

# The Tall Tree

JUNE 2012  
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NEWSLETTER of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## *The Palo Alto Historical Association Annual Dinner*

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

6:00 PM Social Hour, 7:00 PM Dinner

Ming's Restaurant

1700 Embarcadero Road, Palo Alto

## HISTORY & NEWSPAPERS— Can One Live Without the Other?



*Bill S. Johnson, Publisher of the Palo Alto Weekly  
(Photo: Palo Alto Weekly)*

BILL JOHNSON FOUNDED THE PALO ALTO WEEKLY 32 years ago and has been serving the community in leadership capacities ever since. Born in Palo Alto, Bill places a high priority on community service and using his newspapers to thoughtfully explore important issues.

A pioneer in online publishing, the *Palo Alto Weekly* became the first newspaper in the country to post its contents on the internet, and attracts some 140,000 unique visitors each month to *Palo Alto Online*. More than 13,000 people subscribe to *Express*, the *Weekly's* e-mailed daily news digest.

Bill has served on numerous boards, including the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, California Newspaper Publishers Association, Children's Health Council, Avenidas and Stanford's Haas Center for Public Service. Through donated ad space, sponsorships and editorial coverage, his papers have consistently sought to support local nonprofit groups. In addition, the *Palo Alto Weekly* Holiday Fund has raised and given away almost \$4 million in grants to organizations serving families and children.

*All Are Welcome*

*Reservations required by May 31 (see insert); \$45 per person*

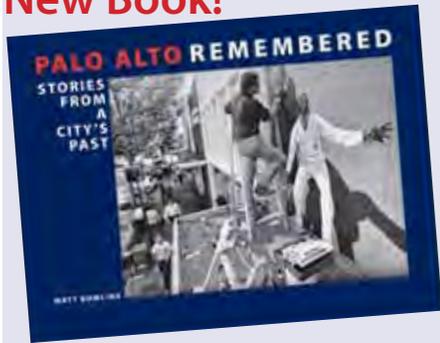


All American Market employee cleans up after the earthquake, 1989. (PAHA Archives)

## Flashback to the Loma Prieta Quake

At 5:04 p.m. on October 17, 1989, Palo Alto and the Bay Area were shaken by an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale. Last spring, Palo Alto High School student, Manon von Kaenel of *The Paly Voice*, interviewed then-student, now Palo Alto High School teacher Sarah Bartlett about her memories of that day. Internal links in the article provide additional recollections and images from that day at <http://palyvoice.com/node/27197>.

## New Book!



**PALO ALTO REMEMBERED** by **Matt Bowling** —not your usual history book! Published by PAHA, the book is on sale for \$25 at Bell's Books, Books Inc. and the Village Stationer in Palo Alto and at Keplers in Menlo Park.

To find out more, or to order online, go to [www.paloaltoremembered.com](http://www.paloaltoremembered.com).

**WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

Ron Olmstead  
June Casey  
Susan Rosenberg  
*Life member*

# Six Flags Over California

TEXAS CELEBRATES ITS HISTORY WITH THE NAME OF AN AMUSEMENT PARK in Arlington, "Six Flags Over Texas," honoring the six national flags to have flown over the state. Today, the Six Flags amusement parks can be found throughout the country including the former Marine World in Vallejo. But most Californians are not aware that our state also has had six national flags fly over the state.



FROM THE DESK OF THE HISTORIAN Steve Staiger

We are familiar with the flags of Spain, Mexico and the United States having flown over California. Some will recall that Francis Drake visited California in 1579 and claimed the land for England. And like Texas, there was an independent republic, the California Republic that flew its flag briefly over at least part of the state in 1846.

The sixth flag is that of Russia. Fort Ross, in Sonoma County, was the southern-most outpost of Russian colonization in North America. Two hundred years ago in 1812, Fort Ross was established primarily as an agricultural station to feed the colonists in Alaska. There was a Russian Orthodox chapel and the first windmill in California and a fortified stockade constructed of redwood timbers harvested nearby were included in the fort's structures. Residents of Fort Ross included Russian, Aleuts and other native Alaskans. It also operated as a base for sea otter hunting along the California coast. There are accounts of Aleuts kayaking through the Golden Gate to hunt for sea otter in the bay. The Spanish soldiers were unable to contest this intrusion as their cannon could not reach the Marin side of the Golden Gate.

Fort Ross remained a settlement until 1841 when the colonists retreated to Alaska. The buildings, a few cannon and other material not shipped back to Alaska were sold to John Sutter who had every valuable article sent to his Sutter's Fort in the Central Valley. Sixteen years later, the Russians would abandon all of their North American colonies, selling Alaska to the United States for \$7.2 million.



Fort Ross (California State Parks, <http://www.parks.ca.gov>)

# Palo Altan Came on a Junk

HISTORY TOUCHES OUR CITY IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS. Reno Chia-Lin Chen, a resident of Palo Alto for many decades until he passed away in 2007 is one of a very small number of people who have emigrated to the United States by sailing a Chinese junk across the North Pacific. He came with five other men who crewed the junk. The men, most of them fishermen, had fled mainland China individually in 1949 when the Red Army defeated Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces. Reno himself left on the last boat out of Shanghai and fled to Taiwan.



DOUG GRAHAM  
President, PAHA

In 1955, Reno and five other men acquired a commercial junk, with the purpose of entering it in a Cross-Atlantic Yacht race from Rhode Island to Stockholm, Sweden. After some delay, they were accepted as entrants and then had to prepare the boat for oceanic crossings and learn how to crew her. The six had to handle an 80-foot sailing boat (no engine) which normally carried a crew of fifteen. They made two false starts from Taiwan. On the third try they kept going, 6,000 miles across the notoriously stormy North Pacific.

They reached San Francisco in August, 1955, broke and too late to continue on to the yacht race. But their fame preceded them; the Coast Guard escorted the junk in from the Farallones and under the Golden Gate Bridge (see photo). The crew was met by hundreds of San Franciscans and the Consul General to Nationalist China. "The first Chinese junk to enter San Francisco Bay in a century—or maybe ever—did so yesterday," read one of the local papers. Celebrations also proceeded in Taiwan.

After the festivities, the crew sailed *Free China* to China Camp in Marin County, where it was sold. The crew dispersed to begin new lives in California. For years, the *Free China* plied the bay waters, undergoing renovations, changes to the hull and the addition of a diesel engine. Finally, the junk reached the end of its life and was grounded as a derelict hulk, stripped of sails, mast, deckhouse and most of its equipment

The hull and decking of *Free China* has been preserved, and there is now new interest in Chinese technology. It is being shipped home to be fully restored in Taiwan. It is one of the few remaining "traditionally built" Chinese commercial vessels left in the world, was built in 1905, and has already lasted much longer than wooden vessels usually do.

The junk was saved largely through the efforts of Dione Chen, Reno Chen's daughter. Dione grew up in Palo Alto, on Ilima Way in Barron Park and is a Gunn graduate. Dione's mother Iris Chen still lives in the Chen home near mine. Reno and Iris have participated in the community life of Ilima Way but rarely talked about how Reno came to this country. For some of us, it was only at Reno's memorial service that we heard the story.

Not only has the Chen family resided in Palo Alto since about 1961 and contributed to our city, but now we can be proud that one of Palo Alto's daughters has made possible the restoration of *Free China*, an important piece of China's and the world's technological history. [Sources: *Iris Chen*; SJ Mercury News April 15, 2012; *Chinese Junks on the Pacific* by Hans K. Van Tilburg, 2007]



Free China entering Golden Gate in 1955. (Cover photo from *Chinese Junks on the Pacific*, Hans K. Van Tilburg and SJ Mercury News, 2012.)



Free China Crew in 1995. Palo Altan Reno Chen is the man standing at the right with his arm extended. (From the Paul Chow collection and SJ Mercury News, 2012.)

**Note to Readers:** as the editors of the Tall Tree become more "green," we offer you the option of receiving your Tall Tree digitally. If you are interested, please email your request (include your preferred email address) to PAHA Secretary Bardy Wallace, at [bdgw@pacbell.net](mailto:bdgw@pacbell.net).

**Oral Histories:** are an invaluable method to preserve local history. To volunteer, help record, or give an oral history yourself, contact: Carol Mitchell at [carolcmitchell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:carolcmitchell@sbcglobal.net).

*Our mission is to collect, preserve and make available to the public information about the history of Palo Alto.*

## History Jaunts

### **Celebrate Preservation Month with Palo Alto Stanford Heritage Association.**

On Sunday, May 20 from 1–3 PM, PAST will hold its 17th Annual Preservation Awards ceremony at the Palo Alto Woman’s Club, 475 Homer/Cowper. For more information, see: [www.pastheritage.org](http://www.pastheritage.org).

### **The Golden Gate Bridge: Icon, Metaphor, Inspiration**

Friday, May 25, 2012, 6 PM. An evening with John King, urban architecture critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A Free Event hosted by the California Historical Society, 678 Mission Street, San Francisco. RSVP required at <http://johnkingggg.eventbrite.com/>.

### **Wolfe & Wolfe Prairie Homes Tour in Historic San Jose**

Saturday, August 18, 10 AM–4 PM: The Preservation Action Council of San Jose (PAC\* SJ) features eight Prairie houses in San Jose. The Prairie School is an American indigenous architectural style developed in the Midwest in the late 1800s, featuring horizontal lines, flat or hipped roofs with broad overhanging eaves, and windows grouped in horizontal bands. Frank Lloyd Wright was the most famous of the Prairie School architects. See: [www.frankdeloswolfe.com](http://www.frankdeloswolfe.com).

**Heritage Program on Channel 30** The TV cable program, *Heritage*, on Channel 30 in June, will be “Palo Alto Remembered—The Book” from the May 6, 2012 meeting. Community leaders Susan Rosenberg, Gary Fazzino, Peter Drekeimer, and artist Greg Brown are featured. *Heritage* will be broadcast Wednesdays at 8 PM, Thursdays at 10:30 AM, and Saturdays at 1 PM. DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed at the History Desk of the Palo Alto Main Library, Tuesday 4–8 PM, and Thursday 1–5 PM.

## Become a Member of PAHA

We invite you to become a member of the Association and join those who care about Palo Alto and enjoy learning about its history. Your dues support the preservation of our archives, assistance to researchers and dissemination of Palo Alto historical information through our publications. Join today!

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 [pahistory.org](http://pahistory.org). Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee. (Note: current members will receive renewal notices in July.)

## PAHA's Public Meetings

JUNE 6

ANNUAL DINNER

at Ming’s Restaurant

“History and Newspapers”

Speaker: Bill Johnson

Publisher of the Palo Alto Weekly

\$45 per person, reservations by

May 31 required.



Save these dates in Fall 2012

Sundays at the

Lucie Stern Community Center  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

OCTOBER 7

Celebrating the  
Girl Scout Centennial

NOVEMBER 4

DECEMBER 2

### PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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