

MARCH 2008
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NUMBER 5

The Tall Tree

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING

Sunday, March 2 at 2:00 p.m.

Free & open to the public

Lucie Stern Community Center
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Where Barron Park Got Its Name



Speaker:
Doug Graham
Barron Park
Historian

WHY DID BARRON PARK AND PALO ALTO FIGHT A 31-year “cold war” over annexation?

What is the connection between Barron Park and the “Shrek” movies?

Why did President Ulysses S. Grant come to dinner?

Why is there a trailer park in Barron Park?

Why is there a \$20 million, three-mile-long tunnel under and around Barron Park?

How did Barron Park get rid of its “Superfund” pollution cleanup project?

What critical thing did David Packard do for the neighborhood when he lived there?

Why did Barron Park still have a volunteer Fire Department as recently as 1975?

How did the people of Barron Park create their own public park (Bol Park)?

When and why did John F. Kennedy hang out repeatedly in one of the neighborhood’s cocktail lounges?

How did Barron Park help change zoning in Palo Alto with the “CN” zone?

There once were two railroads in Barron Park—why were they there and what happened to them?

Why does Barron Park have a maypole dance every year?

Why did Barron Park send a protest delegation to Sacramento in 1932?

Who hosted Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton at her home where Barron Park is now?

Is Barron Park older than Palo Alto?

Why has Barron Park been called “An Island of Green”?

Why is the BPA the largest neighborhood association in Palo Alto?

Doug knows the answers. A community activist in innumerable ways, Doug served on the board of the Barron Park Association from 1977–2006.

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*You are kidding? A community donkey?
When? Why? How?*



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The board meets first Wednesdays (except August) at Lucie Stern Community Center at 4:00.

IN MEMORIAM

OUR VALUED MEMBERS

Loraine Esther Berry
Michael Litfin



**YOUR DONATION
AND MEMBERSHIP**

A \$25 MEMBERSHIP PAYS FOR A subscription to this newsletter. Amounts in excess of that basic fee are tax deductible and support our mission. We charge no fees to attend our programs or to use the archives. Life members at \$350 do not receive our annual membership reminder, sent in July. Please supply your phone number and email address if you pay by check, and let us know if you require a receipt. You may join online, or if by Mastercard or Visa, please provide the card number, expiration date, and your signature. Online and mail addresses are on page 4. Members who wish to volunteer to help mail, provide refreshments, assist the archivist, contact us.

We Like Bicycles

BICYCLING AND PALO ALTO HAVE HAD A LONG HISTORY TOGETHER. The 2008 Tour of California is only the most recent event in the shared history of Palo Alto and the popularity of the bicycle.

The first big bicycling craze in America began just as Palo Alto and Stanford University were founded in the early 1890's. With the introduction of the pneumatic tire (invented by Mr. Dunlop) and the invention of the safety bicycle (where both wheels of the bicycle are approximately the same size) bicycling became wide-spread across America and especially popular on the Peninsula and South Bay. Earlier bicycles such as 'high wheelers' were difficult and dangerous, but the new style opened bicycling to more people for recreation and, in towns like Palo Alto, as a significant means of transportation.

Bicycle clubs such as the Mayfield Wheelmen and the University Bicycle Club were established in town as well as on the Stanford campus. By 1895 there were more



Frank Schofield in East San Jose, his camping wagon behind him, 1903 (PAHA Archives).

than 3,000 bicyclists in Santa Clara County. For the more serious bicyclists there were road and track races. For others the Sunday morning ride was the highlight of the week. Forty or more bicyclists would head off to San Jose on the dusty country roads filled with chuck holes. After a hearty midday meal they would hurry back to Palo Alto and the campus before dark.

There were problems. Unpaved roads were full of adobe mud in winter and dust in summer. Bicyclists and pedestrians both preferred the

wooden sidewalks. After years of accidents, the town council made it unlawful to bike on town sidewalks, a law that remained until the 1950s. Before automobile drivers lobbied for better roads, bicyclists did so. In 1899, the path between town and campus was widened to 17 feet, carefully graded, and coated with cinders.

The popularity of bicycles on the Peninsula has waxed and waned over the years. I live along Alpine Road in Portola Valley, where the famous 'Loop' is enjoyed by hundreds of bicyclists (if not thousands on the weekends) and can testify that bicycling continues to be a popular recreation throughout the Peninsula.

Remembrance of Michael Litfin

MICHAEL LITFIN'S CONNECTION WITH PALO ALTO HISTORY has been long and significant. He was a member of our board of directors twice, 1992 to 1995, and again from 2004 until his death this February. He could explain history dramatically so well that, for example, for PAHA's annual dinner in 1995, he composed the text and directed three women who read excerpts from letters by Mrs. Toby to relatives back East, a collection that had been acquired for PAHA's archives. For a program called Meet the Mayors, he helped produce a lively dialogue among past mayors as they told their stories. When he created a program in 1993 called the Search for Aunt Lucie, the information uncovered about Lucie Stern, whose financial donation made possible the Community Center that included the Children's Theater, contributed to our Tall Tree booklet about her written by Michael. His first love, his devotion, in effect, was for the Children's Theater, where he worked for 30 years and was the Assistant Director. In 1997, he presented a PAHA public program for the Theater's 65th anniversary which he updated and presented last year, 75 Years of Children's Theater Magic, for our monthly series. Michael in more ways than we can say was uniquely valuable to us and to his community.

—information gathered by Beth Bunnenberg from the PAHA archives.

The Pacific Art League Building

THE FIRST BUILDING ON THE SITE WHERE THE PACIFIC ART LEAGUE Building now stands at 668 Ramona Street was a two-story, mission revival style residence designed by R.H. Walker and built by L.S. Bean for Bernard Distal. Distal was a native of France who settled in Mayfield about 1864 with his brother Leonard. He was the earliest viticulturist and wine maker in the locality and moved to Palo Alto in 1904.

In 1915 the site was purchased by Henry R. Winsor. Winsor, a native of London, came to Palo Alto in 1906 from Tasmania. He was a cabinet maker first working for the Dudfield Lumber Co. and then independently. His son Alvin followed him in the wood-working crafts (as did a grandson). The Winsor name was locally preeminent in fine furniture and cabinet making as well as in furniture restoration.

The present building was constructed in 1926 for Winsor by the well-known local contractor Wells P. Goodenough. Three years after his new shop and sales building was completed, it was seriously damaged by fire but was soon restored.

The Palo Alto Art Club occupied the building in 1967, although for several years after that, the Winsor shop continued to operate in adjacent space on Forest Avenue.

Reflecting how things change, in the 1930s Standard Oil Company of California had a service station located on the opposite corner across from Winsor's Cabinet Shop where City Hall now stands.

As a personal recollection, I sold The Saturday Evening Post weekly magazine in the late 1930s to customers all over Palo Alto. Of course, at that time it was a much smaller community with a population of some 15,000. I still recall the friendly service station manager who always bought a copy. I then went across the street to Winsor's Cabinet Shop and on opening the door was always greeted by the smell of fresh-cut wood. Mr Winsor dependably bought a copy and then tipped me a whole nickel bringing his total cost to 10¢! He was a good man.

—by Tom Wyman



MAILBOX ART

It can be the little things that make a group of houses into a neighborhood. In tightly knit Barron Park, a rustic tradition of taking pride in one's mailbox has made for a charming, if small, neighborhood tradition. A walk down the sidewalk-less streets of the Southern Palo Alto neighborhood finds a wide variety of extravagant mailboxes in all sorts of colors, shapes and sizes. To see more of Matt's photos, go to www.paloaltohistory.com/mailboxes.html.



Mailbox photos by Matt Bowling

Our Mission

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 history by means of programs, displays, and publications; recognize and preserve historic sites and structures.



Guy Miller saving newspaper articles for the archives.

The Guy Miller Archives of the Palo Alto Historical Association are stored and accessible at the Main Library at 1213 Newell Road Tuesday evenings and Thursday afternoons.

Guy Miller originated the PAHA archives, collecting and organizing material in the basement of the old Carnegie Library on Hamilton Avenue. For 50 years, he collected and gave talks on Palo Alto history, and was employed by the City as the town historian.

Cable Channel 30

THE MISSION BELL STORY presented by John Kolstad, owner of the California Bell Company, for our January general meeting, will be on television in March. John shared the history of the project to place mission bells along El Camino Real, and described his role in reviving the company that originally manufactured the bells. The first was installed on Olvera Street in Los Angeles in 1906.

The program will be on Wednesdays at 8 pm, Thursdays at noon, and Saturdays at 1 pm during March. It may also be shown at other times and channels—check the Media Center schedule at www.communitymediacenter.net.

Tall Tree Goes Back A Ways

A BOOKLET, *Palo Alto, Its Backgrounds, Beginnings, and Growth*, No. 10 of Vol. 1, dated March 1960, was written by Elinor V. Cogswell. There are some quaint details in the booklet. Circuses used to be held at what is now Town and Country Village. Up the road at the train station in World War I, Belgian markets were held at the plaza there to help fund Herbert Hoover's relief work. Belgium later sent a gift of thanks—bells that are now in Hoover Tower.

For more than 40 years, Ms. Cogswell worked as a reporter and then editor of the Palo Alto Times, which originated in 1894, was sold in 1978, and as Peninsula Times Tribune, closed in 1993.

PAHA HAS JUST PUBLISHED A NEW, updated edition of its popular *The Streets of Palo Alto* booklet. For a fascinating trip down Palo Alto's own memory lane, you may purchase it at various local bookstores or at the next general meeting.



PAHA

General Meetings

March 2: History of Barron Park
Doug Graham

April 6: Palo Alto Film Festival
Brian George

May 4: History of Mayfield
Gail Woolley

June 11: Annual Dinner Meeting

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Lawrence & Joanna Liston
Stan Stratton

Keith & Susan Gilbert

William Warrior

Larry, Ethan & Andy Katznelson

The Tall Tree

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followed by a social hour
and refreshments

