



The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

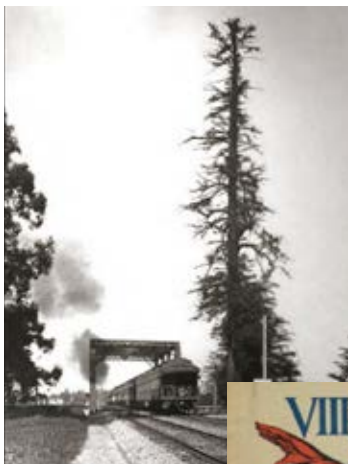
Jan 2024 Volume 47, No 3

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents

Palo Alto and the World 100 years ago: Scenes and Events of 1924

Sunday, January 28, 2024 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Palo Alto Art Center ~ 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto



Join us for a terrific start to the New Year when PAHA historian Steve Staiger will take a look at the year 1924. Hear what was happening 100 years ago in Palo Alto, the US, and the world.

Since Palo Alto's centennial year in 1994, Steve has given a number of talks on "what happened 100 years ago." He always finds it interesting to dig into this history, searching for well-known and little-known facts of the times.

This year's Summer Olympics are in Paris, but did you know they were also in Paris in 1924? The movie Chariots of Fire was based on events from the 1924 Olympics, and Johnny Weissmuller, who won gold medals for swimming at those Olympics, later starred in the Tarzan movies. Two noted politicians, Jimmy Carter and Enid Pearson, were born in 1924 and will be celebrating their 100th birthdays in 2024.

Steve will present images of these and other fascinating issues, people, and events of 1924, as well as some items you might find surprising. Join us for what promises to be an entertaining trip to a century ago.

From top to bottom: El Palo Alto in 1924, President Calvin Coolidge, poster for 1924 Summer Olympics, Cardinal Hotel under construction in 1924, F.L. Worrill Feed Building on Alma Street and Hamilton Avenue

Free and Open to the Public ~ Refreshments Served

**2024 PALO ALTO
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The Palo Alto Historical Association, a 501(c)(3) charitable 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.

PAHA Board meetings are held at 5pm 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 and 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 Museum Update

By PAM President, Rich Green & PAM Founder, Karen Holman



Dr. Ross Dehovitz, Rose Thoits, Darla Secor, & Colleen Braff

The Palo Alto Museum (PAM) Board is very pleased to report that the Roth Building rehabilitation is well underway, developing spaces for museum exhibits, public spaces, a café, learning centers, and, of course, the permanent home of the Palo Alto Archives (pictured above).

The City of Palo Alto Guy Miller Archives, managed for many decades by the Palo Alto Historical Association, will be on the second floor with appropriate accommodations for the papers, photographs, and other ephemera that document the history of this place that has carved such a deep mark on the lives of those near and far. We have never lost sight of the promise to create a museum showcasing the global impact of Palo Alto and Stanford University.

Yet, even at this exciting stage, the job is not done. While we have turned the page from fundraising for rehabilitation and attaining the 40-year lease on the Roth Building, we have now entered a new chapter of necessary museum development needed for;

- Fundraising for the essential professional staff to design the Museum and to lead the organization, key positions to planning the Museum's programs and exhibits using the latest ideas in museum design. The Board of Directors has set the practical goal of raising \$3 million to sustain the Museum through this next phase.

- Overseeing the rehabilitation of the Roth Building
- Ongoing and productive collaboration with City staff
- Managing daily operations
- Continuing work with the outstanding Teen Council's efforts to record oral histories

Go by the Roth Building at 300 Homer and see the Museum's vision as it becomes a reality. You can see some of the progress from the accompanying photos.

The 1932 Palo Alto Clinic was designed by Palo Alto's own Birge Clark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a fitting place to be the Museum's home. Peek through the construction fence at the entrance, and you'll notice that the Arnautoff frescoes are fully protected, ready for professional conservators to restore them to their full historical significance. The camellias in the courtyard are now recognized as heritage plantings and are also being protected. Given current progress, we anticipate rehabilitation to be completed in December 2024, with museum doors opening in the spring of 2025.

The Museum organization, including the Board of Directors, full-time staff, the Honorary Chairs, Advisory Board, Teen Council, and dozens of volunteers, is strong and leading the way.

Palo Alto's first history museum will create a place where everyone is welcome and inspired to learn, share, and imagine. It will showcase the many stories, known and presently unknown, that have made the Palo Alto-Stanford community not only one that is recognized worldwide but also one that we call home.



Victor Arnautoff frescoes at the main entrance

From the very beginning, the Museum has relied on the support of PAHA, as PAHA was instrumental in forming the Museum's initial organization. Join us now by sharing our enthusiasm, share it with others, contribute to the vision, volunteer your talents, contribute financially.

If you'd like to be in touch, please contact: info@paloaltomuseum.org

The History of San Francisquito Creek and Flood Control Efforts

by PAHA board member, Lisa M. Krieger

Every winter since Palo Alto's founding, residents have nervously eyed San Francisquito Creek, fearing that its swollen waters will overflow and possibly flood their streets and homes. That's because we live on an alluvial fan, a fan-shaped deposit of sand and gravel sediments carried by 22 tributaries into the creek. The fan spreads out across the valley floor from today's Redwood City to the edge of Mountain View.

San Francisquito Creek sits high on this alluvial fan rather than in a valley or ravine. Historically, the creek was wide, shallow, and meandering, so it routinely changed course. Floodwaters overtopped its banks and spread over the flatlands regularly. As sediments were deposited along the creek's banks, they built up banks that formed natural levees. Early residents built Palo Alto along this high ledge, using the creek to provide building materials.

Over time, the land has changed. In the 1860s, there were far more wetlands, and San Francisquito Creek became a tidewater stream near Middlefield Road. Embarcadero Road led to "a fine landing from which vessels would carry the produce of the region," according to reports. In the late 1800s, wharves and warehouses were built near the Bayshore Highway.

Gradually, the mouth of the creek began to fill up, so ship landing was more uncertain until, at last, it was abandoned.

"Today, a bleak stretch of swampland covered with grass, with innumerable little sloughs, now marks the site of the once prosperous Embarcadero Landing," reported an 1890s newspaper column. Salmon stopped ascending the creek to spawn.

City planners considered opening the outlet and constructing a 4000-foot-long channel to the Bay.

"It would give Palo Alto a seaside resort for holding regattas and other aquatic sports, adding to the wealth and productiveness of the community," they said.

But as the creek was confined and marshland was reclaimed, the topography and hydrology of the town changed. Homes and businesses began to cover the flatlands.

Flooding—a natural occurrence—became an urban hazard. Over the years, the swollen creek has claimed several lives. In 1917, 12-year-old Harold Mogensen, "a boy of liberal traits and sunny disposition"—drowned when a bank near the Middlefield Bridge crumbled

beneath him. In 1952, six-year-old Clark Spahr Jr. fell off the edge of a muddy bank; a decade later, four-year-old Scott Schmidt of Woodside drowned. In 1969, Stanford School of Medicine student Arthur Yablonsky, 25, drowned in a vicious whirlpool while rafting near the school's golf course.

Over the years, frustrated residents have tried to create their own solutions to flooding. In the aftermath of the Christmas flood of 1955, Crescent Avenue neighbors paid for installation of solid concrete walls, supported by hundreds of cement piles and reinforced by steel bars. At least a dozen different solutions to the flooding problem have been proposed: expand Searsville Lake, remove Searsville Dam, replace bridges with wider ones, build diversion conduits, widen the channel, create more upstream storage with another high or low dam, or line the creek bed with concrete. Meanwhile, the creek has undergone much excavation, grading, widening, levee repair, and berm installation.

The highest flow – 7,200 cubic feet per second – occurred in 1998, when 1,700 properties in East Palo Alto, Palo Alto, and Menlo Park were damaged. The creek's second-highest historic flow – 6,340 cubic feet per second – was recorded on New Year's Eve a year ago. Yet the challenges continue. Preventing a devastating flood while preserving the natural qualities of the creek isn't easy, according to Margaret Bruce, director of the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority, created in 1999 to lead flood control projects.

At a December meeting of the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority Board, Bruce described four parts to the current plan.

First is replacing the 1914-era Newell Road Bridge, scheduled for next summer, which will open up creek capacity by moving its foundations out of the channel. As yet unscheduled, the second and third steps are to improve a long cement wall on the creek's north side and stacked concrete on its south side.

Replacement of the Pope-Chaucer Bridge is the last and unscheduled step. That plan is delayed because last winter's storms caused flooding that exceeded what analysts had predicted. Now, the JPA must look for new designs.

"Our options are pretty limited," said JPA's Bruce. "Shorelines and creek banks are natural features... They want to move, and we've built our cities right up to the edge."

Winter Jaunts

As of writing this in late December, the weather has been crisp and cold with a few rainstorms necessitating umbrellas. While we've gained a few inches, so far, we've not had the amount from the El Nino storms or "atmospheric rivers" of last winter. Here are some outdoor and indoor jaunts for late January and February 2024.

The Google Visitor Experience is a not-to-be missed, must-see adventure for you, your children, your grandchildren, and your friends. To say it is spectacular doesn't begin to describe the Google Gradient Canopy, which houses design showroom, shop with Google goodies, and café. It sits on a 26-acre parkland complete with strolling trails and public art. Friendly Google hosts are everywhere to guide visitors to the parking lot, the escalator/elevator up to the structure, and to explain the displays inside. Google Visitor Experience is located at 2000 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mt View. It is free and open to the public Mon – Sat, 9 am - 8 pm, Sun, 10 am – 5 pm. For more information, go to <https://visit.withgoogle.com>.



Image courtesy of Leonardo Rossetti



"Presidio Row" courtesy of Bryant Street Gallery

Before the exhibit closes on Jan 27th, hurry over to Palo Alto's **Bryant Street Gallery**, to see Tony Huynh's Bay Vista, his "homage to the Bay Area." This solo show features the artist's bright, colorful "...reflections on landmarks... such as Angel Island, the Presidio, and the Great Highway." He noted that Angel Island "...gave me a chance to play with rhythm in nature, the shadows on the house, the sea, the sky, the land on the horizon." Critics commented that Huynh's style is reminiscent of Grandma Moses, who inspired him. Located at 532 Street, the gallery is open Tues-Sat 10 am – 5:30 pm. For more information call 650-321-8155 or visit <https://www.bryantstreet.com/art-exhibitions/>.

February can be lovely in the Bay Area and time to re-explore the "Great Outdoors." **The Zinfandel Trail in the Picchetti Ranch Open Space Preserve** is a good place to start. The Picchetti brothers emigrated from Italy in the late 19th century, purchased the land where they planted vineyards and orchards. They and their descendants lived on the site for four generations. The Midpeninsula Open Space Trust acquired the land in 1976 and since then area has been carefully and lovingly restored with help from the Santa Clara County Historical Society, the California Office of Historic Preservation, and generous private donations. Located at 13100 Montebello Road, Cupertino, it is free and open to the public from dawn to dusk. For more information including maps, regulations, and possible trail closures, call 650-691-1200 or visit the amazing and quite excellent website <https://www.openspace.org/preserves/picchetti-ranch>.



Logo courtesy of MidPeninsula Open Space

Welcome New PAHA Members

- Mary Deierlein
- Lin Lui
- Jim Mathrusse
- Marilyn Prout
- Jeff Watt

Upcoming Program Dates

- March 10
- May 5
- June TBA

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held in person on the first Sunday of the months we present programs. Check our website at www.pahistory.org for program information.

Previous PAHA Programs

If you missed the Dec. 3rd program, *Recollections: Palo Alto at Midcentury*, you can find it and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link: <https://vimeo.com/893454251>

The Heritage Program

You can also watch the most recent PAHA program on local TV. Visit <https://midpenmedia.org/local-tv/> and enter the word "Heritage" in the search box to find the broadcast schedule for PAHA programs.



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