



# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

May 2016 Volume 39, No 7

Since 1913



## PAHA's Public Meetings

### GENERAL PROGRAM MEETINGS

are held monthly

2:00–4:00 PM

October – May

at the

Lucie Stern Community Center

1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

### NEXT PAHA MEETING:

May 15, 2016 (note 3rd Sunday!)

### PAHA-PAST Double Header

“PAST: Historic Preservation at 45”

with PAST board members

and PAHA presents

“Eichler Comes to Palo Alto”

with Steven Eichler

June 8, 2016, 6 pm

### PAHA ANNUAL DINNER

“An Evening with Robert Kelley”

Founder and Artistic Director,

TheatreWorks

Please see insert for details and reservations!



**SPEAKER: STEVEN EICHLER, educator and preserver of the legacy of his grandfather, Joseph Eichler**

Courtesy of Eichlernetwork.com

## A PAHA-PAST DOUBLE HEADER!

### PAST: HISTORIC PRESERVATION AT 45

FOR THE MAY 15 GENERAL MEETING, PAST AND PAHA JOIN FORCES TO PRESENT “HISTORIC PRESERVATION AT 45” AND “EICHLER COMES TO PALO ALTO.” On this occasion, PAST

(Palo Alto Stanford Heritage) will present its Centennial Plaque and Preservation Awards. PAST is dedicated to preserving Palo Alto’s many styles of architecture and the character of its neighborhoods. PAST also recognizes and honors citizens who have guided preservation efforts. Although Palo Alto is more than 120 years old, few of its original structures remain.

PAST President and PAHA board member Brian

George and PAST board members will present the brass Centennial Plaques and Preservation Awards.



Palo Alto citizens and organizations have successfully worked to preserve significant elements of the city’s architectural history. Notable early achievements include saving the Squire House and the Hostess House, and creating the Professorville Historic District and Ramona Street Architectural District. Other major efforts resulted in placing the Green Gables and Greenmeadow

Eichler neighborhoods on the National Register of Historic Places.

## PAHA: EICHLER COMES TO PALO ALTO

In 1949, the first 50 of what would become more than 11,000 Eichler Homes appeared for sale. This began a 25 year home building career for Joseph L. Eichler. He conceived the idea to not only fill the need for housing after World War II, but to do so in a manner unconventional to the average, and even not-so-average, tract home builder. What followed was more than just a house. It was a way of living, “Eichler Living.”

Eichler set high goals with an eye on good design, determined to offer houses and neighborhoods that provide families a way to live more fully. In working with innovative and imaginative architects, he was successful in bringing to market an

architect-designed contemporary home for the person with an average income.

As it was for those first owners, those who live in an ‘Eichler’ today feel a personal connection to their home and neighborhood. Preserving a legacy of Eichler Homes is important for the unique and rich place in history that they represent in Merchant Building and mid-century modern architecture for the masses.

Steven Eichler, grandson of Joseph Eichler, will speak about considering the built environment with intention, understanding and appreciation for the neighborhoods that Eichler built.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC \* REFRESHMENTS SERVED



**PALO ALTO  
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

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# Collecting Decades of Eichler Stories

**MANY OF US—OF A CERTAIN AGE—REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME WE SAW AN EICHLER.** They were different! Growing up in Marin, I saw my first Eichlers in Lucas Valley, where friends of my parents lived in houses that were unlike the tract home where we lived, or anything I had seen before. However, when I moved to Palo Alto in 1973, I saw literally thousands of Eichlers in neighborhoods in Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, and elsewhere in the Mid-peninsula.

When I became the Palo Alto Historian in 1984, I noticed that the archives had only limited coverage of the story of Joseph Eichler and his subdivisions. One reason for this lack of information was that my predecessors had not grasped the significance of the man and his houses for our community. Over the past 30 years, PAHA and the Archives have been correcting this oversight.

While preparing for my PAHA talk on El Camino Park, I discovered a new Eichler story. In the early 1960s, the Palo Alto City Council and City Manager were considering proposals to develop El Camino Park (with the understanding that the park’s recreation amenities would be relocated either to the Baylands or the Stanford campus). There were several suggestions: the San Francisco department store, The White House, proposed building a branch in the park across the street from the Stanford Shopping Center. Gus Mozart, along with two other car dealers, proposed an auto mall to share El Camino Park’s location. A southern Californian developer proposed several high-rise office buildings, plus a 3,000 seat theater on the site, similar to the one John Arrillaga recently proposed.

In this environment, Joseph Eichler made his pitch. By 1964, there was not much vacant land on which to build new subdivisions in Palo Alto. He proposed three high-rise apartment buildings for the site—all 15+ stories. Eichler’s firm did build two high-rise apartment buildings in San Francisco.

There may have been others that I did not learn about, but obviously, none of these proposals became reality. In 1965, the voters of Palo Alto took control of the issue and voted to protect the City’s parklands with a dedicated parkland initiative, which prohibited development on parklands without voter approval.

## PAHA’s Annual Dinner showcases TheatreWorks’ Founder Robert Kelley

Robert Kelley, the Artistic Director of TheatreWorks (*pictured right*), will be the featured speaker at **PAHA’s Annual Dinner, June 8, 2016**. Over 40 years ago, Kelley launched a theater program to engage young people and to reflect the concerns of the community. His first effort, *Popcorn*, premiered in 1970. More than 165 productions later, TheatreWorks is a fascinating story of innovation, diversity, and creativity under his stewardship.



Courtesy TheatreWorks

*You’d be mad not to attend PAHA’s Annual Dinner, June 8th at the Mitchell Park Community Center, featuring Robert Kelley and catered by Chef Chu’s.*

He has received numerous artistic awards for his productions, including *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; *Into the Woods*; *Pacific Overtures*; *Rags*; *Sweeney Todd*; *Another Midsummer Night*; *Sunday in the Park with George*; *Jane Eyre*; and *Caroline, or Change*.

For a teaser about the treat that is in store for you, check out this youtube interview: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=oK7HmVx7STw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oK7HmVx7STw).

*Be sure to RSVP by June 3rd for PAHA’s Annual Dinner with the enclosed form!*

*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.*

*Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 pm. General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (October–December, February–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 pm. Meetings include speakers. The final general meeting of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all meetings.*

# The Eichler Legacy: Further Insights and References

AS YOU PREPARE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN PALO ALTO, and especially about Eichler homes in this area, the *Tall Tree* team has put together some suggested readings and quotations from Eichler homeowners.



*The atrium, a signature feature of Eichler homes, connected the indoors with nature outside, adding space and light. Courtesy Eichlernetwork.com.*

Ned Eichler's *The Merchant Builders* (MIT Press, 1982, revised 2003) provides a vivid account of how firms such as Levitt and Eichler gave a major impetus to the postwar building boom that fostered the American dream of homeownership. Eichler goes beyond the postwar years to describe the developing practices of land acquisition, design, finance, construction, and marketing that continued over the decades. Eichler continues his examination of the merchant builders with *Fame or Fortune: Giants of the Housing Industry Revealed* (iUniverse, 2005). In this work, he provides first-hand insights into the personalities and business dealings of the builders, based on the question, "Do you do it for fame or fortune?" He includes an anecdote about the controversy raised by Joseph Eichler's sale of a Greenmeadow Eichler to an African-American family. For more on Joseph Eichler's support for civil rights, see the article at [www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/EICHLER-PROGRESSIVE-IN-MORE-THAN-JUST-DESIGN-2503643.php](http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/EICHLER-PROGRESSIVE-IN-MORE-THAN-JUST-DESIGN-2503643.php).

California historian Kevin Starr notes in his *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963*, (Oxford University Press, 2008) that Eichler Homes built 10,000 houses over the course of two decades. Joseph Eichler was intrigued by the new construction techniques and opportunities available in the Bay Area after World War II. He formed his own company, hired an architectural firm, and designed his first prototype—a T-shaped two bedroom house that went on the market in Sunnyvale in 1950. Modernism to Eichler meant "glass walls, low-pitched roofs, concrete floors, and steel framing." In the new world of tract homes, an Eichler comprised four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a family room, for approximately \$25,000.

His architects designed homes and floor plans to serve the needs and rhythms of family life. A signature feature of Eichler homes was its atrium, "a light-flooded foyer at the entrance...forming a transition from outdoors to indoors."

The true significance of an Eichler home comes from their owners:

Angela Marcinek's favorite place in the house was its atrium, "The sun would come through the tall glass and warm the smooth ocean blue slate. I would curl up there against the glass like a cat, soaking in the sun and looking out at the world from the view of an ant."

Sunnyvale resident Richard Sachs notes, "Living in our Eichler has given us a sense of connection to our immediate neighbors and natural setting as well as connection to the San Francisco Bay Area in general."

Local artist Judy Gittelson comments on how her atrium, with its small tree, provided a remarkable transition from the public world to her private one. "The symbolic idea was that within the walls of my home, nature grew and echoed throughout the rest of the house."

For more on the Eichlers, visit [www.eichlernetwork.com](http://www.eichlernetwork.com), where you may learn about the Eichler-themed quilt that recently won first prize at a regional quilt contest.



*Quilt-maker Mickey Beebe on Bonnie Doon won top honors for her Eichler-themed quilt this February at QuiltCon West. Courtesy Eichlernetwork.com.*

Current and back issues of the Eichler Network Newsletter are available at PAHA's Guy Miller Archives, Room K-7, Cubberley. In 2008, PAST featured an Eichler extravaganza for its Holiday House Tour; the essay in the tour booklet may be found at [www.pastheritage.org/HHTByYear/HHT2008.html#craven](http://www.pastheritage.org/HHTByYear/HHT2008.html#craven).



# History Jaunts



Don't miss Palo Alto's annual **May Fete Parade** on Saturday, May 7, which begins on University Avenue at 10 am and finishes at Heritage Park. This year celebrates "healthy lifestyles" as it marches down University Avenue and ends across the street from the **Museum of American Heritage (MOAH)**, 351 Homer Avenue, which will be presenting the **12th Annual Vintage Vehicles and Family Festival**, 9:30 am–2:00 pm. A variety of unique vintage cars will be on display as well as MOAH's current exhibit **Pinball: An Exhibition of Vintage Pinball Machines**. For more information, call (650) 321-1004 or visit [www.moah.org](http://www.moah.org).

Be sure to visit the **Palo Alto Art Center**, 1313 Newell Road in Palo Alto, between June 18 and August 28, to see its installation "**Fired Up: Monumental Clay.**" The exhibition showcases the powerful potential of ceramics on a monumental scale. Participating artists have crafted pieces that "tower over us, consume our field of vision, require us to navigate around them." The exhibit celebrates the Palo Alto Art Center's 45th anniversary and is free and open to the public—don't miss it! For more information, call (650) 329-2366 or visit the center's website [www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/csd/artcenter/](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/csd/artcenter/).

**PAST** is pleased to offer another **series of walking tours**. This is a superb opportunity to get out in the sunshine, meet some of your neighbors, and broaden your knowledge and appreciation for our wonderful city. All tours start at 10 am and are free and open to the public. **May 14: Professorville**, led by Gail Woolley, meet at 1005 Bryant (corner of Bryant and Addison); **May 21: College Terrace**, led by Carolyn George, meet at 1181 College (corner of College and Harvard); **May 28: Crescent Park**, led by Margaret Feuer, meet at Squire House, 900 University (corner of University and Seneca); **June 4: Homer Avenue**, led by Steve Emslie, meet at The Woman's Club, 475 Homer Avenue.

If you haven't visited the **Museum of the African Diaspora**—either in person or electronically—it is well worth your while to do so. MoAD, located at 685 Mission in San Francisco, permanently features interactive "slave narratives," as well as a current exhibit on the singer Grace Jones. For more information, call (415) 358-7200 or visit the website [www.moadsf.org](http://www.moadsf.org).

Welcome New Member!  
William Warren

## Heritage Program on Channel 30

PAHA's May 2016 program will feature Barbara Wilcox on "World War I Army Training by San Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp Fremont."

The schedule is

Wednesdays at 8 pm,  
Thursdays at 10:30 am, and  
Saturdays at 1 pm  
on Channel 30.

DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed from the PAHA's Guy Miller Archives, which are located at Cubberley, Room K-7.

Hours: Tuesdays, 4-8 pm,  
Thursdays, 1-5 pm

## 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 make our work possible: we maintain the archives, assist researchers, and disseminate historical information through our publications and public programs. Your generosity will be appreciated for generations to come. Join today!

Individual \$40      Family \$60  
Sustaining \$75      Business/Sponsor \$150      Life \$500

Make check payable to PAHA and mail to: PAHA, Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302. Or join online at [pahistory.org](http://pahistory.org). Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee. (Current members should have received renewal notices by post.)



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Photographs courtesy of PAHA Guy Miller Archives unless otherwise noted.