

The Tall Tree

APRIL 2012
VOLUME 35, No 6

NEWSLETTER of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING * FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC * REFRESHMENTS SERVED

Speaker: Edith Molton

Sunday, April 1 at 2:00 PM

Lucie Stern Community Center, Palo Alto

ESCAPE ON THE LAST TRAIN

A JOURNEY TO SAFETY

AS A YOUNG WOMAN OF EIGHTEEN, NOW PALO ALTO RESIDENT, EDITH MOLTON, began a journey that took her from Berlin to Moscow, to Harbin, to Japan, to Korea, to St. Louis, to Los



Germany, 1922: Edith Molton pictured with Father and Grandfather. In 1940, the young Edith Molton escapes by the "LAST TRAIN FROM GERMANY." (Photo: courtesy of Edith Molton)

Angeles, and at last to Palo Alto. Edith was luckier than many German Jews who did not make it out of Nazi Germany. She had many memorable experiences as she made her way to her present home in Midtown. She made it from Berlin to Moscow and then saw, via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Siberian summer. In Harbin, then under Japanese authority in what was known as Manchukuo, she worshipped with a large Jewish congregation. From there to Korea, also under Japanese authority, to Japan itself. She boarded a Japanese ship—already secretly outfitted with weapons and ammunition for the coming hostilities—to make the thirteen day voyage to America. Edith's journey took her, her husband, and young son to relatives in St. Louis, Los Angeles, and finally to Palo Alto, where she has made her home ever since.

Join us April 1 to hear this heart-stopping true story.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Karen Bartholomew
Coralee Branson



MAY 6!

Palo Alto Remembered: Stories from a City's Past

by Matt Bowling

Do you remember when the...
... Circus came to town?
... Beattles stayed at the Cabaña?
... Oregon Avenue was widened?
... Yacht Harbor was closed?

Matt Bowling brings a fresh view to not-so-long-ago Palo Alto through a collection of 43 short stories and rarely seen photos!

Mark your calendar for PAHA's **MAY 6 PROGRAM!** Join us and celebrate the publication of Matt's new book!

Heritage Program on Channel 30

The TV cable program, *Heritage*, on Channel 30 in April, is "Life in Black and White" from the March 4 meeting. It will be broadcast Wednesdays at 8 PM, Thursdays at 10:30 AM, and Saturdays at 1 PM. DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed at the History Desk of the Palo Alto Main Library, Tue., 4-8 PM & Thur., 1-5 PM.

A Local History "What If?"



FROM THE
DESK OF THE
HISTORIAN
Steve Staiger

Historians and history buffs enjoy speculating on what "might have been" if historical events had turned out differently. Imagining "what ifs" have prompted historians such as Stephen Ambrose, David McCullough, and others to speculate on some of the most famous "what ifs" in history. What if Napoleon had been victorious at Waterloo? What if General Robert E. Lee had defeated Union forces at Gettysburg? What if D-Day had failed and Hitler had conquered Europe?

I have often pondered a local historical "what if"? What if 15 year old Leland Stanford, Junior had not died on the European trip with his parents? Might our local history have been changed if he had survived into adulthood?

We know that he and his parents were thinking about his college education at one of the "ivies." After graduating from perhaps Harvard or Yale, young Leland would have been 22 in 1891 (the year that Stanford University opened.) He would have been ready to face the world with a myriad of opportunities that his education and family connections would have provided.

Through his father's business connections, he might have begun a career with the railroads, as did his somewhat older contemporary Timothy Hopkins, the unofficial adopted son of Leland Stanford's business partner Mark Hopkins.

However, Leland Junior was interested in archaeology. His parents had arranged a visit to the site of Troy, and a meeting with celebrated archaeologist of Troy, Heinrich Schliemann.



The Stanford family, photographed in Paris in 1880

My "what if" speculates that Leland Junior might have become a real life "Indiana Jones," although a generation prior to George Lucas' fictional character. With an inherited fortune (both of his parents would be dead by the time he was 36,) he would have associated with one of the major museums (the Smithsonian?) and traversed the world to uncover mysteries and treasures of past civilizations. By the time he was ready to retire, his wealth, accumulated trove of artifacts, and acclaimed status as the world's leading archaeologist, he might have funded a glorious museum to house and display his treasures. But where might he locate this institution? New York? Washington? His Sacramento birthplace? San Francisco atop Nob Hill? It probably would not be located on the 8,000 acres of Peninsula land inherited from father.

What about life on the Peninsula in this "what if" scenario? Without Stanford University situated where it is, Palo Alto would have developed quite differently. Mayfield (its saloons) would have expanded, as the northern most community in Santa Clara County (the weather would be too nice to ignore). The concept and technology of Silicon Valley would eventually develop somewhere elsewhere, perhaps in southern California, where Fred



Fred Terman, Ph.D, professor at Stanford University and Silicon Valley pioneer.

Terman was born, the son of a professor at what was to become Caltech; Terman grew up with a fascination for radio electronics. Without Silicon Valley, the Peninsula might have developed more like Marin and the East Bay, bedroom communities for San Francisco. ✍

From Hostess House to Community Center to MacArthur Park to What?

As many PAHA members and preservationists know, Julia Morgan was the first woman to receive an engineering degree from UC (1894) and the first woman architect in California. She designed many signature buildings, among them Hearst Castle and five buildings at Asilomar, to name a few. During World War I,



DOUG GRAHAM
President, PAHA

the YWCA commissioned Morgan to design a “Hostess House” for visitors to troops training at Camp Fremont in Menlo Park. The facility, which combined Craftsman style with utilitarian function, opened in May, 1918. This classic Morgan building featured light frame, board, and batten construction, exposed functional roof trusses and rafters, complemented by a roomy public reception hall complete with large fireplaces at each end “nestling cozily” under overhanging balconies. When the

Great War ended, the YWCA sold the structure to Palo Alto for \$1. In May, 1919, it was cut into nine pieces and moved to its present location near the Palo Alto Caltrain Station.

On November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the Armistice, the building was dedicated as “Community House,” the first municipally-owned community center in the United States. It operated seven days a week from 9:00 AM to 10:30 PM, offering lectures, concerts, classes, child care, an employment bureau, and meeting space for Girl Scouts and professional women’s groups. The success of Palo Alto’s first Community Center led to the construction of the Lucie Stern Center, which gradually took over the functions of the Hostess House/Community Center in the 1930s.

From 1935 to 1975, various veterans’ organizations leased the building, though maintenance problems arose. From 1979 to 1981, renovations restored the building to its original condition, and it opened in 1981 as what we know as MacArthur Park Restaurant. It has remained virtually unchanged, and a Palo Alto landmark, since that time.

Julia Morgan’s Hostess House faces a new challenge. Palo Alto philanthropist and developer, John Arrillaga, proposes to build a theater and office complex on the site where MacArthur Park now sits. His project makes possible Theatre Works’ dream of a new, permanent home. On March 5, 2012, the Palo Alto City Council authorized \$250,000 for design and environmental studies on the property. Stanford has pledged financial support for the studies with an eye to easing the impact of the proposed hospital expansion. Preservation of Julia Morgan’s ninety-four year old Hostess House is a priority, and the City is requiring that the Hostess House/MacArthur Park building be saved and relocated to a site of the City’s choosing. Many questions remain unanswered: What will be a suitable site? Will MacArthur Park be interested in continuing its lease? If relocated to one of Palo Alto’s parks, could the building revert to being a Community Center again? Stay tuned!



Community House, designed by Julia Morgan. (from the PAHA archives)



Julia Morgan (from “Inspiring Women”)



Renovated interior of Julia Morgan design. (Courtesy of MacArthur Park)

Note to Readers: as the editors of the Tall Tree become more “green,” we offer you the option of receiving your Tall Tree digitally. If you’re interested, please email your request (include your preferred email address) to PAHA Secretary Bardy Wallace, bdgw@pacbell.net.

Our mission is to collect, preserve and make available to the public information about the history of Palo Alto.

History Jaunts

Spring Lecture Series: Museum of the American Heritage

351 Homer Avenue, Palo Alto 94301

Tuesday, April 10 at 7 PM: "Treasures in Your Attic," featuring antiques expert Steve Yvaska from the San Jose Mercury News.

Wednesday, May 9 at 7 PM: "Solving a Pirate Mystery." Historian Fabio López-Lázaro will discuss the adventure tale, *The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramirez.*

Eclectic Houses of Lower San Juan Neighborhood," Stanford Historical Society

April 22, from 1–4 PM: The 8th annual spring house and garden tour features the lower portion of the San Juan neighborhood, offering glimpses into the history and architecture of homes designed by Birge Clark, Henry C. Collins, Theodore W. Lenzen, and Charles K. Sumner. Highlights include a 1929 Tudor style house with the owner's elaborate model railroad layout. Tickets, payable to Stanford Historical Society, are \$25 before April 6; \$30 after April 6. Send ticket requests to Stanford Historical Society, PO Box 19290, Stanford, CA 94309. Tickets will be mailed. For information visit the SHS website (<http://histsoc.stanford.edu/hhouses.shtml>) or contact Susan Sweeney (susan.sweeney@stanford.edu, 650-324-1653) or Charlotte Glasser (cglasser@stanford.edu, 650-725-3332).

"Gardens Full of Life!," Elizabeth Gamble Garden 27th Annual Spring Tour

April 27 and 28, from 10 AM – 4 PM: The tour this year presents five gardens created to incorporate edibles along with flowers. Tickets are \$30 for members, \$35 for non-members; lunch is an additional \$15. For information: 650-329-1356, www.gamblegarden.org.

Become a Member of PAHA

We invite you to become a member of the Association and join those who care about Palo Alto and enjoy learning about its history. Your dues support the preservation of our archives, assistance to researchers and dissemination of Palo Alto historical information through our publications. Join today!

Individual \$25 Family \$40
Sustaining \$60 Business/Sponsor \$100 Life \$350

Make check payable to PAHA and mail to: PAHA Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302. Or join online at pahistory.org. Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee. (Note: current members will receive renewal notices in July.)

PAHA's Public Meetings

Sundays at the
Lucie Stern Community Center
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

APRIL 1 AT 2:00:

"ESCAPING ON THE LAST TRAIN"

Speakers: Edith Molton



Save these dates in 2012

MAY 6

"PALO ALTO REMEMBERED"

New Book Celebration

JUNE 6

ANNUAL DINNER

at Ming's

OCTOBER 7

**CELEBRATING THE GIRL SCOUT
CENTENNIAL**

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Doug Graham, *President*

John Hackmann, *First Vice President*

Joyce McClure, *Second Vice President*

Bardy Wallace, *Recording Secretary*

Chris Botsford, *Treasurer*

Steve Staiger, *Historian*

Gwen Barry

Matt Bowling

Beth Bunnenberg

Vicky Ching

Larry Christenson

Brian George

Betty Gerard

Georgie Gleim

Bob Jack

Mary Beth Cebedo Lefebvre

Jeanne McDonnell

Carol Clifford Mitchell

Harriette Shakes

Kent Stormer

Tom Wyman



The Tall Tree is published eight times a year
by the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Jeanne McDonnell, Peggy McKee,

Mary Beth Cebedo Lefebvre

Editors

Harriette Shakes, *Design*

Omega Printing, *Printing*