



The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

March 2019 Volume 42, No 5

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents

African Americans of San Jose and Santa Clara County

Sunday, March 3, 2019 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Mitchell Park Community Center, El Palo Alto Room
3700 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto



Jan Batiste Adkins
Educator & Lecturer

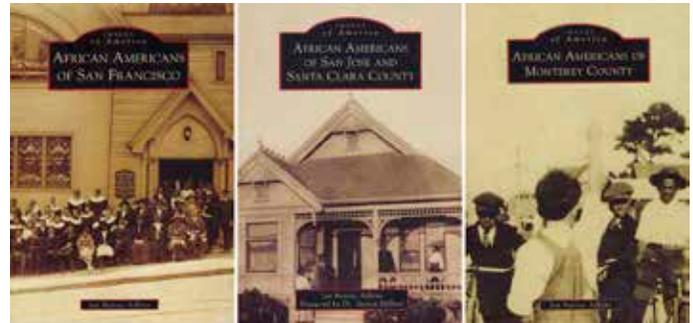
Join us on March 3rd for a presentation by Jan Batiste Adkins. Jan is a local author who has written several books about African Americans in San Francisco, Monterey, and now Santa Clara County.

We first met Jan when she contacted the archives last year to research her latest book, *African Americans of San Jose and Santa Clara County*. She visited the archives several times and was able to find a wealth of materials, including images from the collection. We are excited to have Jan speak about her recently published book.

Jan is an educator and lecturer who grew up in Portland, Oregon. She graduated from University of

Oregon and has a Master's degree from San Jose State University. She has taught in high school and community colleges and is an adjunct faculty member at San Jose City College teaching English composition and literature.

Jan will have books available for purchase.



Free and Open to the Public ~ Refreshments Served

A call for home movies ...

PAHA's Program Committee is working on a Sunday program featuring home movies highlighting Palo Alto's history. PAHA has a collection of home movies that have been donated over the years. Brian George, PAHA Board member and film/video guru, has transferred many of these films to a digital format for preservation and ease of viewing.

We are now reaching out to our members and the community, seeking additional film to share on a future Sunday program. We envision screening numerous home movies from the 1920s through more recent times.

(Continued on page 3)





**FROM THE DESK OF
Steve Staiger
City Historian**

**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 Cubberley Community Center, K-7, Phone (650) 329-2353.

Board meetings are held at 4pm on the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Guy Miller Archives. Public programs are held at 2pm on the first Sunday of each month (October-December, February-May) at various locations in Palo Alto. Programs include speakers. The final program of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all programs.

Palo Alto's First Entrepreneur

The great-granddaughter of John F. Parkinson recently visited the PAHA Archives. The resident of Virginia was visiting relatives on the West Coast, and dropped in for a visit. We spent an afternoon talking about the life of her great-grandfather.

John F. Parkinson was a larger-than-life presence in early Palo Alto. The businessman, civic leader and dreamer was honored in 1994 as one of Palo Alto's Creators of the Legacy.



John F. Parkinson

Born and raised in Iowa, John came to California in the late 1880s as a young man for health reasons (as did many Midwesterners in the late 19th century). He was working in the hardware/

lumber business in Santa Clara when he saw the business potential in the new town of University Park (the first name of Palo Alto).

He established the first lumberyard and hardware store on University Avenue in 1892. That same year, his father, Dr. Benoni Parkinson, and his uncle George Parkinson joined him in Palo Alto and established the Bank of Palo Alto on The Circle. An early civic contribution was John's donation of the lumber for the construction of the first school in town on Bryant Street.

His business thrived, but misfortune struck. A fire destroyed his lumberyard, and the lack of insurance bankrupted him. He rebuilt his business, and expanded by inventing a "safety" ladder that he manufactured in Mountain View.

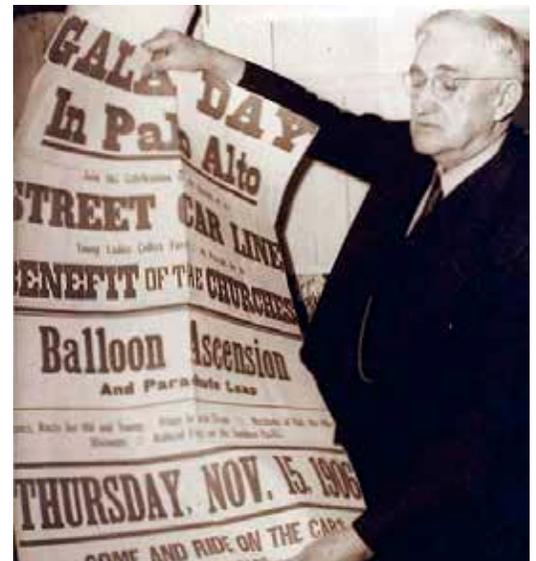
He was very active in local politics and civic matters. Parkinson was instrumental in getting the Carnegie Foundation funding for Palo Alto's public library. He travelled to New York and negotiated a \$10,000 grant despite the fact that Palo Alto was too small to qualify. The library opened in 1904.

Parkinson published one of the many newspapers in town, where his strong anti-union politics were promoted. He was elected to the Board of Trustees (the "city council" of pre-1910 Palo Alto), and served as President (mayor) at the time of the 1906 earthquake. He led local efforts to provide local supplies of bread and milk to help feed the victims of the quake and fire in San Francisco.

In November 1906 he was the honorary operator of the first street car to run on University Avenue. The idea and early promotion of the electric streetcar was Parkinson's, but he was unable to find the financing for the construction, and the project was completed by others.

Over time, the town grew and Parkinson's influence diminished. In the 1940s, the old man was recognized for his early contributions to the community when Palo Alto celebrated its 50th anniversary. His health declined, and his daughter Sarah cared for him until his death in 1956. His obituary recalled his contributions to the community, but there were few readers who knew or remembered him personally. In one sense, he had lived too long, and was forgotten by the residents of the town he helped build 60 years earlier.

His life was summed up in a 1947 quote: "I made a fortune in Palo Alto and lost it in Palo Alto, but I don't know a better place to do either".



John F. Parkinson holding a poster for 1906 "Gala Day"

Museum Exceeds 2018 City-Set Goal Thanks to Donors!

by Laura Bajuk, Executive Director, Palo Alto Museum

Just over a year ago, the City Council challenged us to raise \$1.75 million – half of what we needed to close the gap toward the \$9.2 million rehabilitation of the Roth Building. If we met that goal, additional funds would be given to the project, and the Museum would go forward. If we didn't meet it, the City might invite the community to make a new offer to develop the historic building.

It was a really big goal – about twice our annual fundraising average. Would new donors step forward? Would continuing donors step up again, and again? Did we have the people, resources and the energy to reach the goal, after twelve years of fundraising?

The answer turned out to be a resounding YES. We met the goal, got the preservation dollars, and now stand about \$1 million away from starting construction.

How did it happen? With new strategies and a few new board members, we discovered new energy. We shifted our thinking from our “need” for a Museum to the benefits it would bring to our community, and how donors could make those benefits real. It worked.

Timing was key. Our deadline got pushed back to December 17. Those extra two weeks proved to be critical. City Council members offered advice. Joe Simitian worked with us on county funding possibilities. By November 29, we had raised an incredible \$1.1 million. But we were about \$700,000 short of the City goal, and the deadline loomed. The stress was palpable.

Enter a local couple who'd been supportive, but hadn't yet given. We sat at their kitchen table, eating homemade pie and talking about the Museum. “Where are you on that City goal?” they asked. We told them. They paused, then offered to pledge half that amount, if we raised the other half – by December 16. We had a new goal that meant we would meet the City goal – wow! “Raise \$350,000 in only two weeks,” I thought. “Could we do it?”

We had to try. We got the word out as fast as we could, by email, snail mail, social media - including every holiday party we attended. That challenge was so exciting that over 60 people responded in those two weeks. By the time we reached the December 17 Council meeting, we had raised \$1,818,619 – we were over goal!

Our courageous board members deserve a lot of praise: they had to have a Plan B in mind, while at the same time push ahead toward two aggressive goals. Our tiny staff was amazing. Everyone worked so hard, so fast, keeping their eye on the horizon through the ups and downs.

But the lion's share of the gratitude belongs to our many donors, whose generosity reminded me of the closing scene in “It's a Wonderful Life” where Jimmy Stewart is saved because his friends and neighbors believe in him. We are honored by your trust in us, and commit to bring you the incredible history museum this community has deserved for so long.



Lawrence Chew, Sr. graduated from Seale Military Academy in 1924

Lawrence Chew, Sr. worked all of his life as a house boy for a well-respected family in Palo Alto. They sent him to military school to improve his English. And while he never realized his dream to open a restaurant, his children were well-educated and have become successful.

Stories like this will be told in the new Museum.

What are YOUR stories?

(Continued from page 1) Some selections may be as short as a minute or two, and others might be longer.

If you have home movies you would be willing to share with a Sunday afternoon PAHA audience, please let us know. Please contact our historian, Steve Staiger, to discuss the process. We may not be able to show all movies offered, but the movies selected will be transferred to a digital format, and you will receive a copy of the digital version.

We suspect there are many reels of May Fete Parades stored away on the top shelves of closets, or in cabinet

drawers. We want to see your film, and share it with the community! Did someone in your family take movies of birthday parties, Christmas mornings, school activities, or someone learning to ride their new bicycle?

We want to see your home movies and share them with the community as well as preserve them for the future.

Please contact us:

steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org

(650) 329-2353



History Jaunts for the Winter

Hurry over to **The Gallery House**, located at 320 S. California Ave. in Palo Alto, currently presenting “Rhythm and Color”. The exhibit features artists Henry Alikashani (jewelry and sculpture), Mary Catherine Sippel (painting), and Nance Wheeler (mixed media painting), and runs through March 2, 2019. The Gallery House is free and open to the public Tues – Sat 10 am – 6 pm; Sun 11 am – 3 pm. Enter through Printers Café. It’s well worth a jaunt! For more information, call (650) 326-1668 or visit their website www.galleryhouse2.com.

Another jaunt that is free and open to the public is the **Pace Gallery**, 229 Hamilton Ave. in Palo Alto, open Tues-Sat 11 am-7 pm, Sun 11 am-5 pm. The present exhibition, through March 24, 2019, features new art by JR. JR is a French artist and photographer known for his large-scale urban works that address socio-economic and political issues. These works are dedicated to the city and people of San Francisco. JR’s art— The Chronicles of San Francisco: Sketches—includes portraits, works on paper, video installations, lightboxes, and etched glass works. More information is on the website www.pacegallery.com.

The **Los Altos History Museum**, located at 51 S. San Antonio Road in Los Altos, is always worth a visit. Its current exhibit features “Inspired by Juana: La Doña de la Frontera,” honoring Juana Briones’ saga of resilience, ingenuity and business savvy in what is now Silicon Valley and the Bay Area. She was—as millennials would put it—a phenom! The exhibit is enriched by a variety of events celebrating the life of this extraordinary woman and runs through March 31, 2019. The Museum is open Thurs- Sun, noon – 4 pm. For more information, call (650) 948-9427 or visit the website www.losaltoshistory.org.

If you haven’t taken your children, grandchildren, or yourself to the **Rosie the Riveter Museum** in Richmond, it’s a must-see, and worth mentioning again as a reminder for PAHA members and friends to visit! “This gem on the East Bay waterfront delves into what was happening on the home front during World War II, particularly on the role of women who kept the factories humming.” The museum is open daily, 10 am – 5 pm, at 1414 Harbour Way South, Suite 3000 in Richmond. There’s a gift shop where you can purchase a “Rosie” bandana. For more information on the museum and for docent-led tours, visit www.rosietheriveter.org or call (510) 232-5050. Close by is the SS Red Oak Victory, the last surviving vessel built at the Richmond Kaiser Shipyard during World War II, has been transformed into a museum at 1337 Canal Blvd. in Richmond www.redoakvictory.us.

News from the Archives!



Anna Zschokke

PAHA’s online photo collection has just reached over 13,000 photos! In the past few months, we’ve added hundreds of photos of residences in Palo Alto. Currently we’re processing a box of photos from both Paly and Gunn High Schools that include class, staff, and sports team photos. A recent gem we discovered was a portrait of Anna Zschokke, the founder of the Palo Alto school district, taken around the turn of the 20th century. This photo should be available online in the next month. Our online photo archive is searchable and can be found at <http://archives.pahistory.org/>.

Welcome New Member!
Christopher Eldemir

PAHA Upcoming Programs

April 7 - *The Life of Timothy Hopkins,*
with Steve Staiger

May 5 - *Historic Preservation Month*
featuring PAST Awards

June 5 – PAHA’s Annual Dinner

The Heritage Program
will be a collection of short
stories presented by Historian,
Steve Staiger:
“The History Corner –
Highlights of Palo Alto’s
125 Years”

Airs on Channels 28 or 30 on
various days and times. It is
simultaneously streamed on
the Media Center web site
www.midpenmedia.org
Check web site for schedule.

DVDs available from
the Guy Miller Archives
Tues. 4-8 pm, Thurs. 1-5 pm



The Tall Tree is published
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PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



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