



# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

October 2016 Volume 40, N° 1

Since 1913

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC \* REFRESHMENTS SERVED

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## PALO ALTO ART CENTER CELEBRATING 45 YEARS

### PAHA's Public Meetings

#### GENERAL PROGRAM MEETINGS

are held monthly

2:00–4:00 PM

October – May

at the

Lucie Stern Community Center

1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

#### PAHA'S FIRST AUTUMN MEETING

October 2, 2016

Palo Alto Art Center's 45th Anniversary

with Karen Kienzle, Director

#### UPCOMING MEETINGS

November 6, 2016

The Christmas Bureau of Palo Alto

with Kay Philips, Secretary

December 4, 2016

Vignettes Panel

moderated by Karen Holman

former Mayor of Palo Alto

ON OCTOBER 2ND, THE PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION KICKS OFF THE 2016-17 PROGRAM YEAR WITH A PRESENTATION BY KAREN KIENZLE, DIRECTOR OF THE PALO ALTO ART CENTER.

Karen brings a wealth of knowledge to her leadership of the Art Center. She worked previously as the Assistant Director for Exhibitions, Education, and Community Outreach at the de Saisset Museum at Santa Clara University, and Assistant Curator at the San Jose Museum of Art. She received her B.A. in the history of art from UC Berkeley and her M.A. in museum studies from San Francisco State University; she is a graduate of the Getty Museum Leadership Institute at Claremont Graduate University. Karen continues to lecture on Museum Studies at San Francisco State and participates in local museum associations.

It is the Palo Alto Art Center and her role in it that Karen Kienzle is passionate about. Since coming to the Palo Alto Art Center in 2009, she has confirmed and expanded its reputation as a Palo Alto treasure and a nationally acclaimed visual arts center. On October 2, she will describe how it celebrates Bay Area art and artists and how its exhibitions focus on contemporary fine art, craft, design, and new art forms. She and her staff oversee the Art Center's educational programs, tours, and the Gallery Shop. The Center's Mission Statement encapsulates why you should go to 1313 Newell Road: "The Palo Alto Art Center is your place to discover art. See, make, and be inspired because everyone is an artist." A visitor commented on his visit after the recent innovation, "WOW--the remodel of the building goes well beyond bricks and drywall. The idea of Community Creates was supremely executed with wonderful connections to how community sees and participates in art."



Renovated in 2012, the Palo Alto Art Center at 1313 Newell Road celebrates 45 years this fall. For more on the history of this building, originally Palo Alto's City Hall, see page 3.

You have just time to visit the Art Center's 21st Annual Great Glass Pumpkin Patch (September 27-30, sale October 1-2)

If you miss that event, *The Butterfly Effect: Art in 1970s California*, opens the evening of September 16 and runs through December 30.

### Last Call! Dennis Martin docent walk at Jasper Ridge

During last October's meeting, Bo Crane presented the life and times of Dennis Martin, an Irish immigrant who came to California on a wagon train in 1844. This **October 15, at 10 am**, Bo will host a 5-mile docent-led walk through Martin's lands on what is now Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve. It will include historical anecdotes about Martin and a visit to the obelisk marking the Martin ranch house while following San Francisquito Creek downstream and back. The walk is free and limited to 20 participants. To reserve a place, contact Bo Crane by September 30 at [bcrane65@comcast.net](mailto:bcrane65@comcast.net).



KAREN KIENZLE

Director, Palo Alto Art Center



**PALO ALTO  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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- Jerry Tinney

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 Cubberley Community Center, K-7.

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 pm. General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (October–December, February–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 pm. Meetings include speakers. 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.

# Palo Alto as a Small Town, Dateline 1927

MY PARENTS HAD MOVED WITH MY SISTER TO PALO ALTO FROM SAN FRANCISCO BECAUSE THEY COULD GET A NICER HOUSE AND LARGER LOT FOR THEIR MONEY.

And the weather was better. They moved into the house at 240 Rinconada Avenue in 1927, a short walk to the Mayfield Southern Pacific station, where my father boarded the early morning train to San Francisco. One could easily shop in a range of stores in Mayfield, and Downtown Palo Alto was not a long walk. I arrived a few years after the move.



Author's Old Palo Alto home in present day, essentially unchanged in eighty years. Courtesy of Ralph Britton.

Local residents worked in a variety of trades and professions. Typical residents on our street included a teacher, a lithographer, a home for foster children, a machinist working at Joshua Hendy Iron Works (machining engine blocks for Liberty ships during WWII), a photographer, a postman, and a Stanford professor. Like my father, many in the neighborhood rode the train to and from San Francisco; they comprised a diverse group—the owner of a luggage manufacturing company, the Chief Counsel for Southern Pacific Railroad, and a stock broker, along with others of more mod-



My family, from left: Elizabeth Leone Britton, teacher at Addison and Crescent Park schools; sister Barbara Britton; father Ralph Britton Sr.; and author Ralph Britton, Jr.

est trades and professions. In spite of significant income and wealth discrepancies, they enjoyed a certain camaraderie as they shared space on the cars and passed the time with card games. A group of neighbors occasionally gathered to make music, with my father providing piano accompaniment.

We children walked or rode our bikes to school. No chauffeuring—gasoline was rationed and not to be used frivolously during wartime. Each block had a “house mother” along the way to school where we could go in case the air-raid siren went off (it never did.) Helicopter parents were unknown (as were helicopters, for that matter.) We kids enjoyed great freedom in our activities, but we had responsibilities. I delivered the *Palo Alto Times* in the neighborhood. It was printed on the old 16-page press at the office on Ramona at Hamilton and carried to the newsboys’ homes in aging Ford Model As. Bikes were repaired at Mr. Neeley’s on California Avenue, which was one of a very few black-owned businesses in town.

It was a fine time to be growing up in Palo Alto. Now the neighborhood is changing—new large houses are replacing the modest homes of former residents, but much of the old charm still remains. —Ralph Britton, Jr.

## 2016 Steve Staiger Award Presented to Jack Parkhouse

THE SECOND ANNUAL STEVE STAIGER AWARD WAS PRESENTED TO JACK PARKHOUSE THIS PAST JUNE AT PAHA’S ANNUAL DINNER.

The Award went to Jack in recognition of his countless contributions to the Guy Miller Archives. For many years, Jack has worked to maintain the collection of documents in the Archives. His work has included collecting material from numerous sources in the community, organizing the material into the proper files, and more



The 2016 Steve Staiger award

recently, helping visitors with their inquiries. Those familiar with the archives appreciate that the collection would not be as valued a community resource without

Jack’s many contributions.

Thanks and recognition go to Larry Christenson (and Brian George) for creating the Steve Staiger Award last year, presented to Steve at the annual dinner. Unfortunately, Larry will be leaving Palo Alto and has passed the responsibility for nominating new Award winners to Steve.

## The three incarnations of 1313 Newell Road



1313 Newell Road, pictured here in 1970, served as City Hall from 1953 to 1971, when it became the Cultural Center. Renovated in 2012, it is now the home of the Palo Alto Art Center.

The building at 1313 Newell Road, which currently houses the Palo Alto Arts Center, has had several incarnations. In 1950, voters rejected a bond measure to purchase an eleven and a half acre site across from Rinconada Park for a new City Hall. However, Jerry Keithley, Palo Alto's first City Manager, was determined to build a replacement for the demolished City Hall at 445 Ramona Street on this site. He defended the location as being "nearer the center of town," since the City had recently annexed most of the area south of Oregon Avenue. Using general funds, he purchased half of the acreage and spent \$387,000 to build a new City Hall. Keithley's procedural end run goaded citizens into forming Palo Alto's first residentialist group, the Committee for Good Government.

Architect Leslie I. Nichols (1894-1969) designed the sprawling 24,000 square foot ranch style building. Chicago native Nichols earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Architecture at Cornell in 1920 and

practiced with the prestigious firm Gordon and Kaelber in Rochester, New York. There he studied classical Beaux Arts traditions and modern trends in hospital and apartment building construction. Nichols and his father-in-law, Arthur Gibb, formed a partnership in New York City in 1924: they contributed to the design of the Holland Tunnel; Nichols won an architectural competition to design a million dollar tuberculosis hospital. In 1932, Nichols moved to Palo Alto. During his career, he built over thirty-six houses plus commercial buildings, including the Roller and Hapgood Mortuary and the First Presbyterian Churches of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. Nichols won several architectural awards and served on the San Mateo and Atherton Planning Commissions.

Nichols completed his design for Palo Alto's new City Hall in 1953. He intended its redwood and brick exterior and shake roof to harmonize with the surrounding residential neighborhood. His plans provided for off-street parking and buried utility lines. Other amenities included a lunchroom, council chambers with seating for 132, and a drive-in utility payment window off Newell Road.

By the 1970s, City Hall had outgrown its Newell Road quarters and relocated to Hamilton Avenue. It took \$350,000 and years of community meetings before the old City Hall entered its second life as The Palo Alto Cultural Center in 1971. Concerts, classes, exhibits, film festivals and lectures made it a hub of visual and performing arts for the Mid-Peninsula.

A third incarnation began in 2012. After an eighteen month, \$7.9 million dollar renovation and expansion, the Cultural Center re-emerged as the Palo Alto Arts Center; it now focuses on the visual arts.

1313 Newell Road symbolizes our city in many ways: architecturally, it exemplifies adaptive re-use; politically, it represents the continuous dialogue between residentialist and pro-growth factions; culturally, it proclaims the artistic vitality of its residents. — © Margaret R. Feuer



On August 22 Pat Briggs presented a proclamation from the City of Palo Alto to Robert Kelley, Artistic Director of TheatreWorks. Kelley was the featured speaker at PAHA's annual meeting in June when he regaled members and guests with his and TheatreWorks' story. He founded the professional theatre company in 1970 and has received local and national acclaim for his commitment to its diversity and inclusion.

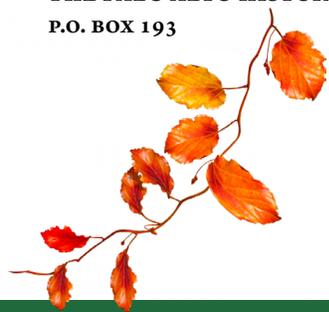
## Summer Updates!

### 9,862... and Counting!

That is the number of digital photos on the PAHA website as of September 4, 2016. With the help of our cataloger, Janet Lin, the progress toward cataloging and uploading all 13,000 currently digitized archive photos has accelerated significantly in the last three years. From about 3,200 images uploaded from 2004 to 2013, the project shows promise of moving beyond 10,000 online photos before October 2016!

The project will not end at 13,000 photos. An additional 2,000 have been donated to

PAHA beyond the scope of the original digitization project supported by PAHA, the City of Palo Alto Library, and a grant from Cable Co-op. We have started training volunteers to describe and digitize these new images. This really should be an ongoing project if we can convince more people to donate their photos either as prints, slides, negatives or digital files. We are ready – do you have more photos for us? Please contact Steve Staiger at 650-329-2353 or [steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org) for more information. — Brian George



## In Memoriam: Billy Prior 1920-2016

Billy Prior received the Croix de Guerre, right, from the French government for her service in the Women's Army Air Corps in World War II.

Longtime Palo Alto Alma "Billy" Prior died in June 2016. She was a World War II veteran, having survived the Buzz Bombs in London, Battle of Normandy, and was one of the first woman soldiers to enter Paris after its liberation. Her parents were known as "Mr. and Mrs. Palo Alto", and her love for Palo Alto was lifelong. She was a supporter of the Sempervirens Fund dedicated to preserving the redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains. She helped fund the Palo Alto Bicentennial Redwood Grove, and is seen with her parents at the dedication. She loved Palo Alto history and supported the Archives with numerous donations of material over the years. When the effort began to create the Palo Alto History Museum, Billy made one of the first gifts of family artifacts, including a collection of children's toys. Her visits to the Archives were always a pleasure, and she had great stories to tell. She will be missed.



Billy Prior, right, with her parents in 1976.

### Welcome New Members!

Gerald Underal  
Mary E. Valentine

### Heritage Program on Channel 30

The Heritage Program for September 2016 is a replay of the 2012 "Palo Alto Remembered" event when PAHA introduced the book. It features Susan Rosenberg, Gary Fazzino, Peter Drekmeier, and Greg Brown.

The schedule is

Wednesdays at 8 pm,  
Thursdays at 10 am, and  
Saturdays at 1 pm

on Channel 30.

DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed from the PAHA's Guy Miller Archives, which are located at Cubberley, Room K-7.

Hours: Tuesdays, 4-8 pm,  
Thursdays, 1-5 pm

### In Memoriam

Alma (Billy) Prior  
Joseph (Joe) Shakes  
Gladys (Laddie) Hughes  
Katherine Anne (Nan) Blackledge

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Photographs courtesy of PAHA Guy Miller Archives unless otherwise noted.

## History Jaunts



**PAST Heritage Walking Tours** Mark your calendars for the new season of walking tours sponsored by PAST! All tours are free of charge and begin at 10:00 am. For brochures of the areas, visit <http://www.pastheritage.org/tours.html#brochures>.

Sat., 09/24—Meet at the Woman's Club (475 Homer Ave.) for Steve Emslie's tour of the Homer Historic District

Sun., 10/02—Meet at 1005 Bryant St. for Kris Zavoli's tour of Professorville

Sat., 10/08—Meet at 900 Seneca Ave. for Margaret Feuer's tour of Crescent Park

Sat., 10/15—Meet at 1005 Bryant St. for Gail Woolley's tour of Professorville

Sat., 10/22—Aisha Fike's tour of Ramona Architectural District (meeting place TBD)

Sat., 10/29—Meet at 1181 College Ave. for Carolyn George's tour of College Terrace

**The Moffett Field Historical Society Museum**, at Moffett Field in the heart of Silicon Valley, displays the important role of aviation and national defense in the Bay Area's history. It includes many historical artifacts and hands-on activities such as "flying" a P-3 Orion.

Docent tours by volunteers help to bring Moffett's story to life, from the 1930s to the present. The Museum is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 am – 2 pm, photo ID is required. For more information, directions, and admission, visit <http://www.moffettfieldmuseum.org/contactus.html>.

**The Repair Café Palo Alto** is a periodic, volunteer-run community service dedicated to encouraging the repair and reuse of goods rather than relegating them to landfill. Bring your broken things and work with volunteers to assess what it would take to repair them. With luck, you'll walk away with a once-again useful item and some knowledge of how to repair it and other things in your universe. Repair Café Palo Alto will meet on Sun., 11/06, 11 am – 3 pm at the Museum of American Heritage, 351 Homer Ave., Palo Alto. For more information, visit <http://www.repaircafe-paloalto.org>.