PAHA Board member, Bo Crane, will be speaking about how five former Palo Alto High School (Paly) athletes contributed to the success of the 1920 U.S. Olympic team a century ago.

After an eight-year hiatus due to the cancellation of the 1916 Olympics during WWI (1914 to 1918), the Olympics recommenced in 1920 in Antwerp, Belgium. Many athletes had put their sport careers on hold during this time to support the war effort. Paly alums Frederick “Feg” Murray (class of 1912), John K. Norton (1912), Robert Lyman “Dink” Templeton (1914), and Morris Kirksey (1914) were no exception. These four plus John “Jack” Patrick, 1917 Paly graduate, would go on to star in the 1920 Olympics in either track, rugby or both sports and bring home four gold medals, two silver medals and one bronze medal.

Join us on January 24th from 2:00-3:00 pm to hear interesting stories about these five former Paly athletes turned Olympians, and how three won spots on the 1920 U.S. rugby team—a team that was expected to be crushed by France, reputedly the best team in the world.

For more information about our programs, and for Zoom instructions, visit our website at www.pahistory.org.
As we continue to slog our way through the Covid pandemic, it’s interesting to wonder just how this period will appear to future historians. Looking back at the 1918 flu epidemic, we find little more than a few photographs in our PAHA files. According to the Sedition Act of 1918, which made it a crime to undermine the war effort, discussions of the epidemic were apparently considered to fall into this category.

There is certainly no lack of published information about our current pandemic. What will be especially valuable to future historians, however, will be personal stories of how this has affected local families, local businesses, schools, and other institutions. These are the “between the lines” stories which are often overlooked, and which can provide color, context, and valuable information to future generations who might be facing another similar trauma. Most relevant as I write this, how did the pandemic affect our holiday celebrations? Did some of us invent new traditions? How did we make this period a special time, rather than focusing on what we cannot do? These will be fascinating bits of history for those future historians.

In the meantime, PAHA hopes you have all managed to find some ways to celebrate our winter holidays. We look forward to virtually seeing you at our next program on January 24th from 2:00-3:00.

President’s Letter

Georgie Gleim

The Steve Staiger Award was created in 2015 to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to collecting, organizing, and sharing the history of Palo Alto. It has been our custom to grant the award during our June annual meeting dinner, but unfortunately, we were unable to do so this year because of COVID-19 restrictions.

The recipient of the 2020 Steve Staiger Award is Jim Lyons, a long-time PAHA member, donor, and volunteer. Jim is a retired dealer of early and rare newspapers and has been a member and volunteer at PAHA for many years. He has devoted countless hours to preserving and repairing photos, maps, newspapers, and other early publications in our collection.

Most recently, Jim has digitized the contents of two scrapbooks of an early Palo Altan. The scrapbook was put together by Norwood B. Smith, an amateur historian (and PAHA member) and contains photos, articles, and transcripts of oral histories from the late 1800s to the 1950s. Jim has also embarked on cataloging PAHA’s book and publication collection.

Jim is a generous donor of supplies, equipment, materials, and artifacts to the Archives. At the beginning of the year, we acquired 66 bound volumes of The Daily Palo Alto Times from him, dating from 1908-1933. He has always made time to pass along his wealth of knowledge in identifying and authenticating historic materials, as well as preservation techniques, to PAHA volunteers (and PAHA Historians!).

Thank you, Jim, for your many contributions to PAHA and to the preservation of Palo Alto history!
Those who have held the record in the 100-yard dash have each been called the World’s Fastest Human. Included in this list is Morris Marshall Kirksey, a Palo Alto High School graduate and Stanford alumnus, who is also Paly’s only two-time Olympic gold medal winner.

Kirksey was born in Texas, but the family soon moved to the Bay Area. He competed at Paly in fall rugby and spring track with the class that graduated in June of 1914, the month when the heir to the Austrian-Hungary throne was assassinated, soon setting off WWI.

At Stanford, he continued going out for both rugby and track and was getting noticed as a fast sprinter. After the 1916 Olympics were cancelled due to the war in Europe, Morris left Stanford to attend Rice University. The U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917. As a Rice student, Kirksey registered for the WWI draft in June. A month later he enlisted in the Navy, serving until April 1919.

Returning to Stanford in 1920, Kirksey once again joined the rugby and track teams. The 1920 Olympic trials were held in June at Harvard Stadium. Morris was one of four 100-yard sprinters making the team to race in the 100-meters and 200-meters.

In the Olympic finals of the 100-meter race, Charley Paddock, doing his trademark leap at the finish, nosed out Kirksey for gold as both were clocked at 10.8 seconds, leaving Kirksey with a silver medal. A few days later, he narrowly finished fourth in his 200-meter semifinal, again by an inch, but this time missing out on the final. Running anchor on the 4 x 100-meter relay, Kirksey helped set a new relay world record, finally getting his gold medal!

The rugby championship was held two weeks later. Because rugby was still being played in California universities along with football, Bay Area college players comprised most of the team, including Kirksey. On a rainy day, the U.S. beat France, giving Kirksey his second gold.

Back at Stanford, Kirksey continued racing and won the 100-yard race at the 1921 Intercollegiate Association track meet. Later that spring, he tied Charley Paddock’s record time of 9.6 seconds while barely losing at the finish line once again.

With a Stanford degree in philosophy, Morris went onto the St. Louis Medical College, becoming a physician. In the early 1930s, he taught at San Francisco’s Stanford University Hospital. Married, he and his wife moved to Stockton, where he was a staff psychiatrist for the California Department of Corrections for 25 years, assigned to both San Quentin and Folsom prisons.

Morris died at age 86 in 1981. His 100-meter Olympic time would put him fourth best in the Paly record book. But at one time he was the Worlds Fastest (Paly) Viking—an inch away from being the World’s Fastest Human.
Jaunting During the Pandemic

As I sit here on a bright, crisp, sunny day, in December, we are still in the midst of a shelter-in-place mandate with instructions from local health officials and the governor to persevere with masks and social distancing. That said, before going on a jaunt, check the accompanying telephone numbers or websites for updates and current health mandates.

Entwined is a monumental piece of public art in the Peacock Meadow of Golden Gate Park (240 JFK Drive, between McLaren Lodge and the Conservatory of Flowers). Created by San Francisco artist, Charles Gadeken, Entwined celebrates the 150th anniversary of Golden Gate Park. The trees range from 12 to 20 feet in height and their illuminated canopies are as large as 30 feet wide. You can also admire Entwined during the day, even when the LED lights are not ablaze. This stunning installation will remain in Golden Gate Park through February 28, and the installation is illuminated from sundown until 8:30 pm. For more information, visit https://www.goldengatepark150.com/entwined.

Medical and health care professionals urge us to put on our masks and get some exercise walking or biking outdoors, perhaps with one family member or one friend. The Bay Trail — which includes Palo Alto’s Baylands Nature Preserve — now comprises 350 miles of trails. I recommend you start at Byxbee Park, 2375 Embarcadero Road. Entrance is free, as is parking; you may bring your dog, so long as he/she is on a leash. In addition to hiking and biking, Byxbee is a popular bird-watching site. You may also enjoy the outdoor art installations that make Byxbee so special to Palo Altans. Visit www.baytrail.org for maps and more information, especially during the pandemic.

The world of Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh is coming to San Francisco in a new digital art experience that brings some of the artist’s best-known works to life in astounding scale. The Immersive Van Gogh Exhibit will make its west coast premiere beginning March 18 at SVN West, located at 10 South Van Ness. Utilizing projection technology, visitors will be able to step into images like his famous Starry Night, Sunflowers, and The Bedroom. Check for accessibility and tickets at www.vangoghsf.com, or by phone at 844-307-4644.

Welcome New PAHA Members!
Patrick Peterson and Woodbury Historical Tours

PAHA Upcoming Programs
Sunday, March 7, 2021 from 2:00-3:00 via Zoom Webinar
Check our website at www.pahistory.org for program information

Previous PAHA Programs
If you missed the December 6 program, “Celebrating Gryphon Stringed Instruments’ 50th Anniversary,” you can find the video on Vimeo by using the link below. Also on this site, you can find other recent PAHA programs, including “Palo Alto: Then and Now.”
https://vimeo.com/489702794

The Heritage Program
This month’s heritage program features “Celebrating Gryphon Stringed Instruments’ 50th Anniversary” with Frank Ford and Richard Johnston.
This program airs on Channel 28 or 30 on various days and times. It is simultaneously streamed on the Media Center website midpenmedia.org/heritage. Check website for schedule.

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents via Zoom Webinar

Medical and health care professionals urge us to put on our masks and get some exercise walking or biking outdoors, perhaps with one family member or one friend. The Bay Trail — which includes Palo Alto’s Baylands Nature Preserve — now comprises 350 miles of trails. I recommend you start at Byxbee Park, 2375 Embarcadero Road. Entrance is free, as is parking; you may bring your dog, so long as he/she is on a leash. In addition to hiking and biking, Byxbee is a popular bird-watching site. You may also enjoy the outdoor art installations that make Byxbee so special to Palo Altans. Visit www.baytrail.org for maps and more information, especially during the pandemic.

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