



Pat Briggs, Director of the Palo Alto Children's Theatre from 1961 to the present.

## Meet Pat

Pat Briggs has been the director of the Palo Alto Children's Theatre since 1961. She has not only directed over 450 productions, but has also created over 20 scripts for production. Besides acting as director, Pat teaches in Summer Conservatory as well as handles such duties as planning, budget, facility and personnel. In 1999, she received the Campton Bell Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. In 2003, Pat was named Woman of the Year from Assembly District 21.

### IN MEMORIAM

Jean Bothwell Mitchell,  
long-time PAHA supporter,  
1914 - 2006.



## I WAS THERE

In the spring of 1938, when the Palo Alto Children's Theatre scheduled performances of *Little Women*, so many girls wanted to portray the March sisters that our beloved director, Hazel Glaister Robertson, doubled the cast, with two actors alternating in each role. My best friend, Maryetta Fagan, and I, were thrilled to be cast as Amy, the youngest of the sisters.

A major problem arose at once. Louisa May Alcott described Amy as a blue-eyed blond, "a regular snow maiden." Maryetta and I were brunettes, with black hair and brown eyes. Hazel's first thought was wigs, so we all trekked to Goldstein's the old theatrical supplier in San Francisco. We tried on their wigs (which were meant for the ample persons of the San Francisco Opera) and we girls simply disappeared under the cascades of golden Valkyrie hair. Next, Hazel dusted our hair with gold and yellow powder and sprayed it with hair shellac. Under the stage lights, our hair turned a sickly green. What to do? Hazel decreed that Amy would be brunette—and literal-minded little girls in the audience would just have to accept it.

In rehearsal, there were hilarious moments as we active girls learned to tame our hoopskirts, and an unforgettable moment in the Pickwick Club scene when the boy playing Laurie Laurence emerged from under the desk where he had been concealed by Jo, sneezing his head off. The lad playing old Mr. Laurence had shaken pepper liberally into the hidey-hole.

We "toured" *Little Women* to San Francisco and Burlingame, giving lots of performances. When I stepped out of my hoopskirt for the last time, it was like saying goodbye to a good friend. —Patty Hoagland McEwen



Patty Hoagland McEwen as Amy in the 1938 Children's Theatre production of *Little Women*.



Dancers in *Almost Nine*, produced by Children's Theatre in 1934.

## Williams House Turns 100

The Museum of American Heritage is celebrating the 100th year of its existence at 351 Homer Avenue, Palo Alto. Through the eyes of two little girls, come and glimpse how families of the early 20th century lived.

The exhibit will run from February 9, 2007 through June 3, 2007, every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 11:00 am to 4:00 pm.



### WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Joan & Gordon Campbell  
Camille Townsend  
Ruth Kerr Jakoby  
Dianne MacDaniel &  
David Jones  
Susan & Tom Nolan  
Patricia Tomson Carlson  
Dorothy V. Melberg

## 75 Years of Children's Theatre



The Palo Alto Children's Theatre is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2007. Get your tickets now for the anniversary production of

*Snow White  
and the  
Seven Dwarfs*

Friday, January 26  
Opening Night & Reception  
7:30 PM

### INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PAHA MEMBER?

*Here's how...* Pick up a brochure at any library or one of our general meetings. Or, send your name, address, phone number and email address to

PAHA, P.O. Box 193  
Palo Alto, CA 94302

with a check for your choice of membership: Individual: \$25;  
Family: \$40; Sustaining: \$60;  
Business: \$100; Life: \$350.

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