



The Tall Tree Newsletter

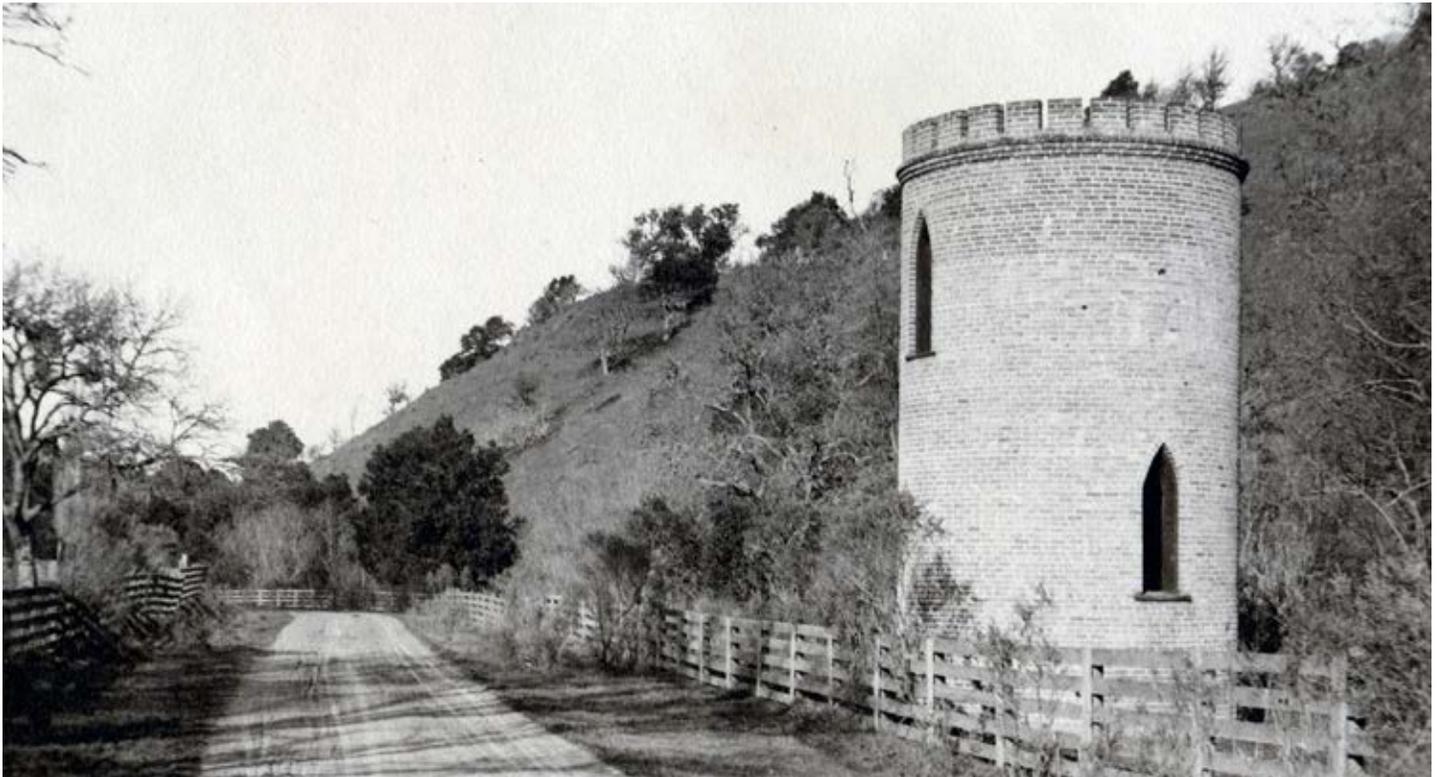
of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

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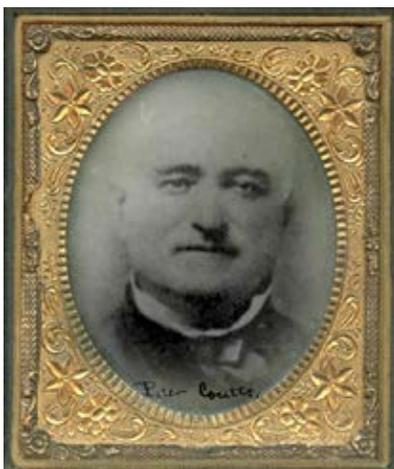
The Palo Alto Historical Association presents via Zoom Webinar

PETER COUTTS: THE FRENCHMAN AND HIS TOWER



Sunday June 6, 2021 2:00 to 3:00 pm

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81606960459>



Join us via Zoom for PAHA's presentation on "The Frenchman", Peter Coutts, one of the most enigmatic people in Palo Alto's history!

Many rumors surround Peter Coutts and his family. Who was this wealthy man that purportedly fled France in 1874 to purchase 1400 acres of farmland in present-day College Terrace only to suddenly abandon it and return to his native land 8 years later, leaving behind such landmarks as the Frenchman's Tower, Frenchman's Bridge, and Frenchman's Library?

Join PAHA and our speaker Lisa Krieger along with Bo Crane on June 6th from 2:00 to 3:00 pm to hear the intriguing story of Peter Coutts, including his real name, who he was, why he came here, why he suddenly left, what is rumor and what is actually true!

You won't want to miss this last talk of our program year!

For more information about our programs and for detailed Zoom instructions, please visit our website at www.pahistory.org

Palo Alto's May Fete Parade

By Darla Secor and Steve Staiger

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Children in costume walking down University Avenue, 1951

Palo Alto's May Fete Parade has been around for nearly a century, even predating the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City (by 6 months). The first Palo Alto May Fete parade was held in 1924 when the Community Center Committee (operating out of the Community House – the first community center in Palo Alto) announced the May Fete Parade was to be an official city event. The parade was a much-anticipated annual community celebration up until the pandemic, last year.



Boy walking his pet sheep in parade, 1944

In the beginning, the parade was comprised of children and their pets. Parents usually watched on as spectators. Hundreds of children paraded down University Avenue with their dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, hamsters and even goats. Some walked their pets on a leash, others pulled them in self-decorated wagons and carts. Some children decorated their bicycles, tricycles or scooters and rode them in the parade. Others dressed in costume to participate. Soon Scout troops joined in along with every school marching band in town. Students built hand-pulled floats to promote their schools. Dance teams would perform their routines and jugglers juggled as they walked.

Eventually the parade outgrew the theme of children and their pets, until everyone seemed to participate in the parade. Local associations, clubs and groups such as the Humane Society and Palo Alto Children's

Theater, joined the parade to promote their organizations. Mayors, Marshals, horseback groups, fancier floats and decorated automobiles joined in as well. Later, the parade featured a May Queen and her court. At some point, it was decided that the parade would have a different theme each year and a pageant and maypole were featured at Lucie Stern Community Center.

Historically the parade begins at 10 am on the first Saturday in May. The route begins on University Avenue near Emerson and for many years it ended at Addison School. In recent years the parade has ended at Heritage Park on the corner of Waverley and Homer.



Jerry Tinney (2nd tricycle) in a May Fete parade, late '30s

The parade has only been cancelled twice in its long history—once in 1941, when it was postponed to the following weekend due to weather, and last year due to the pandemic. The last in-person parade in 2019 featured PAHA as the Grand Marshal during the City's 125th anniversary. More than 55 groups adding up to 2,200 participants signed up to walk in the parade that year.

This year, the City held a "Reverse Parade" in which Palo Altans could decorate their homes or businesses in the theme of "What a Wonderful World" and register their address online for people to drive by and view. The concept got off to a slow start with only 6 businesses (mostly city operated buildings) and 11 homes registering. It is hoped that next year the traditional parade will be able to take place again.



Girl Scouts on a float on University Avenue in 1938

The Palo Alto Historical Association, a 501(c)(3) charitable 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. Although PAHA continues to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the current restrictions, the Archive is only open for prearranged appointments. To contact the Archive or to make an appointment to visit, email steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org or call (650) 329-2353.

Until further notice, PAHA board meetings are held via Zoom Meeting at 4pm on the first Wednesday of each month (except August). Public programs are held via Zoom Webinar at 2pm on the first Sunday of each month (October-December, February-May). Program information and webinar links are available in the Tall Tree newsletters and on our website, www.pahistory.org. The public is welcome to join all programs.

Two stories of growing up in Palo Alto in the 1940s

Vacant Lots

by PAHA board member Jerry Tinney

Back in the 1940s there were empty lots where nothing had been built yet. As kids, we all figured they were left that way for us to play in and to create entertainment for ourselves! It never occurred to any of us to ask permission of the owner, as almost every neighborhood had one.



Jerry Tinney playing in a vacant lot around 1940

My first vacant lot experience was the one next door to my home, on the corner of Forest Avenue and Fulton Street. This was the time of WWII, and one of my prized possessions was lead army men, trucks, tanks, and cannons. I decided to dig a hole where I could enact my own private war. Soon a builder came along, built a house, and ended my war games. That was before cyclone fences, so every evening, after the workers left, we would gather and climb around the framing.

Another empty lot was across the street from my friend Lew Mitchell's house, on the corner on Forest Avenue and Middlefield Road. Soon after a rain, when the grass was about 8 to 10 inches high, we would grab a handful of grass, pull it up with some dirt, and press into a ball. We had lots of fun throwing these at each other! They looked so cool flying through the air.

After the grass had dried, we decided to build a high jumping pit using the dried grass as a bed to land on. We noticed the adjoining neighbors, the Quinbys, had a nice stand of bamboo, so we ran home for a saw and soon had the perfect pole for pole vaulting. Only then did we realize how difficult it was to pole vault!



Corner of Everett Avenue and Fulton Street in 1923

Across the street from my friend Jerold Zinola's home on the corner of Guinda Street and Homer Avenue, there was a double lot. There, we got a little more ambitious. We decided we needed a baseball field so we scrounged up 2x4s and some chicken wire and built a backstop. Each of us went home and got our lawn mowers (which all homes used to have) and we mowed the lot.

We had a good time there until some Babe Ruth wannabe hit a homer through the neighbor's window. Since it was the only ball we had, we all ran and the game was over.

These are fond memories of times when it was a kid's responsibility to entertain themselves. Our parents had no idea that it was up to them to find things for us to do.

Remembrances of the War

by Frank Mills

Growing up in Palo Alto in the 1940s now seems a like a history lesson to me. When I was 8 years old, I remember playing catch in the street when a neighbor came out and said, "Japan just bombed Pearl Harbor!" I didn't know what Pearl Harbor was and, at that age, I don't think I even knew where Japan was.

My father was the Air Raid Warden for our block, which at the time included only our house and our greenhouses. The city would hold air raid drills at night. I remember hearing the siren and my dad going outside to walk the block with his flashlight. His job was to make sure there were no lights on in our neighborhood so the Japanese airplanes could not identify targets.



1941 Scrap Metal Drive with boys giving the Victory sign

The recycling of iron and steel was encouraged to help with the war effort, so my school, Lytton Elementary (later torn down and replaced by Lytton Gardens Senior Community), held a scrap metal drive. I remember filling our wagons with scrap metal we collected from our backyards and taking it to Lytton School. Another way we helped the war effort was by planting "victory gardens" where we grew our own vegetables to eat. We planted a garden at Lytton School in the shape of a "V" for victory. These gardens allowed the canned foods to be sent to our soldiers.



Lytton School victory garden with Frank Mills 3rd from back, on right inside row

We didn't have a TV back then so we would hear news about the war on the radio and see clips of war footage at the theatre prior to the movie. One clip that sticks with me showed U.S. soldiers using a flamethrower in a tunnel, and the Japanese soldier ran out on fire. My family was in Santa Cruz on vacation when the Germans surrendered and the soldiers stationed in the area were celebrating everywhere. I was eleven at the time. Since then, I've always been interested in watching movies and reading about the history of WWII because I lived through it.

Jaunting for Real!

The best news was a recent morning's headline: "SF, LA Counties Achieve Yellow Tier"! While we all still need to get vaccinated and wear our masks inside, we can get out and do so much more now! As always, check telephone numbers and websites for each jaunt's "pandemic protocols," especially as many continue to require reservations and place limits on entrance numbers.

The New Museum Los Gatos (NUMU) is currently presenting *ArtNow*, an annual juried Santa Clara County high school art exhibition and educational program. It offers opportunities, scholarships, and awards to participating students. This year, NUMU invited local high school students to honor the battles and achievements of Freedom Rider and civil rights activist John Lewis by rendering and submitting their interpretations of his words, "Never be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble." NUMU is located at 106 E. Main St. in Los Gatos and is open Fri, 12-7 pm, Sat-Sun, 10am-4pm. Tickets are required. For more information and detail, visit www.numulosgatos.org or call (408) 354-2646.



Bair Island has been restored and protected by POST

Some of the best jaunting of all is getting outside and enjoying California's glorious scenery and weather! **Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)** offers a variety of opportunities to explore California's great outdoors. POST protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all.

Be sure to visit their website for descriptions, maps, and driving instructions to their many awe-inspiring hiking suggestions, at www.openspacetrust.org.

Now is a great time to visit ocean-carved reefs, bright green anemones, ochre sea stars, mussels and a plethora of other fantastic marine life at **California's tide pools!** Whichever tide pool you choose, your drive will take you through coastal towns and alongside farms, beaches, and blooming wildflowers. Explore local tide pools at the following destinations: **Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach, Agate Beach Park in Bolinas, Natural Bridges State Beach in Santa Cruz, and Asilomar State Beach and Point Pinos in Pacific Grove.**

More Information can be found easily online.



Photo courtesy of Bay Nature

Welcome New Members!

Kelsey Banes
Katherine Williams

Upcoming Programs

Save the dates for our upcoming programs:
October 3, November 7
and December 5

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

Previous PAHA Programs

If you missed the May 2nd program, *Celebrating 100 Years With The Garden Club of Palo Alto*, you can find this and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link:
<https://vimeo.com/545805533>

The Heritage Program

This month's heritage program features *Celebrating 100 Years With The Garden Club of Palo Alto*. This program airs on Channel 28 or 30 at various times and is simultaneously streamed on the Midpen Media Center website, midpenmedia.org/heritage. Check website for schedule.

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