Dr. Esther Clark
Palo Alto’s Beloved Pediatrician

It seems appropriate to take this opportunity—Mother’s Day, 2015—to honor Dr. Esther Clark. Although not a mother herself, Dr. Clark was a beloved pediatrician who helped thousands of Palo Alto mothers to raise healthy children. Dr. Clark grew up in College Terrace along with her brothers, Birge and David, all of whom attended Palo Alto High School and Stanford University. A high school science class sparked Esther Clark’s interest in medicine, and she never looked back: she began her medical career as the Peninsula’s first female pediatrician in 1926; she joined Dr. Russell Lee and Dr. “Fritz” Roth to found the Palo Alto Clinic (housed in the Roth Building in the Homer Historical Corridor); in 1953, she founded the Children’s Health Council to serve children with special needs. In 1965, Dr. Clark donated to the City of Palo Alto 21 acres of her property in the Old Trace and Old Adobe Roads area. That land is now the Esther Clark Nature Preserve. Dr. Clark’s nephews, Malcolm Clark and Dean Clark, will facilitate this celebration.
Financing the Archives

We can start with the history—after all we are PAHA. On July 22, 1957, all thirteen (yes, there were 13 then) members of the Palo Alto City Council unanimously passed a resolution authorizing the City to contract with the PAHA to “perform the function of Palo Alto Historian.” The resolution was signed by Mayor Noel E. Porter. The contract called for a payment of $75 per month. PAHA has had responsibility for maintaining the archives ever since. This is, of course, a key part of the mission of the association today.

Now, our payroll and benefits come to more than $28,000 for a part-time historian and assistant. The Palo Alto Library covers those costs and provides space for the archives. In addition, volunteers have always greatly contributed to operating the archives. For many years, the archives were in a corner of the Main Library, but with the remodeling of the Library, they moved to the Cubberley Complex in what had been classroom K-7. We thus have a larger space and a much better environment for doing historical research.

In addition to the physical archives, PAHA has been digitizing historic photographs and making them available on the web. We now have more than 7,200 photographs available anytime someone wishes to view them. They can be accessed at http://archives.pahistory.org/. Currently this project is financed directly by our membership. In addition there are costs for storing archival material off-site. We will be negotiating a new contract for City’s next fiscal year and hope to get these costs included as part of the Library budget.

For some years the cost of operating the archives wasn’t too much of an issue because we had a good volume of book sales to generate income. That was essentially a windfall and sales are now quite small. Consequently we need additional support from our members, at least until we are able to get additional financing from the City.

The archives are financed separately from the other functions of PAHA, such as the monthly meetings, for which we neither seek nor receive City financing.

Take a Spring Walking Tour with PAST (Palo Alto Stanford Heritage)

Saturday, May 9 — Professorville
Led by Gail Woolley. Meet at 1005 Bryant (corner of Addison and Bryant).

Saturday, May 16 — College Terrace
Led by Carolyn George. Meet at 1181 College (corner of College and Harvard)

Sunday, June 14 — Professorville
Led by Kris Zavoli. Meet at 1005 Bryant (corner of Addison and Bryant).

Saturday, June 20 — Crescent Park
Led by Margaret Feuer. Meet at the Squire House, 900 University, (University and Seneca).

All walks begin at 10:00 AM.

Space Aliens and the Local Scene

The 93rd annual May Fete Children’s Parade will be on Saturday, May 2. The theme for this year is “No space to alienate,” the idea that children should accept people for who they are. The flyer announcing the parade has several images of space aliens and emphasizes the acronym UFO for “be Unique, be Free, be yOu”.

In looking for a theme for this month’s column (I am always looking for ideas and would welcome any suggestions), I was reminded that space aliens have been a part of the local scene for several decades (and perhaps longer). While we are not in the same league as Roswell, New Mexico and Nevada’s Area 51, numerous aliens have been spotted in Palo Alto since the 1970s. I am, of course, referring to the art of Greg Brown. Many of his portraits of local residents feature aliens and their UFOs. There is the confused alien who has crashed his space ship into the side of a bank building; the alien peeking from a garbage can on the back of a trash man; or the alien in a stroller being pushed by Spiro Agnew. These portraits are treasured by residents and visitors, and suggest that aliens are not always to be seen as the villains of 1950s horror movies.

There is another local spot with a potential link to aliens. Frenchman’s Tower, on Old Page Mill Road, has been around since the 1870s. Built by Peter Coutts during his residence in California, the brick tower’s purpose remains a mystery. In my talks to third grade classrooms, I challenge the students to solve the mystery. Ideas proposed by the students have included using the tower as a place to store his gold, a haven to hide from his enemies, or as a place to “hang out.” So far, no student has been able to prove his theory.

I have extended this challenge to adults as well, and several men have researched the question and offered their own ideas. One man sent a detailed email report on his analysis of the tower. He examined a number of factors including its height and its place in the environment, and concluded that its function was as a beacon to attract aliens. Unfortunately he offered no proof as to how this beacon might work, or whether it has already accomplished its task. The tone of his report appeared to be quite serious, unlike the aliens of Greg Brown.

Above, Alien mural by Greg Brown, downtown Palo Alto.
Below: Frenchman’s Tower on Old Page Mill Road, Palo Alto.
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 $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 November.)