



# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

April 2021 Volume 44, N° 6



The Palo Alto Historical Association presents via Zoom Webinar

## MAMA GARCIA'S AND "ROADHOUSE VALLEY"

Sunday April 11, 2021 2:00 to 3:00 pm

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81944326698>

Join us via Zoom for PAHA's presentation on the once popular roadhouses west of the Alpine Inn (Rossotti's) in Portola Valley. This area of Portola Valley was outside the 1.5-mile zone around Stanford campus wherein state law banned the sale of liquor until the 1970s. Due to its close proximity as well as the beautiful scenery, the "Roadhouse Valley" became a popular locale for Palo Altans, Stanford students, and locals to grab a drink.

Some of the more notable bygone roadhouses that opened in Portola Valley after the Prohibition era,

included Mama Garcia's La Casa Blanca, The Portola Club, Jan's Valley Inn (briefly Maloney's), and Mangini's (briefly Rudy's). They are all gone now and their once existence seems almost mythical.

Join us on April 11th from 2:00–3:00 pm to hear stories, see photos, and learn about this interesting history of Portola Valley's bygone roadhouses.

For more information about our programs and for Zoom instructions, please visit our website at [www.pahistory.org](http://www.pahistory.org)

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*The Palo Alto Historical Association, a 501(c)(3) charitable 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. Although PAHA continues to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the current restrictions, the Archive is only open for prearranged appointments. To contact the Archive or to make an appointment to visit, email [steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org](mailto:steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org) or call (650) 329-2353.*

*Until further notice, PAHA board meetings are held via Zoom Meeting at 4pm on the first Wednesday of each month (except August). Public programs are held via Zoom Webinar at 2pm on the first Sunday of each month (October-December, February-May). Program information and webinar links are available in the Tall Tree newsletters and on our website, [www.pahistory.org](http://www.pahistory.org). The public is welcome to join all programs.*

# *Ye Olde Shoppe: Spotlight on longtime family businesses in Palo Alto*

## **Bell's Books**

**#5 in a series by PAHA Board member, Leslie Mills**

Our final article in the “Ye Olde Shoppe” series is about long time Palo Alto vendor, Bell's Books. Located at 536 Emerson in Palo Alto, adjacent to Mac's Smoke shop (featured in last month's Tall Tree), Bell's Books also has a long history in Palo Alto.



Herbert Bell and portrait by famed WWII sketch artist Howard Brodie. Photo provided by Bell's Books

In 1935, Herbert Mason Bell (24) drove from Los Angeles “with a station wagon full of books, to start The College Book Company with his employer, David Lawyer, a Los Angeles book dealer”, the store's website reads. The plan

was to sell textbooks to Stanford students as the university did not have its own bookstore at the time. They opened a store on “The Circle” (University Avenue near Alma Street), but after a year of slow sales, Lawyer decided there was no money in selling books to college students. Herbert Bell wished to continue the business and purchased it for \$2300.

Herbert had a love of literature from an early age. Born in 1911 in a pine timbering town in Alabama, Herbert's father was the foreman of a local lumber mill and his mother died of cancer when he was only five. To satisfy his literary craving, Herbert formed a literature club in high school, and organized informal gatherings to discuss writing, film, and music in college. After graduating, he went to Paris and tried his hand at journalism, attempting to interview famous writers and actors in the 1930s, with little success, but great enjoyment. After a short stint of teaching college in Alabama, he received a letter from a friend working in a bookshop in Los Angeles offering him a job. He moved west and began working for David Lawyer, and never looked back.

Bell's business struggled for several years. In 1938, the bookstore moved from its location on The Circle to 536 Emerson and changed its name to the College Book Shop. Bell added his surname to the store in 1953, which morphed to Bell's Books Store in 1971, then finally to Bell's Books. They would relocate a few more times over the years, moving to 408 University in 1944, and 229 Hamilton (the Cardinal Hotel building) in 1948 before returning to their final location at 536 Emerson in 1950 when the building came up for sale and the Bells were able to purchase it. Their website reports, “the final move was accomplished with the physical assistance of the head of the German Dept. at Stanford, store employee Barbara Worl, and a local policeman who took pity on the Bell's when the landlord threatened legal action if they weren't out by midnight. They all rolled carts of books around the corner from Hamilton to Emerson late into the night.” Barbara, a recent Stanford graduate at the time, would stay on for 55 years!



Barbara Worl, Valeria and Faith Bell circa 1980s. Photo provided by Bell's Books

Herbert was a divorced father of two girls, Jane and Libby (Elizabeth), when he met his future wife, Valeria Dale Bryant. Valeria was born in the

Canal Zone of Panama where her father worked the locks at Pedro Miguel. She was an exceptionally smart young woman who skipped two grades and was accepted to Stanford University at the age of 16. Valeria was a student at Stanford when she met Herbert while visiting Bell's Books with her friend who was dating an employee there. Herbert and Valeria married in the late 1940s and had three children: Jonathan, Michael, and Faith.

Truly a family business, three generations of Bells have worked at the store over the years. Valeria took over (Continued on page 3)

## Kate Latham: The Tennis Pro

By PAHA Board Member Bo Crane



Avon Championship, 1980

Kate Latham, Palo Alto High School (Paly) class of 1970, was a professional tennis player for 16 seasons before retiring at age 34. She likely has the longest professional playing career of any former Paly athlete. Over her career, Kate won some 220 matches in high-level tournaments including a combined fifteen Wimbledon and US Open events, as well as competing in the French and Australia Opens.

The Latham family joined the Foothills Tennis & Swimming Club where Kate switched from swimming to tennis and was coached alongside another talented tennis player and future Paly grad, Eliza Pande. Paly had no girls tennis team so Kate and Eliza played for the club. After high school, Kate went on to play for Foothill Junior College and then turned professional. Eliza did not pursue a professional tennis career after playing for Stanford University.

After a year at junior college, Kate joined the professional tennis circuit. In 1973 at the age of 20, she went to Wimbledon where she lost to Margaret Court, the top ranked women's player at the time. Billie Jean King would go on to win Wimbledon that year. At a tournament in Cleveland that July, Kate

lost in the first round to Chris Evert (age 18), the Wimbledon runner-up.

In 1974, Kate won at Manchester, made the finals at Beckenham, and then at Eastbourne lost to Martina Navratilova, 6-2, 2-6, 10-8 after being up triple match point. She won her first round at Wimbledon that year but lost in the next round. In 1979, Martina, ranked #1, eliminated her twice in tournaments. Kate finished ranked #21 in the world that year. Evert and Navratilova would prove to be her nemeses during her tennis career, having never won a match against them.

In 1981 Kate beat a 37-year-old Billie Jean King and a 14-year-old Steffi Graf in 1983. That same year she went to Dublin after Wimbledon to play in the last Irish Open (established in 1879). She became the tournament's final winner, with her name engraved along famous winners such as Alice Marble, Maria Bueno, King, Court, and Evonne Goolagong. In 1985, she won two tournaments in Hawaii. Her final tournament was March 1987 in Fresno, losing to a 16-year-old tournament rookie. She finished the year playing on the senior circuit.

Latham went back to college at San Jose State University (SJSU) where she received a BS and MS in Environmental Studies. She later taught and lectured at SJSU for three years and continued in sports by competing in triathlons, which included getting back into swimming. She still swims, road bikes and now runs her own energy consulting firm, Latham Home Rating, in Mountain View.



(Continued from page 2) as book-keeper and worked at the store after the children had grown.

Herbert operated the store until 1983 when he fell sick with leukemia, and Faith, the youngest of the children, was summoned home from a ten year stay in Canada to help run the store. Herbert passed away in 1992 and Valeria, Faith and longtime employee, Barbara Worl, ran the business until Valeria's retirement in 2014 when she handed the ownership to Faith. Faith has been working at the store for nearly 40 years. Her husband, Christopher Storer, helps with the bookkeeping since his retirement from teaching philosophy.

Bell's Books carries a wide variety of books both new and used. The store houses over 300,000 volumes on their shelves that reach the height of the two story ceiling still adorned with the ornamental pressed tin panels. The high shelves



Faith Bell inside Bell's Books, 2021

are accessed by ladders, creating Bell's Books' signature look. Faith said the majority of inventory is in used books which includes rare or collectible publications such as "the iconic "Peacock Edition" of *Pride and Prejudice*, first U.S. editions of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Orwell's 1984, P.T. Barnum's

autobiography, with his signature, a signed Pablo Picasso and, impressively, the oh so rare first editions of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

When asked about the financial success of the business, Faith laughed, "Nobody is in this business for the money. They do it because they are passionate about reading (and) want to share this love with other people". She also credits her "experienced and dedicated" staff in the perseverance of the business. As far as the future is concerned, she's doesn't think any of her family will take over the business but says she will "carry on until I drop."

## Jaunting for Real!

It's encouraging to reflect that thirteen months into the pandemic, things are opening up! It's not the same "normal" as pre-Covid, but outside dining is flourishing on California and University Avenues and most children are back in some kind of hybrid school. On the down side, traffic has picked up on the main arteries and many of the local galleries have not re-opened. Be sure to email or call venues to confirm in-person jaunting is allowed.

If you are unwilling to throw caution to the winds, continue to explore **Palo Alto's Public Art installations**, which now comprise eight new murals commissioned by the City's **Uplift Local** initiative. This is a jaunt you can do on your own or with friends (suitably masked, of course). Highlights include *See You Soon* at 542 High Street, *Sunrise at the Baylands*, 2020 at 668 Ramona St., and *California Marching Band* at 265 California Ave. For locations of the murals and information on the artists, visit [tinyurl.com/PaloAltoartmap](http://tinyurl.com/PaloAltoartmap) and download the summaries and explanations.



Image courtesy of Uplift Local



Image from Wikipedia

One of the local treasures and crown jewels of our area—**Filoli** is now open! With pandemic protocols regarding required appointments, masks, and social distancing in place, you may visit the 654 acre estate, the historic house, hike the Estate Trail, and take advantage of the gift shop and café. If you have not visited Filoli before, the gardens are extraordinary, no matter what the season! Filoli is located at 80 Canada Road in Woodside and is open daily 10am–5pm. For guidelines, appointments, and ticket information, call 650-364-8300 or visit the website <https://filoli.org>.

With pandemic protocols and guidelines in place, the **Palo Alto Art Center** re-opened in March. The upcoming exhibition, *The Black Index*, opens May 1 and remains through August. The exhibit comprises a group effort of six artists presenting in a variety of media, including drawings, performance, printmaking, sculpture, and digital photography. The artists "build upon the tradition of Black self-representation as an antidote to colonialist images." You can preview *The Black Index* and take a virtual tour at [www.theblackindex.art/](http://www.theblackindex.art/). The Palo Alto Art Center is at 1313 Newell Road in Palo Alto, is open 10am-5pm Tuesday-Saturday, and admission is free. For updates on policies, call 650-329-2366 or check the website [cityofpaloalto.org/artcenter](http://cityofpaloalto.org/artcenter).

### Welcome New Members!

Joan and William Chase

### Upcoming Zoom Webinar Programs

May 2, 2:00-3:00, *Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Palo Alto Garden Club*

June 6, 2:00-3:00, to be announced

Check our website at [www.pahistory.org](http://www.pahistory.org) for program information

### Previous PAHA Programs

If you missed the March 7th program, *Saving the Past: Preserving Palo Alto Children's Theatre's History*, you can find this and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo using this link: <https://vimeo.com/522705423>

### The Heritage Program

This month's heritage program features "*Saving the Past: Preserving Palo Alto Children's Theatre's History*", with Chris Castro.

This program airs on Channel 28 or 30 at various times and is simultaneously streamed on the Midpen Media Center website, [midpenmedia.org/heritage](http://midpenmedia.org/heritage). Check website for schedule.

### In Memoriam Crystal Gamage

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