

# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

December 2013 Volume 37, N° 3

General Meeting • Free and Open to the Public • Refreshments Served

Sunday, December 1 at 2:00 – 4:00 PM  
Lucie Stern Community Center  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

Hosted by: Karen Holman, City Council Member

## PAHA's Public Meetings

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP  
PROGRAM MEETINGS  
are held

2:00–4:00 pm

October – June

at the

Lucie Stern Community Center  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

### CALENDAR

2013

December 1

*Vignettes*

2014 [TBA]

January 26

March 2

April 6

May 4

June 4: Annual Dinner

# Vignettes



*Karen Holman, City Council Member, will host the Vignettes program*

THIS YEAR, AS PAHA PREPARES TO CELEBRATE ITS CENTENNIAL, we have changed the Vignettes program to celebrate special friends and guests as they reflect on their lives here and “kick off” the holiday season. We are honored to have the opportunity to eavesdrop on a Fireside Chat with four Palo Alto natives who will share their recollections.

Ralph Britton, Patty McEwen, Jerry Tinney and Tom Wyman grew up here in times very different from today. Their formative years were influenced by Depression era Christmases, the circus coming to town, going to the movies several times a week at the local theatres, local dairies, and so much more. They remind us of another Palo Alto and Stanford that continue to influence the present. It is interesting

and instructive to look back to see if we’ve retained what we need to sustain our strong community.

For those of you who have similar memories, this will be a time to reminisce. For those of you who have arrived more recently, you have a rare opportunity to benefit from our guests’ decades-long friendships and experiences as they allow us to eavesdrop on their conversation.

Join us in front of Lucie Stern’s “living room” fireplace and be prepared for a special day that just may include some surprise guests.





Kathleen Norris, 1925  
(Wikipedia Commons)

## Long Time Palo Altan, Author Kathleen Norris

Norris was one of the most successful women of her day, at one point, the highest paid woman in America, yet not very well known today. She was born in San

FROM THE DESK OF  
THE HISTORIAN  
Steve Staiger

Francisco in 1886 and moved to Mill Valley at age ten. In 1899, her mother died at Thanksgiving, her father at Christmas. She became the foster mother of five younger siblings. She began working in San Francisco

as a salesgirl, then a library attendant, and finally a newspaper reporter.

She married Charles, the brother of novelist Frank Norris, in 1909. They lived in New York City, where she began writing short stories and her first novel, *Mother*, published in 1911.

In 1919, they moved to a 203-acre Santa Cruz Mountain ranch near Saratoga. In 1928, Birge Clark designed their home at 1247 Cowper, where she lived for more than 30 years. It cost \$77,000 to build. Birge estimated that in 1974 it would cost more than \$500,000 to build (houses were just crossing the \$100,000 barrier)

She wrote a novel every six months, plus magazine articles. She dictated and a team of secretaries put together the manuscripts. "I certainly don't regard myself as a great literary light," she is quoted as saying. One critic wrote that, "novels poured from her typewriter as sawdust from a saw mill."

Her husband would spend an entire morning working on a paragraph for one of his novels, but he was a great manager of their literary lives. They were an interesting couple. She was a Democrat, a Catholic, and a Prohibitionist; he was a Republican, an Episcopalian, and a social drinker

In the late 1940s she became active in Palo Alto's Community Theater as an actress, including a role as a 101 year old woman. Charles died in 1945. In 1958 she sold the house, which became the Newman Center, and moved near her son in San Francisco. She died in 1966 and is buried at Alta Mesa Cemetery.

### PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Kent Stormer  
Jerry Tinney  
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## PAHA at the Mayfield Fair, October 19, 2013

One hundred and fifty years after after the first train ran through here, Caltrain sponsored a lively event at the Menlo Park train station, with many booths, speakers, music, people in period costume who dined at tables set for the occasion, and even three residents of the community in Ireland that Menlo Park is named for. A brochure explained that the station was created at the place where workers were housed in the early 1860s when they constructed the railroad bridge over San Franciscquito Creek that took the train to what was for a time its final stop, Mayfield in 1863, now the California Avenue district. The band played music like that of Mayfield's early days. In January, Caltrain will hold another celebration to mimic the one held in 1864, when the train first reached San Jose.

Photos from the Mayfield Fair at the Menlo Park Train Station: The train arriving carrying a crowd in costumes of the period. The PAHA booth; left to right, Barbara Wallace, Rich Green, Harriette Shakes, Beth Bommenberg. Last photo, Beth in costume with PAHA President, John Hackmann. (Photos courtesy of Harriette Shakes)



## FOPAL Serendipity

“Bubbe mayses,” old wives tales to one Yiddish Palo Alto writer as “oral history” and other ephemera. Behind Rick’s Rather Rich (the one that raised the most money for the church’s Ice Cream Social!) on a chilly 7:53 am on the second Saturday of each month, Ephemera! awaits. Volunteers of the Friends of the Library at Cubberley, FOPAL, roll down the ramp carts loaded for sale at 25 cents, pamphlets, magazines, maps, small travel books. Some of us regulars buy for relisting on eBay and Amazon. Some are looking for a special item. Some plan to haul hundreds of books to join thousands in garages, warehouses, and attics.

And I, your peripatetic president, procure pieces and pictures of Palo Alto, past and present. Last weekend I gathered about 20 books for myself, the “Hackmann Archive.” Our neighbor, Lee De Forest, is quoted: “A radio menace steadily growing greater, more ruthless, more deserving of suspicion and more generally detested is the use of broadcast for direct and blatant advertising in larger and larger doses.” The November 1930 “Golden Book,” a literary magazine, recommends buying books at the Palo Alto Book Shop.

“California History,” 2010, a California Historical Society journal, had the nice review of Jeanne Farr McDonnell’s book, *Juana Briones of 19th Century California*. I found several issues plus a dozen maps, charts, and USGS reports on the Loma Prieta Earthquake of 1989 (while I was holding a baby in Candlestick Park!) I learned that there had been a smaller one in Los Altos, August 8.

A Yiddish “bubbe mayses” quote is from an undated manuscript by Miriam Flock, with much from the Ohio oral history project “WomenSpeak: Taking Back Herstory.” Delightful Yiddish stories that made me want to hear the local Yiddish Singers in Palo Alto.

I also collected the 1941 “Story of Stanford’s Golden Jubilee,” the 1919 “Stanford Songs” and a mint condition 1927 “Stanford Literary” magazine. The story of Menlo Park, “A Tradition of New Horizons,” the 64-page highly illustrated work, a big part of Palo Alto history too, as we are learning with the 150 anniversary of the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad coming here in 1863, once a proposed and discarded idea for the route of the first transcontinental railroad, through the valley and Arizona. And much more—Thank You FOPAL volunteers.

## Pictures Tell the Tale—The Archives

It is an old saying that pictures speak louder than words, but it could be said that pictures speak louder with words than without. In any case, PAHA should be congratulated for having invested a century in preserving and making photos available. Changes over time in photography now include technology that gives access to PAHA’s collection to a wider public. Historians and all of us thank the many people involved in creating and expanding PAHA’s online photo collection. Major contributors include the volunteers who recorded information about each photo or edited the digitized images, and the catalogers who entered the photos and data into our CONTENTdm database. Once in the database the website designers reviewed the entries and uploaded them so they would be available to the public. Currently Brian George and Janet Lin make it happen. Brian oversees the project and edits the images while Janet catalogs each photo. Terry Jue of Digital Fish Designs completes the process by adding them to our website. The online Photograph Collection is approaching 3500 images. —Brian George

*Guy Miller looks through the files in his office in the basement of the Carnegie Library in Palo Alto, 1945. As Palo Alto’s city historian, he established the archives, now called the Guy Miller Archives.*

## Heritage Program on Channel 30

PAHA’s November program, “It Happened Here: Reflections on the Palo Alto Historical Association and the Museum,” by Rich Green, President of the Museum, will be on television in December. Broadcast schedule:

Wednesday: 8 PM

Thursday: 10:30 AM

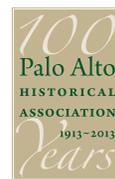
Saturday: 1 PM

DVDs of previous programs can be borrowed at the Archives which are temporarily located at Cubberley Room H-5. Hours:

Tuesdays, 4–8 PM, and

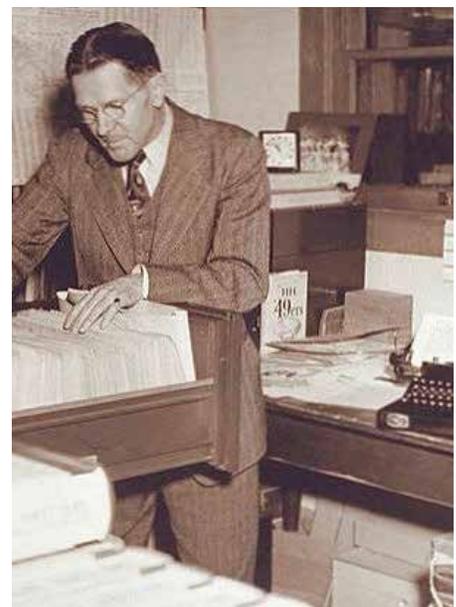
Thursdays, 1-5 PM.

## PAHA's 100th Year



Check your online or printed issue in January because PAHA has been active, more sometimes, less others, for 100 Years.

We will do a special issue for that anniversary. The town started in 1893, so we are fortunate that some of the residents were feeling historic twenty years later. A group met in 1913 to originate our present organization. Cultural, economic, political events—all these and much more affected Palo Alto and PAHA, the organization that preserves and makes known how we got to where we are.



# History Jaunts

**Woman's Club of Palo Alto:** The clubhouse at the corner of Homer Avenue and Cowper Street was constructed in 1916. The Club is now in the process of preparing an application for placing the building on the National Register of Historic Places, and planning for an exhibit and events to celebrate that recognition and Centennial. The Club itself was founded simultaneously with the City of Palo Alto, and was long deemed the women's branch of government. During their early years, members met in homes, churches, and meeting places such as the Odd Fellows Hall.

**San Mateo History Museum:** Admission Free First Fridays, Dec. 6, 10 am to 4 pm. 11 am, preschool children create and hear stories; 2 pm, docents lead tours for adults. The Museum is at 2200 Broadway with exhibits from Indian times to today. More information: [www.historysmc.org](http://www.historysmc.org) or 650 299 0104.

**Evening with the Collection: Culinary History of San Francisco:** Wednesday, December 9, 2013 at 6:00pm. Join the California Historical Society for a special evening with the collection featuring author Erica J. Peters. Dr. Peters will discuss her new book, *San Francisco: A Food Biography*, and CHS archivists will share select items from the CHS Collection focusing on California food history for a one-night only viewing. Dr. Peters, co-founder and director of the Culinary Historians of Northern California, will take questions from the audience and sign books. Free for California Historical Society members, \$5 general admission. California Historical Society, 678 Mission Street, San Francisco. Please RSVP at <https://sffoodhistory.eventbrite.com/>

**Ranger Draws Fans at Rosie the Riveter Visitor Education Center:** Ninety-two year old ranger, Betty Reid Soskin, leads free history tours of the park on Tuesdays and Saturdays at 2 pm. The center is at 414 Harbour Way South, Suite 3000/Oil House, Richmond. For more information, call 510 232 5050, ext. 0, or see article in San Jose Mercury News, November 18, 2013.

**WELCOME**  
to a New Member  
Ryan Fisher



*Cooking in the Street; Culinary History of San Francisco (California Historical Society)*

Unless otherwise noted, photographs reproduced in the Tall Tree are from the Palo Alto Historical Association archives.

## Become a Member of PAHA

We invite you to become a member of the Association and join those who care about Palo Alto and enjoy learning about its history. Your dues make our work possible: we maintain the archives, assist researchers, and disseminate historical information through our publications and public programs. Your generosity will be appreciated for generations to come. Join today!

Individual \$25      Family \$40  
Sustaining \$60      Business/Sponsor \$100      Life \$350

Make check payable to PAHA and mail to: PAHA Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302. Or join online at [pahistory.org](http://pahistory.org). Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee. (Note: current members will receive renewal notices in July.)

THE PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
Our mission is to collect, preserve and make available to the public information about the history of Palo Alto.



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

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