Tall Tree

Volume 29, Number 8
May 2006
www.pahistory.org

General Meeting

Sunday, May 7 at 2:00 p.m.
Lucie Stern Community Center
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Free & open to the public
Cookies & coffee

Kathleen Norris,
“A Woman of Certain Importance”

Speaker: Deanna Paoli Gumina, Author of A Woman of Certain Importance, historian, psychologist

Kathleen Norris and her husband Charles G. Norris, already successful writers, searched the world over for a place to raise their children, and chose Palo Alto in 1928. They selected Birge Clark to design their home, “La Casa Abrieta” ("The Open House"), which still stands at the corner of Melville and Cowper. The Norrices lived in Palo Alto until 1945 when C.G. died at which time Kathleen returned to San Francisco, place of her birth.

By 1935, Kathleen had written 50 books. So well known an author was she that TIME magazine featured her on the cover of the January 28, 1935 issue. Independently wealthy from her voluminous literary work, she was decidedly A Woman of Certain Importance, the title of a book by our speaker, Deanna Paoli Gumina.

Deanna, historian, psychologist and lecturer at SFSU, thought about writing of San Francisco’s past since the age of seven. She has published a number of journal articles, including a history of Old Saint Mary’s Church in San Francisco. In addition, she wrote the book, The Italians of San Francisco 1850 – 1930, and annotated the winter diary of Lillie Hitchcoot Coit.

Identifying with Kathleen Norris as a fellow San Franciscan and writer, she welcomed the opportunity to write Kathleen Norris’ biography. Join us to learn more about one of Palo Alto’s best known citizens. Copies of the book, A Woman of Certain Importance, will be available.

Photograph of Kathleen Norris by Arnold Goethe from the Library of Congress shown with the title of book, A Woman of Certain Importance, by Deanna Paoli Gumina.
—Courtesy of author
A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Susan Bright Winn

We are always happy to see so many people appreciating the results of the time and effort put in by so many of our board members and volunteers, all of whom deserve our warmest thanks and applause. Over the past year our attendance at our monthly general meetings has increased, and this month is a good time to shine a spotlight on a few board members who especially work to bring our programs to you.

First, thanks to Joe Shakes, Program Chair, who has worked with his committee to produce quite an array of interesting programs, from Roxy Rapp remembering the Palo Alto of his youth, to former mayors recalling the important aspects of their times in office. The Fourth Annual Vignettes of Palo Alto featured reflections of our own membership on past days here in town. Anna Mancini shared with us the restoration process of the historical Hewlett-Packard garage on Addison, and Tom Wyman recalled the effects of the 1906 earthquake. And in May, Deanna Gumina will round out our knowledge of famed Palo Altan, Kathleen Norris. Finally, for our June banquet we are especially looking forward to Palo Alto Weekly editor, Jay Thorwaldson, who will speak on the many transitions that Palo Alto has experienced as it went from a small, leafy college town to the birthplace of Silicon Valley.

Second, thanks to Brian George who videos each meeting, and then produces a program seen the following month on local cable Channel 30. Brian is also reviewing our archives for films of historical moments in Palo Alto history.

And last, thanks to Carol Clifford Mitchell, Hospitality Chair, who oversees the delicious refreshments and beautiful flower arrangements for our meetings.

Thanks, very much, to all three for the efforts that go into making our programs so delightful.

FROM THE DESK OF THE HISTORIAN

Steve Staiger

The Association is now preparing the third edition of our booklet “Parks of Palo Alto.” Originally published in 1983 and revised in 1996, our parks have changed enough to warrant attention.

Liz Hogan, our former president, is the editor. She is a member of the Friends of Palo Alto Parks, which is assisting us with the printing. Board member Gwen Barry is searching for and selecting photographs. Liz has visited each of the parks and verified with City staff changes or improvements.

And we will have two new parks by the time of publication. Recently opened Heritage Park is on Homer Avenue adjacent to the future Palo Alto History Museum in the Roth Building. As you may recall, the City, with our assistance, encouraged the public to submit possible names for this park. Over 100 submittals were made, with the names of Drs. Joe Davis and Russel Lee receiving the most nominations. Heritage Park was the compromise name.

Another new park in the making will open sometime this summer. On Stanford land at the corner of El Camino Real and Page Mill Road, it will include soccer fields.

Other parks have had significant changes since the last edition of the booklet. For example, Juana Briones Park on Arastradero recently re-opened after extensive landscaping. The Enid Pearson Arastradero Preserve was renamed to honor former Councilmember and parks supporter Enid Pearson, but also grew in size and has new facilities.

In the past the booklet has proved useful not only for its historical content, but also as a handy guide for park visitors. The new edition will further this effort with updated descriptions of park amenities and stories of honored historical personalities and bits of Palo Alto history.
“She Certainly Fits No Stereotyped Category as a Producer of Literary Lumber.”

TIME, January 28, 1935

Along with her portrait on the cover, TIME magazine mentioned that “with her frankly commercial short stories, her articles, her moving picture rights, her lectures, her household hints and miscellaneous works, she makes close to $300,000 a year, probably more than any other woman in the U.S. today.”

In the article TIME wrote this description of Kathleen Norris, “She certainly fits no stereotyped category as a producer of literary lumber. A charming, friendly, incredibly busy woman, she is a concocter of treacly yarns, a romantic who laps up travel literature, a sophisticated and often rampant wit and practical joker, an amateur actress of talent, a deadly croquet player, a dynamo of energy that can leap from typewriter to cooking pot to evening dress and back again, a wife, a mother, a chatelaine, all in one highly individual bundle.”

Kathleen Noris as “Widow Cagle in Lula Vollmer’s play of southern mountaineer white trash, Sun-Up [presented by the Palo Alto Community Players]. Mrs. Norris was worried because the role required a series of hearty pulls on the corn cob pipe. She had never smoked in her life, thought herself at 54 too old to begin. But her stage director was adamant. So, experimenting first with cubeb, later with cubeb tobacco stuffed into the bowl, she learned to keep the corn cob puffing. She now confesses to enjoying a smoke, is having difficulty breaking herself of the habit.” — TIME magazine, January 28, 1935, p. 65
NOMINATIONS FOR PAHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
The Nominating Committee has nominated Vicki Ching and Bob Jack for three-year terms on the Palo Alto Historical Association Board of Directors. Board members who are standing for another three-year term are Beth Bunnenberg, Georgie Gleim, Karen Holman, Carol Clifford Mitchell, Jan Murphy and Tom Wyman.

Members at large may put a name in nomination by preparing a petition signed by at least 10 members of PAHA and submit it to Jan Murphy, Recording Secretary, at 650.493.2477 on or before Friday, May 12th. The membership will elect new members to the Board at the PAHA Annual Dinner on Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

MAY IS PRESERVATION MONTH
Pictured here is one of several brass plaques to be awarded to owners of Palo Alto homes which have reached centennial status this year. Awards are presented by PAST Heritage at their annual Preservation Awards Ceremony, on Sunday, May 21st. For a complete calendar listing of Preservation Month activities and programs, please call the PAST hotline, 540.299.8878, or visit www.pastheritage.org.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PAHA MEMBER?
Here’s how...Pick up a brochure at any library or one of our general meetings. Or, send your name, address, phone number and email address to PAHA, P.O. Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302 with a check for your choice of membership: Individual: $25; Family: $40; Sustaining: $60; Business: $100; Life: $350.