

VOLUME 29, NUMBER 8  
MAY 2006  
www.pahistory.org

# The Tall Tree

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## GENERAL MEETING

Sunday, May 7 at 2:00 p.m.  
Lucie Stern Community Center  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Free & open to the public  
Cookies & coffee

## Kathleen Norris, “A Woman of Certain Importance”

**SPEAKER:**  
**Deanna Paoli Gumina,**  
*Author of **A Woman of***  
***Certain Importance,***  
**historian, psychologist**

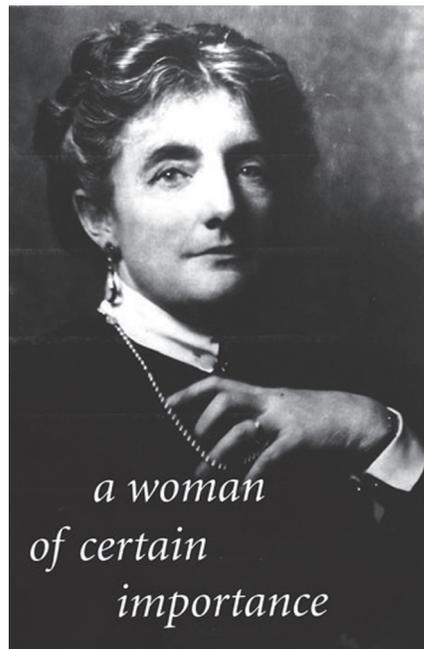
Kathleen Norris and her husband Charles G. Norris, already successful writers, searched the world over for a place to raise their children, and chose Palo

Alto in 1928. They selected Birge Clark to design their home, “La Casa Abrieta” (“The Open House”), which still stands at the corner of Melville and Cowper. The Norrises lived in Palo Alto until 1945 when C.G. died at which time Kathleen returned to San Francisco, place of her birth.

By 1935, Kathleen had written 50 books. So well known an author was she that *TIME* magazine featured her on the cover of the January 28, 1935 issue. Independently wealthy from her voluminous literary work, she was decidedly *A Woman of Certain Importance*, the title of a book by our speaker, Deanna Paoli Gumina.

Deanna, historian, psychologist and lecturer at SFSU, thought about writing of San Francisco’s past since the age of seven. She has published a number of journal articles, including a history of Old Saint Mary’s Church in San Francisco. In addition, she wrote the book, *The Italians of San Francisco 1850 – 1930*, and annotated the winter diary of Lillie Hitchcoit Coit.

Identifying with Kathleen Norris as a fellow San Franciscan and writer, she welcomed the opportunity to write Kathleen Norris’ biography. Join us to learn more about one of Palo Alto’s best known citizens. Copies of the book, *A Woman of Certain Importance*, will be available.



*Photograph of Kathleen Norris by Arnold Goethe from the Library of Congress shown with the title of book, A Woman of Certain Importance, by Deanna Paoli Gumina.*

—Courtesy of author

*The Tall Tree* is published eight times a year by the

**PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

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Susan Bright Winn, *Editor*

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Michael Litfin	Peggy McKee
Carol Clifford Mitchell	Tom Wyman

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 the Main Library, 1213 Newell Road.

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except for August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 p.m.

General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (October–December, February–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 p.m. 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.

**PAHA HERITAGE PROGRAMS**  
≡ CHANNEL 30 ≡

**APRIL: WEST BAY OPERA'S  
50TH ANNIVERSARY**

**MAY: THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE**

**SCHEDULE**

Wednesdays 8:00 p.m.  
Thursdays Noon  
Saturdays 1:00 p.m.

Videos of past PAHA meetings can be checked out from the Main Library's History Desk during historian's hours:

Tuesday evenings  
Thursday afternoons

**A NOTE  
FROM THE  
PRESIDENT**

**Susan  
Bright Winn**

We are always happy to see so many people appreciating the results of the time and effort put in by so many of our board members and volunteers, all of whom deserve our warmest thanks and applause. Over the past year our attendance at our monthly general meetings has increased, and this month is a good time to shine a spotlight on a few board members who especially work to bring our programs to you.

First, thanks to Joe Shakes, Program Chair, who has worked with his committee to produce quite an array of interesting programs, from Roxy Rapp remembering the Palo Alto of his youth, to former mayors recalling the important aspects of their times in office. The Fourth Annual Vignettes of Palo Alto featured reflections of our own membership on past days here in town. Anna Mancini shared with us the restoration process of the historical Hewlett-Packard garage on Addison, and Tom Wyman recalled the effects of the 1906 earthquake. And in May, Deanna Gumina will round out our knowledge of famed Palo Altan, Kathleen Norris. Finally, for our June banquet we are especially looking forward to Palo Alto Weekly editor, Jay Thorwaldson, who will speak on the many transitions that Palo Alto has experienced as it went from a small, leafy college town to the birthplace of Silicon Valley.

Second, thanks to Brian George who videos each meeting, and then produces a program seen the following month on local cable Channel 30. Brian is also reviewing our archives for films of historical moments in Palo Alto history.

And last, thanks to Carol Clifford Mitchell, Hospitality Chair, who oversees the delicious refreshments and beautiful flower arrangements for our meetings.

Thanks, very much, to all three for the efforts that go into making our programs so delightful.

**FROM THE  
DESK OF THE  
HISTORIAN**

**Steve Staiger**

The Association is now preparing the third edition of our booklet "Parks of Palo Alto." Originally published in 1983 and revised in 1996, our parks have changed enough to warrant attention.

Liz Hogan, our former president, is the editor. She is a member of the Friends of Palo Alto Parks, which is assisting us with the printing. Board member Gwen Barry is searching for and selecting photographs. Liz has visited each of the parks and verified with City staff changes or improvements.

And we will have two new parks by the time of publication. Recently opened Heritage Park is on Homer Avenue adjacent to the future Palo Alto History Museum in the Roth Building. As you may recall, the City, with our assistance, encouraged the public to submit possible names for this park. Over 100 submittals were made, with the names of Drs. Joe Davis and Russel Lee receiving the most nominations. Heritage Park was the compromise name.

Another new park in the making will open sometime this summer. On Stanford land at the corner of El Camino Real and Page Mill Road, it will include soccer fields.

Other parks have had significant changes since the last edition of the booklet. For example, Juana Briones Park on Arastradero recently re-opened after extensive landscaping. The Enid Pearson Arastradero Preserve was renamed to honor former Councilmember and parks supporter Enid Pearson, but also grew in size and has new facilities.

In the past the booklet has proved useful not only for its historical content, but also as a handy guide for park visitors. The new edition will further this effort with updated descriptions of park amenities and stories of honored historical personalities and bits of Palo Alto history.

# “She Certainly Fits No Stereotyped Category as a Producer of Literary Lumber.”

*TIME*, January 28, 1935

Along with her portrait on the cover, *TIME* magazine mentioned that “with her frankly commercial short stories, her articles, her moving picture rights, her lectures, her household hints and miscellaneous works, she makes close to \$300,000 a year, probably more than any other woman in the U.S. today.”

In the article *TIME* wrote this description of Kathleen Norris, “She certainly fits no stereotyped category as a producer of literary lumber. A charming, friendly, incredibly busy woman, she is a concocter of treacly yarns, a romantic who laps up travel literature, a sophisticated and often rampageous wit and practical joker, an amateur actress of talent, a deadly croquet player, a dynamo of energy that can leap from typewriter to cooking pot to evening dress and back again, a wife, a mother, a chatelaine, all in one highly individual bundle.”



## PALO ALTO

.. The Climatic selection of two world famous writers

1247 COWPER STREET  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

April 15th, 1931.

Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce,  
Palo Alto, California.

Gentlemen:

Writers have one tremendous privilege. They can choose their own country and state and town; their typewriters are their office, staff, customers and stock.

We have lived in other places; we have struggled with winter conditions in suburban towns in the east, where the children battled with cold and furnace gas, and the maids departed on the 4:22. We lived for five years right in the heart of New York City, where every hour the children spent out of the house cost money -- money for governess, chauffeur, tickets, fares, tips, meals, over-shoes, museum fees, fees at rink and gym.

A bad atmosphere for the children of moderately-rich parents, but worse for the children of the rich.

So that when we found an exquisite, tree-shaded country town of beautiful spacious, simple homes, of gardens and tennis courts, of matchless climate, good neighbors, honest standards -- a town that beyond all this could boast a famous college, is it surprising that the Norris goods and chattels, the five children, the five typewriters, the two parrots, and the bull dog should be established there?

Now, with a son in the newspaper business in San Francisco, a son finishing his junior year in college, another boy ready to enter college in October, and two girls happy in a private school two blocks away from our own Spanish gate, our one regret is that we did not find Palo Alto for our home before we did.

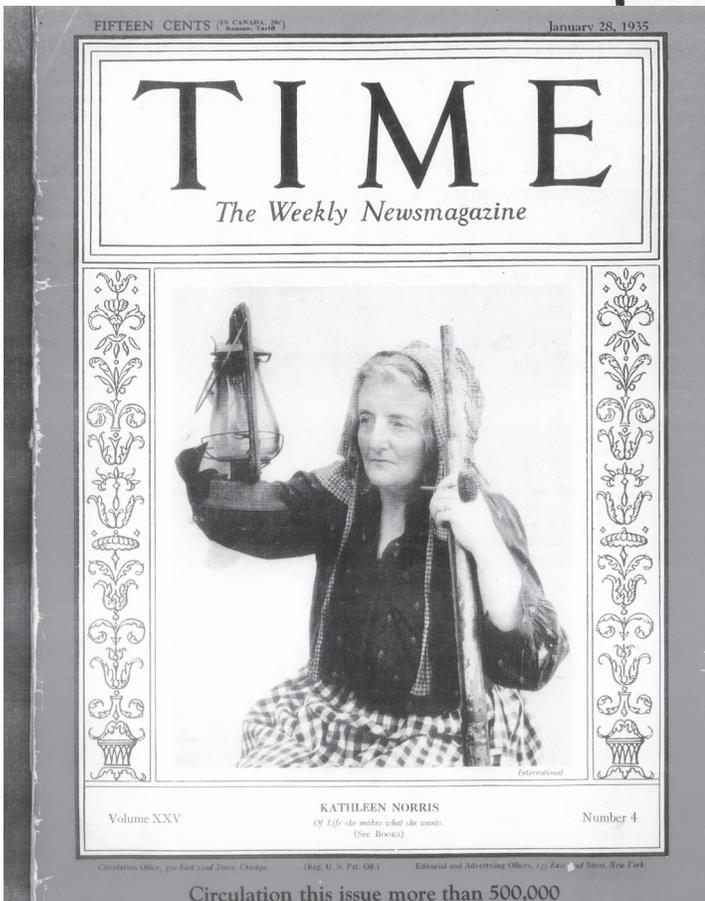
Yours very truly,

*Charles G. Norris*

*Kathleen Norris*

Letter extolling the virtues of Palo Alto written by the Norrises to the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce, April 25, 1931. — PAHA Archives

Kathleen Norris as “Widow Cagle in Lula Vollmer’s play of southern mountaineer white trash, Sun-Up [presented by the Palo Alto Community Players]. Mrs. Norris was worried because the role required a series of hearty pulls on the corn cob pipe. She had never smoked in her life, thought herself at 54 too old to begin. But her stage director was adamant. So, experimenting first with cubebs, later with cubeb tobacco stuffed into the bowl, she learned to keep the corn cob puffing. She now confesses to enjoying a smoke, is having difficulty breaking herself of the habit.” — *TIME* magazine, January 28, 1935, p. 65



## NOMINATIONS FOR PAHA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Nominating Committee has nominated Vicki Ching and Bob Jack for three-year terms on the Palo Alto Historical Association Board of Directors. Board members who are standing for another three-year term are Beth Bunnenberg, Georgie Gleim, Karen Holman, Carol Clifford Mitchell, Jan Murphy and Tom Wyman.

Members at large may put a name in nomination by preparing a petition signed by at least 10 members of PAHA and submit it to Jan Murphy, Recording Secretary, at 650.493.2477 on or before Friday, May 12th. The membership will elect new members to the Board at the PAHA Annual Dinner on Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

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## MAY IS PRESERVATION MONTH



Pictured here is one of several brass plaques to be awarded to owners of Palo Alto homes which have reached centennial status this year. Awards are presented by PAST Heritage at their annual Preservation Awards Ceremony, on Sunday, May 21st. For a complete calendar listing of Preservation Month activities and programs, please call the PAST hotline, 540.299.8878, or visit [www.pastheritage.org](http://www.pastheritage.org).

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Cheryl A. Hallberg  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert McIntyre  
Kirstin & Frederic Nichols  
Doris & Cole Richmond  
George Wilson

## INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PAHA MEMBER?

*Here's how...* Pick up a brochure at any library or one of our general meetings. Or, send your name, address, phone number and email address to

PAHA, P.O. Box 193  
Palo Alto, CA 94302

with a check for your choice of membership: Individual: \$25; Family: \$40; Sustaining: \$60; Business: \$100; Life: \$350.



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P.O. BOX 193

PALO ALTO, CA 94302

**NEXT MEETING:**

May 7, 2:00 p.m.

Free & open to the public

Cookies & coffee