

The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

April 2016 Volume 39, No 6

Since
1913

Sunday, April 3rd, 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Lucie Stern Community Center
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

WORLD WAR I ARMY TRAINING BY SAN FRANCISCO BAY: THE STORY OF CAMP FREMONT



PAHA's Public Meetings

GENERAL PROGRAM MEETINGS

are held monthly

2:00-4:00 PM

October - May

at the

Lucie Stern Community Center
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

NEXT PAHA MEETING:

April 3, 2016

"World War I Army Training by San
Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp
Fremont" with Barbara Wilcox

UPCOMING PAHA MEETINGS 2016

May 15, 2016 - note 3rd Sunday!
"Eichler Comes to Palo Alto"
with Steven Eichler

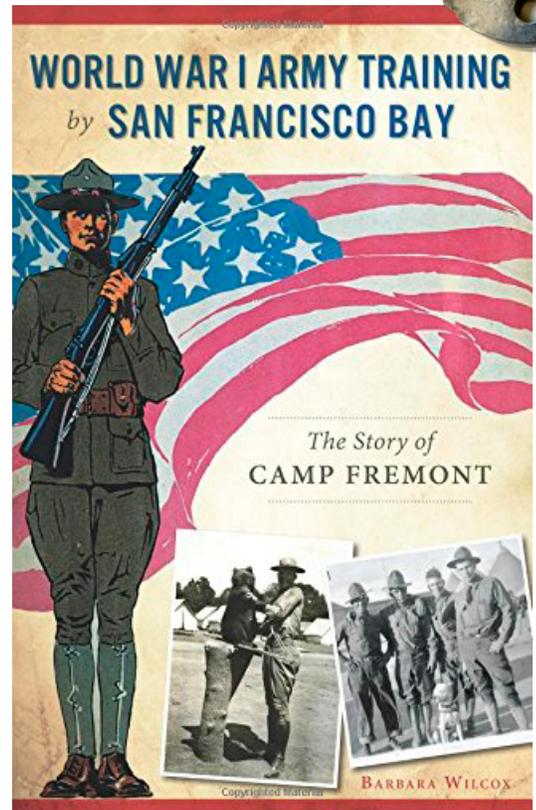
June 8, 2016

Annual Dinner

AS AMERICA ENTERED WORLD WAR I IN 1917, Stanford University leased three-fourths of its Palo Alto land to allow the creation of an Army training camp, Camp Fremont, headquartered in present-day Menlo Park. Not much exists of Camp Fremont today, but Barbara Wilcox uncovers its surprising influence in her new book, *World War I Army Training by San Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp Fremont* (History Press, 2016).

The camp brought the war and its controversies home. Palo Altans became vendors to the soldiers, watchdogs of local women and spies on each other. The foothills acquired a trench ground and artillery range where dugouts and unexploded ordnance still emerge decades later. Peace broke out before most of the Camp Fremont troops saw battle, but the skills they acquired helped transform the West.

Barbara Wilcox is a former editor and reporter with the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *Sacramento Bee* and other papers. Her interest in World War I dates to tales told by her grandfather, who served with the AEF's 319th Services of Supply, QM Corps, in Gironde, France. This book was inspired by her term as a writer for the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park, when geophysicists there proposed testing magnetometers over "Stanford's hidden World War I tunnels." The Stanford Historical Society awarded Wilcox its Prize for Excellence in Historical Writing for research that led to this book. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and Stanford University.



Courtesy Amazon.com.

Copies of *World War I Army Training by San Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp Fremont* will be for sale at the meeting from Books Inc. of Palo Alto.

To learn more, please visit:

www.facebook.com/CampFremont

www.amazon.com/Barbara-Wilcox/e/B01AX33U00



SPEAKER:
BARBARA WILCOX,
**Award-winning Local
Historian**



My Father in the Great War

PRESIDENT'S LETTER
Ralph Britton

MY FATHER WAS A VETERAN OF THE GREAT WAR. IN OCTOBER 1917, HE LEFT HIS TEACHING POSITION TO JOIN THE ARMY.

Because he had held summer jobs working in a photo studio, he ended up in the First Aerial Photo Section. He trained at the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, New York, and Ellington Field, Texas, before embarkation. His convoy took 21 days to reach Liverpool. Life on the coal-fired ship was rough, and he reported seeing the stokers shirtless and covered with coal dust from their efforts. The Spanish Flu pandemic was underway and claimed as many as six soldiers' lives each day of the voyage.

His group spent a month in a rest camp in the UK before being sent to the front lines in France on November 1, 1918, just 10 days before the Armistice. My dad never actually experienced combat, but his group was detailed to document the devastation of the war. They toured the battlefields and took many pictures from the ground and the air to catalogue the horrors of trench warfare on the troops.

The effect of bombardments by huge artillery pieces appears comparable to the devastation of Hiroshima a quarter of a century later. They saw grim scenes of unburied dead and stacks of bones in the trenches. Many young men returned home "shell shocked" (now known as PTSD). The Menlo Park Veterans Affairs facility on Willow Road was built to treat these victims of WWI.

My father's group was billeted with French families in the village of Vavin-court, and he made friends with some of the residents. Conditions in rural France were rather primitive: they washed up and did laundry in the village's common trough. Nevertheless, they enjoyed a certain camaraderie with evenings of celebrations, music, and wine in a barn which served as a recreation hall. A sign on one of the village shops admonished: "Please speak English - we don't understand American French!"



Washing in the trough at Vavin-court, France. Courtesy of the author.



Ralph Britton, Sr. in uniform in 1919. Courtesy of the author.



Aerial view of the remains of the French village of Vaux, pock-marked with shell craters. Courtesy US Army.

The Army provided a pocket French phrase book and dictionary, but to small avail. My dad did actually learn some French and corresponded for a time with two youngsters from the village. He returned home on a German liner taken as reparation in 1918, a much more pleasant and rapid passage than journey over. He found a teaching position in Oklahoma and resumed his career in 1919.



PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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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 Cubberley Community Center, K-7.

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 pm. General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (October–December, February–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 pm. 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.

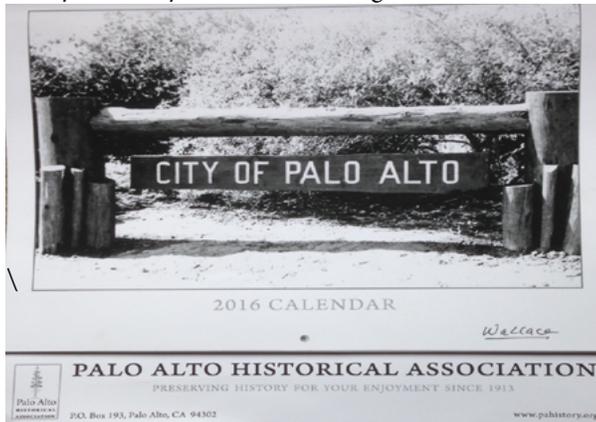
Calling for your images! The 2017 PAHA Calendar



FROM THE
DESK OF THE
HISTORIAN
Steve Staiger



MANY OF YOU ARE ENJOYING YOUR 2016 PAHA CALENDAR. The calendar was the idea of board member Jerry Tinney, who led the project from conception to design to production, and finally to marketing and distribution. Several local merchants sold numerous copies of the limited run of the 2016 calendar. Indeed, they could not satisfy all of the local demand. The calendar was a big hit and found its way into many Christmas stockings.



Returning next year by popular demand!

We are planning to produce a 2017 calendar. There is a system to take our selected images and insert them into a calendar printing model to produce black and white calendars to our specifications. Most of the images in our collection are black and white, so we plan to stay with that model.

For the 2017 calendar, we would like to solicit your help in choosing the images to illustrate each month. We need 13 or 14 suitable images. Jerry and I invite you to visit our website www.pahistory.org and search among the 8000+ images to find one (or more) that strikes your fancy: an image of your neighborhood? a fondly remembered scene of yesterday? something that says “Palo Alto” to you? Personal snapshots are also very much welcome!

Send your favorite image or images (and questions) to Jerry, jerrytinney2@gmail.com, or steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org. Include a message with the six digit identifier for each. Selection for inclusion will happen in the summer.

The Lafayette Flying Corps' Palo Alto hero: Alan Nichols

THE LAFAYETTE FLYING CORPS WAS THE NAME GIVEN TO THE AMERICAN VOLUNTEER PILOTS WHO FLEW IN THE FRENCH AIR FORCE (ARMÉE DE L'AIR) DURING WORLD WAR I. It included pilots who flew with the bona fide Lafayette Escadrille squadron as well as others who simply flew for French forces. Over 200 American candidates successfully completed French flight training; of these, 180 served in combat. Fifty of these pilots originally served in the Ambulance Corps of the American Field Service (AFS). Palo Alto's own Alan Nichols was one of these brave men.

In 1917, Alan Nichols' family lived at 1345 Webster; he was a Stanford student, and his father, Walter, was principal of Paly High. In February, he and a group of Stanford friends signed on for a six-month tour of duty in France with the American Field Service. Alan's group volunteered in the first Stanford ambulance unit of the AFS.



The town in which he had lived was decidedly “pacifist” in its viewpoint. The editor of *The Palo Alto Times*, reading one of Nichols' letters home, asked that he might publish it and others as a patriotic duty. Alan greatly disliked the publicity but reluctantly consented, and the letters became a widely read feature in the local paper. Thus young Nichols was partly responsible for swinging many Palo Altans into close sympathy with the Allies in the hitherto remote war.

Alan Nichols, Paly class of 1914, Stanford class of 1919, sacrificed his life as a brave pilot in the Lafayette Flying Corps. Courtesy A. Firefly.

For young men like Alan, pro-Allied and especially pro-French enthusiasm fired the imagination -- they wanted to see action as well as provide medical care to French soldiers. Alan drove ambulances until the summer of 1917, and with the United States now in the war, he joined the Aviation Service of France with other Stanford volunteers.

He corresponded regularly with his family and friends, filling them in on the details of his life as an ambulance driver and then as a pilot in the SPAD 85 with the Lafayette Flying Corps. He engaged in continuous combat in 1918 and was wounded in June of that year fighting off a simultaneous attack by several German planes.

Although he managed to land his machine within the French lines behind Compiègne, he later died in hospital before he could reach the operating table. The Red Cross wrote his father that the boy “was game to the last and smilingly thanked the nurse for her kindness as he died.” The French government awarded him top military citations, including the Croix de Guerre with two palms, and buried him with full military honors. More on his story may be found in *Letters Home from the Lafayette Flying Corps*, edited by Nancy Nichols, available on Amazon.com.

History Jaunts

Did your children or grandchildren obsess on Katniss Everdeen's adventures in either the novels or the movies of *The Hunger Games*? **San Francisco's Palace of Fine Arts** has capitalized on this fad by re-creating the saga with props and costumes from the movies. "The iconic moments of Katniss' journey unfold over seven galleries...including her transformation as the Mockingjay from District 12," while hands-on activities "range from the simple...to a high-tech interactive map of Panem." Visitors have given *The Hunger Games* Exhibition rave reviews. Located in the Innovation Hangar, Palace of Fine Arts Exhibition Hall, 3601 Lyon St., San Francisco. For more information, visit www.thehungergamesexhibition.com.

High-tech digital installations with traditional Japanese influences are on display in "Living Digital Space and Future Parks" the new exhibition at **Menlo Park's Pace Gallery**, February 6 - July 1, 2016. The exhibit is intended to introduce visitors to the "intersection of art and digital technology" and the use of "Ultra Subjective Space." Most of the 20 nature-oriented installations incorporate a musical component. Interactive and collaborative activities make it a "digital playground for all the ages." The Pace Gallery is located at 300 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. For more information, visit www.pacegallery.com/arttechnology.

"Neighborhoods Coming Together: Quilts Around Oakland" is a citywide quilt exhibition and quilt-making project developed by the **African American Quilt Guild of Oakland (AAQGO)**. The project, begun in 2014, involved creating quilts about people, the environment, history, business, culture, and other aspects of life in Oakland. Over 100 quilts have been made by guild and community members. Community quilt workshops were conducted in schools, community centers and non-profit organizations. The exhibit was launched in Oakland's City Hall Rotunda Gallery in February and continues in various Oakland locations through August 2016. For times, days, dates, visit www.aaqgo.org/AAQGO/?page_id=756.

If you have the time and inclination to go farther afield, PAHA recommends taking a walking tour of **Los Angeles' Historic Broadway Theater District** at the affordable price of \$10. The buildings, dating from 1910-1931, in the Broadway Area have been renovated and revitalized—including their stunning grand lobbies, vaulted ceilings, and heraldic facades. The dazzlingly restored 1927 United Artists Theater "retains its palatial swank". For more information visit www.laconservancy.org/tours.

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 \$40 | Family \$60 | |
| Sustaining \$75 | Business/Sponsor \$150 | Life \$500 |

Make check payable to PAHA and mail to: PAHA Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302. Or join online at pahistory.org. Let us know if you wish to volunteer for a PAHA committee. (Current members should have received renewal notices by post.)



Heritage Program on Channel 30

PAHA's April 2016 program will feature "El Camino Park: A Panel Discussion."

The schedule is

Wednesdays at 8 pm,
Thursdays at 10:30 am, and
Saturdays at 1 pm

on Ch 30.

DVDs of previous programs may be borrowed from the PAHA Archives, which are located at Cubberley, Room K-7.

Hours: Tuesdays, 4-8 pm,
Thursdays, 1-5 pm

In Memoriam

John Borgsteadt
1920-2015



The Tall Tree is published eight times a year by the
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Georgie Gleim, Luana Staiger *Editors*
Györgyi Kapala, Jon Gifford, *Design*
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