

MARCH 2011
VOLUME 34, NUMBER 5

The Tall Tree

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING, FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Sunday, March 6 at 2:00 PM at the
Lucie Stern Community Center, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

PRESERVATION CONNECTING YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

THE JUANA BRIONES HOUSE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN PICTURES OR WORDS.



SPEAKER:
Scott Smithwick
*Architect,
President of PAST,
Editor-in-chief of AIA
of Santa Clara Valley's
newsletter*

Architect Scott Smithwick will present the house's story as a local case study for the cause of historic preservation.

The news-making house was the residence of Juana Briones de Miranda, a remarkable 19th century woman. Briones was one of the few women in California in her time to own property in her own name. She was a skilled rancher, farmer, business-woman and healer. In May 2010, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Briones House to their prestigious "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" list.

Scott Smithwick will give a brief history of Juana Briones and the property. He'll cover various additions and alterations that were made as well as its importance to archeology, native California plants and the connection to some of the great 20th Century artists. Smithwick will also cover the legal battles, the effort to prevent demolition over the last decade and Palo Alto Stanford Heritage's (PAST) current efforts to purchase the property. He'll also explain why preservation is the ultimate "green" sustainable thing one can do for our environment.

Scott was born and raised in Cupertino, studied architecture at Philadelphia University, is now an Associate of Cody Anderson Wasney Architects in Palo Alto. He has worked on several historic projects, including Encina Hall at Stanford, California Hall at UC Berkeley, and the Allied Arts Guild in Menlo Park.



*Photograph of Juana Briones
(courtesy of Archives, Point Reyes
National Seashore).*



The front of the Briones House seen from afar in the early 1900s (PAHA Archives).

THE MARCH CABLE program, Heritage, on Channel 30 will be "Victorious Palo Alto High School Coach—Earl Hansen," filmed at the January 2011 PAHA meeting. DVDs of PAHA programs are available at the Main Library's History Desk, Tuesday, 4–8 PM and Thursday, 1–4 PM.

The Tall Tree is published eight times a year by the

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The Palo Alto Historical Association, is a non-profit organization. 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 PAHA are stored at the Main Library, 1213 Newell Road. See the calendar, p.4, for the schedule of public meetings.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Bill and Rosemary Nichols

Mary Atwater

BECOME A MEMBER OF PAHA

- Individual \$25
- Family \$40
- Sustaining \$60
- Business/Sponsor \$100
- Life \$350

Make check payable to PAHA and mail to: PAHA Box 193

Palo Alto, CA 94302

Or join online at www.pahistory.org.

Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee.



DOUG GRAHAM
President, PAHA

Barron Park's Old-Time Volunteer Fire Department

ONCE UPON A TIME, BARRON PARK HAD ITS OWN FIRE department, housed in a little aluminum shack at 4042 El Camino Real. The shack is still there, almost hidden behind the Lanai Florist. It provides no hint to the modern eye of its storied past.

In early 1949, Barron Park voted 225-60 to establish the Barron Park Fire Protection District. From 1920, when the first "orchard houses" were built on the newly subdivided 350-acre Barron Estate, until 1949 when there were 165 homes, the unincorporated area was protected by the California Department of Forestry. The inadequacy of this arrangement was disastrously demonstrated on Thanksgiving Weekend, 1936, when the three-story Victorian Barron Mansion—originally built in 1878 by Sarah Wallis—caught fire. Fire engines from Menlo Park, Redwood City, and Moffett Field fought the flames. Palo Alto's engine, however, sat at the City Limits 200 yards away doing nothing. Barron Park citizens nursed a grudge that prevented Palo Alto's annexation attempts for the next 40 years and was a driving force behind the formation of the Barron Park Fire Department.

Chet Slinger, the first Fire Chief, supervised the growth of the department, secured the leasing of the firehouse, equipped it with an alarm system, and acquired a 1949 Van Pelt pumper truck. His Fire Department was ready to respond to its first call on November 21, 1949, to put out an early morning blaze at 891 Jude Avenue. Chief Slinger had overseen the intensive training of 17 volunteers who doused the fire with minimal property damage and no loss of life. In 1951, he purchased a new GMC 40-gallon-per-minute high-pressure pumper (see the photo of this truck under restoration in 2006).



1951 GMC High-Pressure Pumper
(courtesy of Al Larsen).

Another dramatic moment for the Fire Department came at 4:00 AM one winter morning when the Cameo Club on El Camino caught fire, when the temperature was in the 20s, one of the coldest mornings of the year. Joe Weiler reported that when they attached the hoses to fire hydrants, the water froze before it reached the blaze. The pavement was icy and they even had trouble standing up. They'd never fought a fire like this one. Weiler said, "Someone should have taken photos because it was pretty comical."

Another fire had its comical side, too. A fire of mysterious origin broke out at Bol's Barn (located at the back of the current Bol Park) on February 22, 1974. The department was called and responded promptly, but no one had remembered to bring the key to the gate at the donkey pasture. So back they went to the firehouse (a mile away) and got the key, then back to the pasture again and unlocked the gate. The pumper truck immediately bogged down in the muddy pasture. The firefighters hooked the hose to a hydrant on Laguna Ave, but they didn't have enough hose to reach the barn. The fire burned merrily, but no one could do anything to put it out. After the barn roof collapsed, there was no longer any danger to the houses on Ilima Way, and spectators stood around admiring the fire. When a tow truck arrived, it, too, got stuck in the mud. Eventually the firefighters hosed down and cooled the embers. A second tow truck rescued the first one, and together they pulled the pumper out.

This event may have had something to do with Barron Park's 2-1 vote the next year to annex to Palo Alto. "The last remaining volunteer fire department on the floor of the Santa Clara Valley" then expired, but will long be remembered.

Ishi—A True Californian

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO A MIDDLE-AGED CALIFORNIAN LEFT HIS HOME in the foothills east of Red Bluff and stumbled into the 20th century. We have known him as Ishi, although that was not his given name but rather the word for “man” in his native Yahi language.



FROM THE
DESK OF THE
HISTORIAN
Steve Staiger

Growing up in California we learned the story of the last “wild” man, who was the last of his people. He was befriended by anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, and came to live with the people he had feared his entire life.

Ishi was born in the foothills of Mount Lassen during the years of the American Civil War. When he was a child, a group of ranchers massacred half of his people, and the remaining members fled into the hills and hid from any contact with the outside world for more than 40 years. Anthropologists long thought that his people, their culture and language were extinct.

In 1908, a survey party working for an electric power company accidentally discovered the last four members, including Ishi and his mother. The other two members fled into the hills and were never seen again. Within a few months, his mother was dead and Ishi was the only survivor. For three more years he lived and survived alone in the wild.

Following his decision to leave his homeland, he came to live in San Francisco at the University of California Anthropology Museum. He demonstrated bow and arrow making, as well as other aspects of his nearly-extinct culture. For years, his newly constructed artifacts were a significant part of the museum’s collection (now in Berkeley). Only later did the anthropologists realize that his tools were not identical to the tools of his ancestors because he freely adapted 20th century materials to ‘improve’ his craft.

Only once did he return to his former home. Traveling with one of the anthropologists, his visit was emotionally difficult, dealing with his memories of his lost family. He was able to demonstrate how he survived for so many years in a land poor in so many resources.

Ishi died in San Francisco in 1916. He was in his mid-60’s. His immune system was unable to fight off the many new diseases it was exposed to in a modern city. In 1961, approximately 100 years after his birth, Theodora Kroeber, using the notes of her husband, published the story of the man she had never met. *Ishi in Two Worlds* remains a popular biography of a true Californian.



Ishi (Wikipedia)



Ishi in 1914; demonstrating making fire (Wikipedia)

Duveneck Exhibit

A NEW EXHIBIT, “TOUCHING LIVES: THE DUVENECKS OF HIDDEN VILLA” WILL BE ON VIEW until June 27, 2011 at the Los Altos History Museum. The exhibit celebrates the lives and achievements of Palo Alto luminaries, Josephine and Frank Duveneck.

The Duvenecks were social activists, Quakers, and dedicated environmentalists. The exhibit documents lives they touched—children, Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Blacks in and beyond the San Francisco Bay Area. The exhibit also traces their early affluent lives in Boston and the purchase of Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills, California. It describes the many programs they drove at Hidden Villa and the educational activities that take place there today. Among other focal points are: “Memories of Frank and Josephine”—a new video featuring some of the people whose lives they touched as well as family members and friends; a replica of Frank Duveneck’s blacksmith shop where he made toys for his children and a variety of items for the ranch and house; a video of a blacksmith at work; a replica of the Duvenecks’ home at Hidden Villa where they socialized with friends and hosted activists such as Cesar Chavez and Wallace Stegner; and a children’s corner filled with educational toys and books.

Information about the exhibit, museum location, and museum hours is also available at www.losaltoshistory.org/duveneck.html.



1972 (above) and 1978 (below)
photos of Mr. & Mrs. Duveneck
(PAHA Guy Miller Archives)

Things to Do and Places to Go

"MUSIC OF THE ANTARCTIC EXPLORATION EXPEDITIONS"

6:30 PM Saturday, March 12

Museum of American Heritage (MOAH), 351 Homer Avenue, Palo Alto.

Left Bank/Rive Gauche is well known to MOAH audiences for their thoughtful interpretations of historic cafe music. This year, they take us on a musical adventure to the South Pole.



Left Bank/Rive Gauche presents at MOAH, March 12 (from usgs.gov).

Their 65-minute presentation was first performed at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty. Historic photographs, period music selections and text will illustrate the importance of music in the lives of explorers and scientists involved in two centuries of Antarctic Exploration.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE TALK, DATE CHANGE: Jeanne Farr McDonnell, who has extensively researched the history of women's gaining the right to vote in California, will speak on May 1 about **"Broad Themes Within the California Woman Suffrage Movement."** Concurrently, the Saratoga History Museum has an exhibit about Isabella Blaney, a local suffragist there. The talk will be at 1:00 at the Odd Fellows Grand Hall on 14414 Oak Street, Suite B, in Saratoga.

PAHA's Public Meetings to Come

Meetings are held at the
Lucie Stern Community Center 2 PM

**MARCH 6: *Preservation: Connecting
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow***

Save the dates

PAHA MEETINGS 2011:

**APRIL 3: *Ric Ambrose, Executive
Director, Pacific Art League***

MAY 1

JUNE 1: ANNUAL DINNER

As the editors of the Tall Tree become more "green," we offer you the option of receiving your Tall Tree digitally. If you're interested, please send your request electronically (include your preferred email address) to PAHA Secretary Bardy Wallace, bdgw@pacbell.net.

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Refreshments will be served.