

The Tall Tree

MARCH 2010
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PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING, FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
Sunday, March 7 at 2:00 PM at the
Lucie Stern Community Center, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Gamble Garden Celebrates 25 Years!



SPEAKER:
KAREN OLSON
Chair, Gamble Garden
Founding Committee

indefatigably to make the Elizabeth Gamble Garden, in the heart of old Palo Alto, a reality. Karen, as Chair of the 25th Anniversary Year, will chronicle the story of Gamble Garden and show us a video that commemorates the Garden's quarter century. 🌿

HOW FORTUNATE PAHA IS TO HAVE KAREN OLSON as its featured speaker for the March 7 meeting! A native of the Peninsula and a graduate of Burlingame High School and Mills College, Karen has lived in Palo Alto for almost fifty years, giving generously in many and varied ways to this community that she has made her own. She has a life-long love of gardening, inherited from her mother who offered a sage observation, "The most beautiful and successful gardens are produced from 10 cents worth of seeds and 10 dollars worth of manure!" How appropriate that this garden lover would be selected by the Palo Alto Garden Club to chair the Gamble Garden Founding Committee. Karen and her committee worked



Elizabeth Gamble House

THE MARCH CABLE program on Channel 30 will be "Lucie Stern and Her Boy Scouts" presented by Larry Christenson. He tells the unique story of Boy Scout history and the impact of Lucie Stern on local scouting. Tapes of past programs can be borrowed at the Main Library's History Desk, Tues., 6 to 9 PM and Thurs., 2 to 5 PM.



Gazebo at Gamble Garden

Gamble Garden photos and logo are courtesy of Gamble Garden.



Gamble Garden logo

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PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The Palo Alto Historical Association, is a non-profit organization. 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 PAHA are stored at the Main Library, 1213 Newell Road. See the calendar on p.4 for the schedule of public meetings.



**WELCOME
TO NEW MEMBERS**

Richard and Deanna Walston



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OF PAHA**

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www.pahistory.org.

Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee.

The Joy of Research

HISTORICAL RESEARCH CAN BE A LOT OF FUN, BECAUSE IT INVOLVES SOLVING mysteries, like a detective on a case. When you find a text or photograph that answers your question, it is an exciting “aha” moment! I have had several such moments while researching in PAHA’s archives at the Main Library. As the

THE PRESIDENT’S VIEWPOINT: Douglas Graham

historian of Barron Park, I am interested in stories of famous people who have lived in the neighborhood. I became curious about the famous war correspondent and combat photographer team of the 1940s and 1950s, Shelley and Carl Mydans. Barron Park lore claimed that they lived for a time on Roble Ridge. I wondered if it was true, and, if so, what brought these world-wandering journalists to Palo Alto?

My “aha” moment was to discover six clippings about Shelley and Carl in the “biographical” files: Shelley Smith Mydans was a local girl—born in Palo Alto in 1915, daughter of a Stanford journalism professor. She left Stanford as a senior in

1936 for New York to become a reporter for the new *Life* magazine. In 1938 she married well-known *Life* photographer, Carl Mydans. Over the next 12 years they worked together to chronicle World War II and its aftermath.



Carl Mydans, courtesy Wikipedia

In late 1941, Carl and Shelley returned home from China, where they had been covering the war, on a Pan Am Clipper flight with a layover in Manila. Unfortunately, they arrived in Manila on December 6, the day before Pearl Harbor. They were swept up in the Japanese invasion and spent the next two years in the infamous Santo Tomas internment camp. Repatriated in late 1943, Shelley wrote a popular novel, *The Open City*, about her experiences as a prisoner. In 1944, Shelley and Carl returned to work on the war fronts. Carl produced some of the most notable photographs of the war, including the iconic picture of General MacArthur wading ashore at Leyte in 1944—the photo that came to symbolize the return of the United States to the Philippine Islands.



Shelley Mydans, courtesy Wikipedia

After a three-year stint as joint Bureau Chiefs for Time-Life in occupied Tokyo, Carl went to Korea in 1950 to cover the new war. Shelley did not accompany him but came home to stay with her mother on Stanford campus. After the Korean War, Carl and Shelley decided to make their home in the Palo Alto area, purchased an acre at 975 Roble Ridge, and commissioned the construction of a permanent home. They lived there for about two years until *Life* sent Carl to Europe. The Mydanses put their dream home up for rent, and Shelley spent most of the rest of her life in the New York area, while Carl roamed the globe

for *Life*. They each published several books and lived into the 21st century; Shelley died in 2002 and Carl in 2004.

I found obituaries written from a national viewpoint, but only the PAHA files contained the “local angle” facts that will make an longer article relevant to Barron Parkers—and other Palo Altans. If you have questions about your house, or your local parks and streets, the PAHA files may have the answers. The City Historian, Steve Staiger, can help you reach your own “aha” moments.



Mabel McBride, Official Hostess of Palo Alto

AT LAST MONTH'S MEETING, LARRY CHRISTENSON DESCRIBED THE BOY SCOUTS' renovation of the 'Lucie Stern Apartment' at the Lucie Stern Community Center, concluding his talk with an invitation to tour the apartment. For many of us, it was a first opportunity to examine the rooms, as well as the first time we heard the story of Mabel McBride, Palo Alto's first "official hostess."



FROM THE
DESK OF THE
HISTORIAN
Steve Staiger

Palo Alto's first community center was the former Hostess House, today's MacArthur Park restaurant on University Avenue between El Camino Real and the Caltrain tracks, then situated on the edge of town. The Hostess House was the home for community theater productions, dances and musical performances, and recreational activities for the town's youth. This location, I suspect, had a lot to do with the town hiring Mrs. Mabel McBride in 1927 to be Palo Alto's "official hostess." From her office, Mrs. McBride organized the annual May Fete parades as well as overseeing numerous functions held at the Hostess House. Her position included the use of a small living unit in the rear of the building.

When Lucie Stern began working with the City and architect Birge Clark to design the new community center on Middlefield Road, it was logical to plan for and accommodate a living unit in the complex for the hostess, as did the current center. When the Ruth Stern Wing of the new community center was completed in 1935, Mrs. McBride relocated to the Lucie Stern Center, continuing to carry out her responsibilities until her retirement in 1936.

The apartment stood vacant after 1936, as the City did not hire an official hostess to replace her. It is not clear if this decision was due to economic considerations (the Depression), or because the new location no longer required the same level of supervision. Children could safely travel to the Middlefield location (traffic in that part of town was light in the 1930s), and there was less concern over security in the residential neighborhood.

Lucie Stern requested, and the City agreed, that the vacant apartment be turned over to the Boy Scouts. For the next 70 years the Scouts have used the space for various functions as Larry Christenson discussed in his talk. Over the years the history of the apartment and Mabel McBride was forgotten or lost. When the Scouts and Community Center staff began to renovate the rooms, 'urban legend' assumed the rooms had been Lucie Stern's, rather than an apartment she generously funded for Palo Alto's "official hostess."

PAHA members Patty McEwen and Gail Woolley researched and documented the true story of this space and of Mabel McBride's role. Patty McEwen had remembered Mrs. McBride from her own childhood visits to the Community Center. The Scouts, appreciative of the full history of the apartment and Mabel McBride, have mounted a plaque with the story to the wall in the former apartment. ❁



Mabel McBride was Palo Alto's "official hostess" from 1927 until 1936. (*Palo Alto Times*)



May Fete Parade, 1920s, from the Guy Miller PAHA archives

The View from Here

by Jeanne McDonnell and Chris Botsford

After Steve Staiger's article on early photographic experiments last month, an exhibit not to miss is at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. "The View from Here," a collection of California photographs from the 1840s to the present, includes a wonderful 360-degree, 13 plate panorama by Eadweard Muybridge, taken from atop Mark Hopkins' mansion on California Street. It also includes a stunning panorama shot from Telegraph Hill (1884) by Carleton Watkins. The exhibit continues until June 27. Follow the link for a fascinating, 7 minute film shot from a streetcar traveling toward the Ferry Building days before the earthquake. It was recently dated as 1906 by David Kiehn and the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum in Fremont. See if you can spot anyone not wearing a hat. (www.flixxy.com/san-francisco-1905-historical-footage.htm)



Mark Hopkins mansion, 1880, from Wikipedia

Things to Do & Places to Go

RENGSTORFF HOUSE

3070 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View: On Tuesdays and the 4th Monday of the month at 11:00 AM, the Rengstorff staff provides Docent-led walks of Shoreline highlighting the area's environmental processes, ecosystems, and more. Rengstorff's exhibition, "All about the Victorians, Language of Flowers" continues through April 28. Contact info: 650-903-6392 and www.mountainview.gov.

PALO ALTO ART CENTER

1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto: "Treasures from the Mexican Museum" continues through 04/18/10. Contact info: 650-329-2366 and www.cityofpaloalto.org/artcenter.

STANFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Gordon Chang, Professor of History: "As Old as the University Itself: The History of Asian Americans at Stanford," Wednesday, 03/10/10, Tresidder Union, Oak East Lounge, free and open to the public.

Watch the Stanford Historical Society website (<http://hist-soc.stanford.edu/>) for information on the 6th Annual Stanford Historic House and Garden Tour, Sunday, April 25, 1-4 PM.



PAHA's Public Meetings to Come

At Lucie Stern Community Center, 2:00 PM

APRIL 11 (changed from April 4): *Oral Histories*
Speaker: Winter Dellenbach

MAY 2: *Restaurants of El Camino*
Speaker: Doug Graham
President, PAHA

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2 (TOPIC TBA)
Annual Meeting & Dinner
Speaker: Paul Saffo

Oral History Project

by Brian George The PAHA oral history recording project, "Save a Life," is will soon start scheduling sessions for individuals interested in preserving some of their memories of Palo Alto. They will receive a CD of the session and PAHA will retain a copy for its archives. Contact Carol Mitchell (326-6951) or Brian George (494-0561) if you are interested in recording. The sessions will be held at the Media Center in Palo Alto.



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