PAHA is proud to present the story of the Greer family of Palo Alto with speakers Bo Crane and Jerry Tinney.

Did you know the Greer family once owned all of north Palo Alto and Woodside? Learn how John Greer, an Irish sea captain disdaining the distant gold fields, would come to own this vast expanse of prime real estate and how his family struggled to prove their title to the land with the newly formed state of California.

Listen to remembrances by board member, Jerry Tinney, as he recounts his personal experiences with Greer’s grandson, Joe Greer. Joe used to drive a hay wagon around the Town & Country Village shopping center, providing a fun shuttle service for shoppers.

Join us via Zoom to hear stories, see photos, and learn about this interesting family that once was the mid-Peninsula’s biggest land owner.
The ‘30s and ‘40s: A Golden Age For Pets
by PAHA Board member William Warrior

Dating back to before incorporation in 1894, Palo Alto wrestled with the issue of the stray dog population, which by contemporary accounts had reached pandemic levels—being described in one exasperated letter to the editor of the Palo Alto Times as something akin to what could be observed on the streets of Calcutta.

The Palo Alto Board of Trustees made early attempts toward the management of animal care and control. These efforts only resulted in a collective unhappiness citywide, and the repeated reinvention of who should be in charge—from the Town Marshall in 1894; to the appointment of several “pound-masters” in 1901 (one of whom after six-months on the job was arrested and charged with cruelty to animals); to the founding of a short-lived and unsuccessful Palo Alto SPCA in 1902; to the City finally settling with a contract for animal shelter services in 1924 with the newly founded Palo Alto Humane Society.

After 13 years of on again/off again negotiations between the City and the Humane Society, a state-of-the-art shelter opened in 1937 that earned for Palo Alto both state and national recognition for excellence in the care of wayward animals, domestic and wild.

Dr. Newell
by Board member Bo Crane

One of the most recognizable names among Palo Alto residents is that of Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook and its parent company Meta. What many don’t know is that Zuckerberg lives in Palo Alto, its parent company Meta. What many don’t know is that Zuckerberg lives in the oldest house in Palo Alto, built by prominent San Francisco surgeon, Dr. William Andrews Newell.

William Newell was born in Ireland circa 1833. As a young man, he immigrated to the U.S. where he married Kentuckian Josephine Cottrell, born in 1838. Their first child was born in Ohio circa 1855. In October 1859, Newell became naturalized in Buffalo, New York. He moved to a large farm in the Napa Township of California as evidenced in the July 1860 census where his name, age, and birthplace: “Dr. Wm. Newell, 26, Ireland”, appeared along with 30 other boarders. He opened his medical practice in San Francisco around the same period as evidenced in the 1861 directory.

In 1863, the rail line from San Francisco reached Mayfield, making living on the mid-Peninsula more easily accessible from the city. In 1864, at age 31, Dr. Newell purchased 47.5 acres from Henry Seale on the southeast side of San Francisquito Creek. Newell’s land was bordered by San Francisquito Creek and the road, later known as Newell Road, which spanned the creek and continued to Clark’s Landing at the bay’s edge.

While still living in San Francisco, Dr. Newell built his San Francisquito Creek house in 1866. As of the 1870 Fremont Township census, Dr. Newell, his wife, and three sons (the youngest a month old) were living in the home. The last son, Percy, was born (continued on page 3)
When Mexico took control of California in 1821, it began issuing land grants to both native-born and naturalized Mexican citizens to encourage settlement in the area. The grants were usually one to two square leagues in size (a league is approximately 4440 acres) and were called Ranchos. Present-day Palo Alto was part of two Ranchos. Rancho Rinconada del Arroyo de San Francisquito was a 2230-acre rancho granted to the Soto family. It encompassed the north end of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. Rancho Rincon de San Francisquito was an 8418-acre rancho granted to Jose Pena, and included present day south Palo Alto, future town of Mayfield, part of Stanford, as well as northern Mountain View.

Following the Mexican-American War of 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stated that the U.S. government would honor Mexican land grants. However, after California became a state in 1850, the California Land Act of 1851 was enacted requiring all rancho grant landowners to submit a claim proving title within two years. The wait time after filing a petition took up to 17 years! Legal fees caused the sale of much of the land grant.

Rafael Soto was the son of settlers who had been part of the Spanish expeditions. In 1835, Rafael and his family settled near the San Francisquito Creek close to Newell Road where he grazed herds for Mission Santa Clara and sold goods to travelers. Rafael had applied for a land grant but died prior to its issuance. His wife Maria Antonia Mesa was issued the land grant for Rancho Rinconada del Arroyo de San Francisquito in 1841. Their daughter, Maria Louisa Soto inherited the rancho upon her mother’s passing. Maria Louisa also became owner of another rancho in Woodside known as Rancho Canada de Raymundo through marriage to John Coppinger who owned the property. After only 8 years of marriage, Coppinger passed away leaving his wife the rancho. She then wed a visiting ship captain, John Greer, who became joint owner of both ranchos through marriage.

The Soto family filed a claim but was rejected. Upon appeal, the family enlisted the help of Thomas Seale in certifying their title. In return for getting the title certified in 1855, Thomas and his brother Henry received 1400 acres of Soto land. The land encompassed present day Palo Alto from the area now known as Oregon Expressway to San Francisquito Creek. The Seales later sold a large portion of this land north of Embarcadero Road to Timothy Hopkins. Hopkins developed what was then called University Park and later marketed as Palo Alto, a dry subdivision and future town to support Leland and Jane Stanford’s new university.

Jose Pena was an artilleryman at the Presidio of San Francisco. He received permission from the Mission Santa Clara in 1822 to occupy a square league of its pastureland. In 1841, he applied for a grant of the land he had been using, and was granted two square leagues by Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado. In 1847, he sold the rancho to Secundino Robles and his brother Teodoro. The brothers had accrued their wealth in quicksilver they discovered in south San José. A plaque along Alma Street commemorates Secundino’s original adobe site. Pena retained a small plot for himself and his wife on what is now the Stanford golf course. As required by the Land Act of 1851, the Robles filed their claim to the land in 1852 and received grant confirmation in 1868. However, by that time much of their land had been sold pending the claim to pay legal and other expenses including the support of Secundino’s 29 children!

(continued from page 2) in 1881. Newell kept a home office in San Francisco and also presided over the Acclimatizing Society, which sought to manage all public streams and ponds in the state to assist in the preservation and propagation of game and fish.

John Whipple knew the Newell family when he was a young boy. According to Whipple, Newell’s home had a tower from which to shoot ducks, a cement swimming pool, a 10-acre variety orchard, a well that was run by a gas engine, and “50 or more” Mariana Islanders who tended the lawns, horses, cows, and drove the doctor to the train depot for his commute to the city. Newell also planted a grove of eucalyptus trees—trees that today align one side of the 1931 Newell Road bridge across the creek.

Dr. Newell died in 1895. At some point, the house was vacated and three of the sons moved to San Francisco. A fourth son had passed away. Dr. Alexander McIntyre, a dentist, bought the estate in 1906 and used the original materials in reconstructing the house. The house has gone through many remodels and owners since the original construction and is one of the few remaining pre-Palo Alto homes.
April Jaunts

While many of us have not strayed far from home for the past 2 years, the pandemic is receding and the continuing dry weather entices PAHA members to go jaunting! Even though Covid restrictions have lessened, it is still a good idea to call ahead or visit websites for latest protocols.

Take the opportunity to visit the Angel Island Immigration Museum, recently re-opened after 12-years of renovation and modernization. Its exhibits describe and present “both the dark and bright stories” of immigrants “who passed through it in the early 20th century”. Divided into 3 sections, the narrative is enhanced with powerful artifacts, documents, and commentaries. The Museum, located in the station’s former hospital, is free and open to the public weekends from 11:00am to 3:30pm. Docent tours are also available. For information on the ferry schedule to and from Angel Island, as well as details about the museum, call 415-435-3522 or visit the website www.aiisf.org/visit

As a follow-up to last month’s PAHA program on the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, and Leslie Mills’ Tall Tree article on Palo Alto’s indigenous people, visit the de Young Museum to see Jules Tavernier and the Elem Pomo. Tavernier was a French painter and illustrator whose signature work, Dance in a Subterranean Roundhouse at Clear Lake, California forms the centerpiece of the exhibit. Through April 17, it features paintings, photographs, basketry, and ceremonial regalia of the Elem Pomo people from the 1860s to the present. The de Young Museum is located at 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. It is open 9:30am-5:15pm, Tuesday – Sunday. For information and reservations, call 415-750-3600 or visit http://deyoung.famsf.org

The Annual Gamble Garden Spring Tour returns to Palo Alto on Friday and Saturday, April 22 and 23. This perennial favorite offers visits to 5 local gardens where docents will describe their development and horticultural highlights. The Garden Tour provides a plethora of activities including a marketplace featuring products of local vendors, the “Over The Garden Fence” sale with its unique bargains, a silent auction, and complimentary refreshments. A boxed lunch may be ordered in advance. Gamble Garden is located at 1431 Waverley Street and is free and open to the public every day during daylight hours. For information about purchasing a ticket to the Spring Tour, including an opportunity to volunteer, call 650-329-1356 or visit the website www.gamblegarden.org/springtour

Welcome New PAHA Members
Bill & Lesley King
Nancy Bischoff
Ruth Gray (Life Member)

May 1: PAST Centennial Plaque and Historic Preservations Awards
June 1: Parkey Sharkey Story

Check our website at www.pahistory.org for program information

Upcoming Programs

Previous PAHA Programs
If you missed the March 6th program, Back from Extinction: The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, you can find it and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link: https://vimeo.com/686370743

The Heritage Program
You can also watch the most recent PAHA program on local TV. Visit https://midpenmedia.org/local-tv/ and enter the word “Heritage” in the search box to find the broadcast schedule for PAHA programs.

In Memoriam
Ted McKee
Lew Silvers

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents via Zoom Webinar

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