



The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

January 2018 Volume 40, No 4

The PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

presents *Robin Chapman's*

California **APRICOTS**

THE LOST ORCHARDS OF SILICON VALLEY



Robin Chapman will lead us to orchards that once bloomed in the Santa Clara Valley. A Los Altos native, Robin had a long career in television news, including KRON-TV in San Francisco, and was a national correspondent in Washington D.C. before returning to Los Altos in 2009. She now writes a history column for

the Los Altos Town Crier. She has authored four books, including *California Apricots: The Lost Orchards of Silicon Valley*. Robin is currently completing her latest book, scheduled to be published by the History Press in the fall of 2018 and tentatively titled *The Spirit of California: Tales of Exceptional People In the Land That Became Silicon Valley*.

Sunday, January 28, 2018, 2:00–4:00 pm

Lucie Stern Community Center ~ 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto



The Valley of Heart's Delight: A Double Feature (at least)



FROM THE DESK OF
Steve Staiger
City Historian

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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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, Phone (650) 329-2353.

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.

Before there was a Silicon Valley, the Santa Clara Valley was known as “The Valley of Heart’s Delight.” This nickname reflected the Valley’s rich agricultural heritage – from fields of wheat to orchards of apricots, cherries, plums and other fruit trees.

By the early 20th century, the Valley was a tourist destination. Thousands of visitors would travel throughout the Valley each spring by the new interurban trolleys to view the acres of orchards covered in blossoms. Community leaders saw the promotional opportunities in this agricultural paradise, and began to promote the Valley and its beauty. Thus was born “The Valley of Heart’s Delight.”

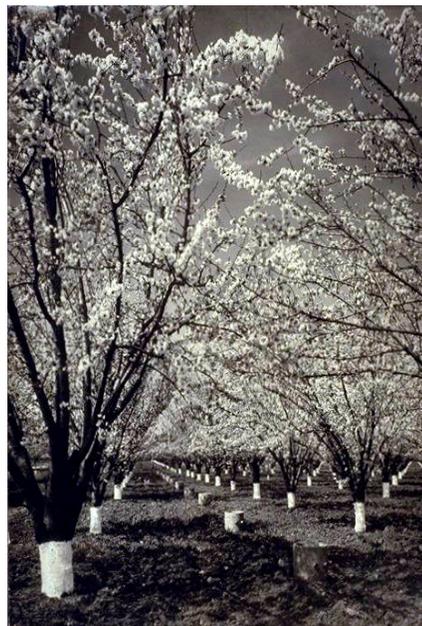
In 1922, the San Jose Chamber of Commerce produced a 25-minute black and white silent film, “Valley of Heart’s Delight,” to promote San Jose and the rest of the Valley. A version of the film with a soundtrack (added by KPIX in 1962) [can be viewed on Youtube](#).



Ralph Britton
PAHA President

population density was low, and land was available for industry as well as agriculture. The area was known as “The Valley of Heart’s Delight” for its beauty, mild climate, and concentration of orchards, flowering trees, and plants. Canneries such as Del Monte and Schuckl thrived in Sunnyvale, and Sutter Packing in Palo Alto. The Joshua Hendy Iron Works in Sunnyvale (now Westinghouse Marine Division) turned out Liberty Ship engines during the war. Farmers on the southern edge of Palo Alto special-

ized in raising chickens, as can be seen in streets still named Leghorn, Plymouth, and Rock. Japanese-American farmers grew fruits, vegetables, and lovely chrysanthemums on modest plots of land, until relocated to camps during the war. The orchards bloomed from late February until April. The thousands of acres of beautiful and fragrant blossoms made for a pleasant weekend drive through



An apricot orchard in early spring bloom, 1940s.

One hundred years ago, the Valley had more than 7 million plum (prune) trees, 665,000 apricot trees and another 750,000 peach and cherry trees.

In 1948, The San Jose Chamber of Commerce created a [new 18-minute color \(with sound\) film](#) with the same title to promote San Jose “as a destination for families and businesses.” Although the orchards were quickly disappearing by this time, the Chamber was successful in attracting new residents and businesses to the area. Then a small city of 50,000, San Jose is now the 10th largest city in the United States.

In 2006, [another film](#) with the same title was released. It got very poor reviews, was withdrawn and an attempt to “fix” it was unsuccessful when it was re-released two years later. Instead of a story of life in the land of orchards, it was a retelling of the famous 1933 San Jose kidnapping and murder of Brooke Hart. I was not aware of this film until I came across references to it in my research for this article.

Growing Up with the Local Orchards

“The Valley of Heart’s Delight.” My family occasionally packed a picnic and stopped by the side of the road to enjoy the view and the pleasant spring weather.

As fruit matured in the summer, canneries hired workers. A common summer occupation for local boys and girls was to work cutting and preparing fruit.

It was a simpler time. A family with one wage earner working at a modest job could afford a modest but comfortable home in Palo Alto. There was less pressure. While many of Palo Alto’s children went to college, those who didn’t could expect to find a decent job that would support a comfortable living.

Chrysanthemums: When Flower Nurseries Bloomed

As this month's PAHA program attests, agriculture played an important role on the Peninsula for many decades. November's PAHA program on Redwood City highlighted the lesser-known history of our area's local chrysanthemum industry, once vital to the region's economy, influential on the world stage, and in which Palo Alto played a central part.

The advent of Peninsula floriculture dates to shortly after 1900 in Montara, where horticultural professor I. Takahashi from the University of Tokyo successfully cultivated strawflowers and demonstrated their ability to generate more cash than food crops. Nearby produce growers took notice and soon flower nurseries appeared in the flatlands of San Carlos, Belmont, and Redwood City, where favorable lease terms, rich soils, and abundant sunlight supported the growth of flowers of all kinds, including higher value chrysanthemums desired by Japanese and Chinese immigrants.

In 1904, Redwood City gardener Henry Goertzhain developed the idea of a cheesecloth house to filter sunlight and allow greater control over moisture, wind, insects, and temperature. The innovation revolutionized the mums industry by allowing for larger, single bloom plants with flowers as large as ten inches in diameter and plants that reached over seven feet in height! The market responded enthusiastically to these larger blooms, with Japanese growers in particular quick to adopt the new growing method.

Between 1910 and 1930 the industry expanded and mums became the Peninsula's most valuable export, bringing in some \$7 million in revenue annually. Blooms retailing for \$1.50 per stem (equivalent to 18 dollars today) could be shipped via refrigerated rail transport to midwestern, Atlantic and southern markets, where each autumn 30 rail cars were sent to New Orleans for All Saints Day celebrations, while nationwide different colored mums were delivered as high school and college football homecoming corsages.

With the addition of exports to Asia and Europe, by 1929 Redwood City claimed to be the "Chrysanthemum Capital of the World", helping San Francisco emerge as one of the world's three great flower markets – after London and Chicago, and before Amsterdam. In 1931, the local Japanese-American community held the nation's first Kiku Matsuri, or Japanese Chrysanthemum Festival, showcasing cultural traditions with a parade, concerts, tea ceremonies, dance, and martial arts programs. The flower is esteemed in both Chinese and Japanese cultures as a traditional symbol of long life and rebirth. In Japan, the flower's beautiful alignment of petals, which unfold in a precise manner, represent perfection and nobility and became part of many family seals, including Japan's royal family.

With the onset of war with Japan, and the controversial Executive Order 9066, all Japanese growers were forced to sell or leave behind their farming operations. At the same time, the global demand for flowers began to collapse. A few lucky Japanese growers who entrusted their operations to friends or business associates were able to come back to intact nurseries after the war, but most nurseries were in ruins. The post-war housing boom soon forced farmers to move southwards in search of cheaper land.



Early chrysanthemum packing house. Workers prepare flowers for shipment east and abroad. Courtesy San Mateo County History Museum.

At this time, the California Chrysanthemum Growers Association relocated to Palo Alto, where by 1955 five rail cars of mums would leave Palo Alto Station daily during peak season. Innovation on the growing side continued, with the use of lights to retard bud formation, extending harvests later into the year, and the introduction of polyethylene in the place of cheesecloth. Gas heaters in the winter and electric evaporative

coolers in the summer further lengthened growing seasons. During the 1950s and 1960s, the industry concentrated increasingly in Santa Clara County, where mums growers of Chinese descent became the dominant players. By 1968, chrysanthemums were the county's single largest crop, at a value of some \$10 million per year. The industry peaked in 1978, when there were 140 members of the California Chrysanthemum Grower's Association.

Competition from cheaper South American growers and increasing land prices in the emerging Silicon Valley put pressures on local flower nurseries, which continued to be active until the 1990s, when 95% of the nation's cut flowers were still grown in California. However, the outbreak of white rust in Santa Clara County in that decade devastated the chrysanthemums crop, while increasing international market pressure and soaring real estate prices led flower growers to abandon California more generally. The state now produces only 2% of the cut flowers sold in the US.

Beyond a few small growers, the legacy of mums on the Midpeninsula continues to this day in the person of Paul Althouse, who purchased the original Goertzhain Redwood City Nursery in 1944. Mr. Althouse, now in his nineties, continues to raise mums and other colorful flowers in the northwest corner of Palo Alto's Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden. Paul's mums are cut for flower arrangements delivered weekly to various Palo Alto community locations, and they can be visited daily in season at Gamble Garden.

— Jon Gifford with Shawn Overstreet, PhD of Filoli and the Redwood City Heritage Assn. Additional photos in the Tall Tree electronic edition.

PALO
ALTO
HISTORY
MUSEUM

Palo Alto History Museum UPDATE – The Palo Alto City Council unanimously upped its support for a Museum on December 11 by **extending the museum’s lease** option for the Roth building, adding a **matching grant**, and agreeing to appoint **three Council members to help** the board raise funds for this important project. **Bottom line:** if the museum raises \$1.75 million by November 30, 2018, the City will add \$665,000 in historic preservation dollars and open the conversation to free up more funding. PAHA is where the Museum was born; thank you for the many gifts you have made. Please talk this up and help get the Museum built. Donate at PaloAltoHistoryMuseum.org. — *Laura Bajuk, Interim Director*

We’re almost 125 years old! Interested in helping Palo Alto celebrate its quasiquicentennial in 2019? Contact Brian George on briang8897@aol.com to join up.

History Jaunts for the New Year

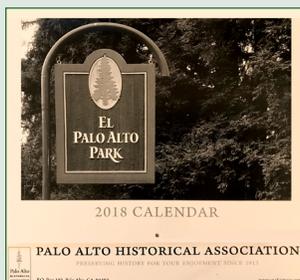
Be sure to visit **Peers Park** (and bring the children and grandchildren!) to see the ten towering trees in the Challenger Redwood Grove. These trees commemorate the 1985 space shuttle flight, on which astronaut Loren Acton carried a package of redwood seeds from Palo Alto’s El Palo Alto tree. It is now 30 years since the seeds were planted and the ten trees tower above the plaque. Peers Park is located at 1899 Park Blvd in Palo Alto.

A must-see, especially if you haven’t been there lately, is the **Computer History Museum** at 1401 N. Shoreline Blvd. in Mountain View. “This captivating Silicon Valley museum takes a deep dive into...the modern chip world, ancient Incan computers, Renaissance-era calculators...and other spectacular geeky glories.” Visit the website computerhistorymuseum.org or call (650) 810-1010 for details about admission, hours, docent tours, and special events.

MOAH’s exhibit, Thomas Edison and His Rivals: Bringing Electricity to America. Learn about the 20th century rivalries between Thomas Edison, George Westinghouse, and Nikola Tesla as they raced to bring life-changing inventions and electricity to the American public. The Museum of American Heritage is located at 351 Homer Ave. in Palo Alto, is free, and open Friday to Sunday, 11 am - 4 pm. The exhibit runs through February 18, 2018. For more information, call (650) 321-1004 or visit MOAH at moah.org.

To burn off those extra holiday calories, visit San Mateo County’s recently opened, 6,142-acre, **La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve**, and hike its miles of trails that stretch from Skyline Boulevard to La Honda. The preserve is free, open to the public daily from sunrise to sunset. For directions, and trail maps, visit <https://www.trails.com/topomap.aspx?trailid=HGS013-024>.

PAHA 2018 Calendars still available for pickup and purchase!



2018 PAHA Calendars are still available for pick up and purchase at the January 28th PAHA meeting at Lucie Stern Community Center. Calendars are free to all members who are current with their dues. They can also be picked up at PAHA Archives, Tuesday 4-8 pm or Thursdays 1-5 pm, or received by mail by sending a check for \$5.00 for shipping/handling to P.O. Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302.

Additional calendars are available for purchase at Bell’s Books, Books Inc., and the Palo Alto Art Center, from \$15 each.

Welcome New Members!

Lifetime
Virginia DiMarchi
Annual
Jennifer Anderson
Janifer Burns
Rebecca Carter
Joy Chase
Trudy & Klaus Eichstädt
Kirsten Essenmacher
Ellen Fox
Mary Herndon
Judy Hulse
Linda Illig
Scott Kilner
Nadia Naik
Seelam Reddy
Eve Rice
Dale Sainsbury
Rita Vrhl
Anna Wachtel
James Wu

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The Heritage Program for January 2018 will feature

“Palo Alto as Early Influence on Lives of Public Service”

Weds. 8 pm, Thurs. 10 am & Sats. 1 pm on Channel 30.

DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed from PAHA’s Guy Miller Archives at Cubberley, Room K-7.

Hours: Tues. 4-8 pm, Thurs. 1-5 pm

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In Memoriam

Eleanor Doty
Jean Lane

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

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Photographs courtesy of PAHA Guy Miller Archives unless otherwise noted.