



Since 1913

# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

October 2019 Volume 43, No 1

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents

## RAYE C. RINGHOLZ'S MAYFIELD: THE TOWN THAT WOULDN'T GO AWAY



California Ave. 1938



California Ave. Today

**Sunday, October 6, 2019 2:00 – 4:00 pm**  
**Palo Alto Art Center – 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto**

Join us on October 6 to hear author Raye Ringholz speak about her recently published book, "Mayfield: The Town That Wouldn't Go Away". Joining Raye for her slide presentation will be graphic artist Carol Gilbert.

The book is an update to PAHA's 1976 history of Mayfield. Initially platted in 1867, Mayfield was bordered by El Camino Real, the railroad tracks, and the current streets of Cambridge Avenue and Grant Avenue. Mayfield grew over time with new subdivisions and became a hub for the local lumber, farming, and ranching businesses. Although known for its many saloons, Mayfield was a thriving community with local government, schools and churches that supported its growing population.

The California Avenue business district of today was Mayfield's downtown. Raye's new book showcases the many fascinating characters and events that shaped Mayfield and contribute to the character of the community today. Raye is a resident of Palo Alto and a local history writer. She previously published a number of books on topics ranging from the development of the nuclear industry in the West, the life of legendary mountaineer Paul Petzoldt, and several books on Park City, Utah where she lived prior to Palo Alto.

After moving to Palo Alto in 2015, Raye joined PAHA's Publications Committee. After hearing stories about Mayfield from other committee members, she became very interested in the history of Mayfield and about this funny little town that wouldn't give up its thirteen saloons and two breweries to become a bedroom community for Leland Stanford's proposed university! She then quickly volunteered to write a book about Mayfield.

Come and hear fascinating tales of the many people and places that continue to define this community and have contributed to the interesting spirit of Palo Alto.



Photo courtesy of Sunny Scott

Raye will have books for sale and signing.

Free and Open to the Public ~ Refreshments Served



**2019 PALO ALTO  
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- Darla Secor
- Jerry Tinney
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# Ralph, PAHA Thanks You!

Our PAHA President, Ralph Britton, will be moving to the San Diego area in October. He has guided many successes of our organization for more than 5 years. A major accomplishment during that time was our first 3-year contract with the Palo Alto Library that included significant financial support for the management of the City's archives.

Volunteer organizations need a strong board and an understanding leader who can insure the continued vitality of the group. Ralph and the PAHA Board have been committed to continuing the heritage of over 100 years as a Historical Association.

We have been fortunate to have Ralph and his unique institutional memory to guide us. Our mission of preserving and sharing Palo Alto's history depends on people who have a perspective and understanding of local history. Ralph's work as President provided us with that perspective.

Over its 125 years, Palo Alto's success has involved citizens who stepped up to solve problems and lead by example. Based on his many years of contributing to Palo Alto, Ralph has certainly been one of those citizens!

*We'll miss you Ralph!*

## Welcome New PAHA Historian



**FROM THE DESK OF  
Steve Staiger  
City Historian**

Thirty-five years ago Ruth Wilson, the PAHA Historian, announced her retirement. She encouraged me to apply for the position, and I was pleased to be given the job. I started in

September 1984 and jumped right in with very little hands-on advice or assistance from her.

Needless to say, I have learned a great deal over these years. The job has given me many opportunities to interact with the community including talking to a wide range of audiences, from kindergartners to seniors. The job also entails writing this monthly column for the PAHA Tall Tree newsletter, and history pieces for a number of publications. And I have helped answer thousands of history inquiries at the Historian's Desk.

With the advice of board member Brian George, we have decided it is time to consider the future of the Archives. While I am not planning an immediate retirement, we have developed a plan to bring on board a successor who will share the position and

give me time to travel with my wife who is now retired.

With that thought, I am pleased to announce that PAHA Board member Darla Secor has accepted the position of PAHA Historian. Beginning September 1st, Darla is now sharing the position with me, including regular hours at the Archives manning the Historian's Desk. I do hope to stay around long enough to see the Archives move into the Roth Building, and perhaps even longer in an emeritus role.



**Darla Secor, City Historian**

Next month Darla will write the Historian's column, introducing herself and some of her thoughts on how the job might evolve in the next several decades.

*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, Phone (650) 329-2353.*

*Board meetings are held at 4pm on the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Guy Miller Archives. Public programs are held at 2pm on the first Sunday of each month (October-December, February-May) at various locations in Palo Alto. Programs include speakers. The final program of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all programs.*

# The Mayfield of My Early Years, ca. 1940-1950

By Ralph Britton

When I was a boy we lived close to Mayfield. By then of course it had already been incorporated into Palo Alto, but if we went to shop on California Avenue, we went to Mayfield. The train station was labeled “Mayfield”. There was a level railroad crossing at California Avenue, protected by a pair of “wigwag” signals which were lit and swung back and forth above the road, ringing a bell at each stroke when a train approached; a buzzer and another light warned of a second train. There was nothing to prevent drivers from crossing the tracks and there were a few accidents.



The old Mayfield train station, early 1950s. Photo courtesy of Jon Kinyon

The railroad was an important presence with a public loading side and a depot with a Station Agent who also served as a Western Union telegraph operator ready to send a telegram. The station itself was a small yellow wood structure and had a potbellied stove in the waiting room. A couple of large palm trees shaded part of the platform by the tracks. A large water tower fed big trackside spigots which could rapidly fill a steam locomotive's tender car.

I would sometimes walk over to meet my Dad's evening commute train. The cars had steps that were open and commuters would stand on them, ready to get off the train. Bolder passengers would step off before the train had stopped, taking a few rapid steps upon landing to gain balance. The Daylight Limited passed through town heading for San Francisco at up to 90 miles per hour during commute hours. Conductors had to be watchful that commuters departing the last car didn't mindlessly cross the opposite track. There was clearly less emphasis on safety in those days.

Most things local people might need could be purchased in Mayfield. There was Emerick and Duncan for hardware and paints,

(Continued on page 4)

## Welcome New PAHA Board Members



**Amanda Brown** is a second-generation Palo Altan with a fourteen-year detour in the state of Arkansas. She is a graduate of Gunn High School, the Foothill Middle College Program, JLS, and Juana Briones. After earning a bachelor and masters degree in US History, Amanda moved home to the Bay Area and currently resides in San Jose. In her free time, she reads and researches her family genealogy.

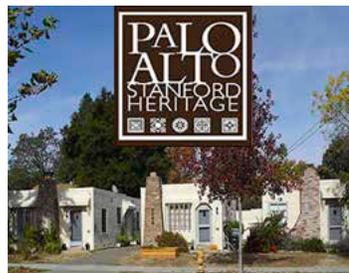


**Colleen Braff** is a member of the Thoits family and is a 4th generation Palo Altan. The Thoits Family connections to Palo Alto go back to 1893 when Edward K. Thoits came with his family and opened a shoe store on University Avenue in conjunction with the newly built Stanford University. Colleen was raised in the family home built by her great grandparents at 939 Forest Avenue. She married her high school sweetheart, Jon Braff, 28 years ago and moved a mile across town into the house where Jon grew up. Colleen has her own interior architecture and design business and she is passionate about helping clients remodel and renovate their homes both locally and afar. Recently, she completed the renovation of the Thoits Brothers office at 629 Emerson to reflect the family's history in Palo Alto.



Born and raised in Palo Alto, **Leslie Mills** can trace her Palo Alto roots back to 1889 when her great-grandfather, Frank Richard Mills, moved from Winters, CA to be a gardener on the Timothy Hopkins estate. In 1903, he established Mills the Florist, in the basement of his home on Palo Alto Avenue. The florist is still in business today on University Avenue. Leslie graduated from Palo Alto High School and attended college at University of Washington where she obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mechanical Engineering. She has worked in various industries including hydroelectric power, PG&E utility, petroleum remediation in groundwater, and as Project Manager for Tenant Improvements. Currently, she manages and develops real estate. She is happy to be part of PAHA to help preserve Palo Alto's history for future generations.

# History Jaunts for the Fall



Palo Alto Stanford Heritage (PAST) resumes its schedule of docent-led walking tours. Mark your calendar! All tours begin promptly at 10:00 am. **Saturday, October 5 — Tour College Terrace** with Carolyn George, meet at 1181 College Ave. **Saturday, October 12 — Tour of Downtown** with Margaret Feuer, meet at City Hall Plaza, 250 Hamilton Ave. **Saturday, October 19 — Tour of Downtown Entrepreneurs** with Bo Crane, meet on the Ramona Street side of 250 University Ave. **Sunday, Oct. 27 — Professorville** with Kris Zavoli & Anne Gregor, meet in front of 1005 Bryant at the corner of Bryant and Addison.

(Continued from page 3) Ben Franklin was the five-and-dime, the Mayfield Theater offered movies (now Zombie Runner), and Bishop's Creamery. The Bishop family also owned the California Avenue Pharmacy. There was an auto repair garage at California Avenue and Park Blvd. that became the first Co-Op Store, now the site of Mollie Stone's.

business which existed at least until 1960 was Clarence's Smoke Shop. They served beer in quart bottles, sold hamburgers, and there was a card room in the back. It presumably escaped the Stanford ban on alcohol because it predated Stanford. A small bicycle repair shop was known simply as Mr. Neely's. It was one of the very few African American-owned businesses in those days.



The main market was the Piggly Wiggly, which early on became Safeway; Antonio's Nut House occupies that building today (look for an article about Antonio's Nut House in our November issue). A Standard Oil gas station was near Birch Street and California Avenue, and sold gas at 28 cents a gallon. I'm given to understand that the oldest

Away from California Avenue, there was Sutter Packing Company (now Fry's Electronics). It offered jobs in the summer time for students slicing apricots and other fruits for canning. Peninsula Building Materials' raw material was delivered by rail and supplied gravel, cement, and concrete. On El Camino Real there was Bonander's Drive-In, where a waitress would take an order and bring the meal back on a tray that would hang from the car window. There was also Foster's Freeze on El Camino Real. The Fire Station on Park Blvd. had a whistle that blew at 8:00am, noon, and 5pm.

## Welcome New Members!

- Colleen Braff
- Ilene Hertz
- Leslie Mills
- David Moss
- Robin Reynolds
- Jim Wall

## The Heritage Program

currently airing is PAHA's June 2016 program featuring Robert Kelly sharing the history of TheatreWorks Silicon Valley. This repeat showing honors their 50th Anniversary and recent 2019 Tony Award.

Airs on Channels 28 or 30 on various days and times. It is simultaneously streamed on the Media Center website [www.midpenmedia.org](http://www.midpenmedia.org) Check website for schedule

DVDs available from the Guy Miller Archives, Cubberley Community Center, K-7  
Tues. 4-8 pm, Thurs. 1-5 pm

## In Memoriam

Ester Bugna, Life Member



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

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