



Since 1913

The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

April 2022 Volume 45, No 6

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents via Zoom Webinar

THE GREER FAMILY: OUR LAND WAS THEIR LAND

Sunday, April 3, 2022 2:00 – 3:00 pm

Webinar link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84661879919>

PAHA is proud to present the story of the Greer family of Palo Alto with speakers Bo Crane and Jerry Tinney.



Greer home, built prior to 1890, today the site of Town & Country Village Shopping Center

Did you know the Greer family once owned all of north Palo Alto and Woodside? Learn how John Greer, an Irish sea captain disdaining the distant gold fields, would come to own this vast expanse of prime real estate and how his family struggled to prove their title to the land with the newly formed state of California.

Listen to remembrances by board member, Jerry Tinney, as he recounts his personal experiences with Greer's grandson, Joe Greer. Joe used to drive a hay wagon around the Town & Country Village shopping center, providing a fun shuttle service for shoppers.



Joe Greer steering hay wagon at Town & Country in the 1950s. Susan Banfe, her brother Peter, and others enjoy the ride.

Join us via Zoom to hear stories, see photos, and learn about this interesting family that once was the mid-Peninsula's biggest land owner.



Captain John Greer

PAHA has an archive of over 100 video recordings of its programs. Most are available as DVDs at the archives. Programs since October 2020 are also available on the Vimeo website. For more information about our programs, and for Zoom instructions, you can visit our website at www.pahistory.org.

**2022 PALO ALTO
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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.

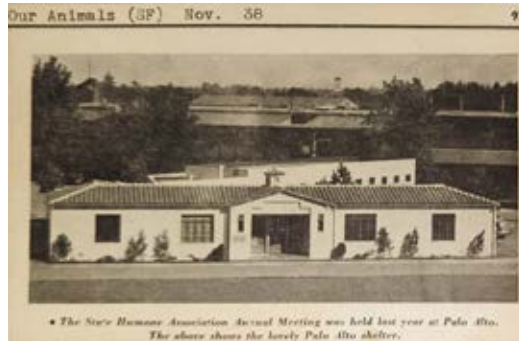
The Guy Miller Archives of the Palo Alto Historical Association are stored at Cubberley Community Center, K-7. PAHA continues to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic and no appointments are needed during public hours. To contact the Archive or to make an appointment to visit, email steve.staiger@cityofpaloalto.org or call (650) 329-2353.

Until further notice, PAHA board meetings are held via Zoom Meeting at 5pm 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.paha-history.org. The public is welcome to join all programs.

The '30s and '40s: A Golden Age For Pets

by PAHA Board member William Warrior

Dating back to before incorporation in 1894, Palo Alto wrestled with the issue of the stray dog population, which by contemporary accounts had reached pandemic levels—being described in one exasperated letter to the editor of the Palo Alto Times as something akin to what could be observed on the streets of Calcutta.



The 1938 San Francisco SPCA publication *Our Animals* ran a feature story about "the lovely Palo Alto Shelter"

The Palo Alto Board of Trustees made early attempts toward the management of animal care and control. These efforts only resulted in a collective unhappiness citywide, and the repeated reinvention of who should

be in charge—from the Town Marshall in 1894; to the appointment of several "pound-masters" in 1901 (one of whom after six-months on the job was arrested and charged with cruelty to animals); to the founding of a short-lived and unsuccessful Palo Alto SPCA in 1902; to the City finally settling with a contract for animal shelter services in 1924 with the newly founded Palo Alto Humane Society.

After 13 years of on again/off again negotiations between the City and the Humane Society, a state-of-the-art shelter opened in 1937 that earned for Palo Alto both state and national recognition for excellence in the care of wayward animals, domestic and wild.



The Palo Alto Animal Shelter's brand spankin' new 1942 animal rescue vehicle

Dr. Newell

by Board member Bo Crane

One of the most recognizable names among Palo Alto residents is that of Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook and its parent company Meta. What many don't know is that Zuckerberg lives in the oldest house in Palo Alto, built by prominent San Francisco surgeon, Dr. William Andrews Newell.

William Newell was born in Ireland circa 1833. As a young man, he immigrated to the U.S. where he married Kentuckian Josephine Cottrell, born in 1838. Their first child was born in Ohio circa 1855. In October 1859, Newell became naturalized in Buffalo, New York. He moved to a large farm in the Napa Township of California as evidenced in the July 1860 census where his name, age, and birthplace: "Dr. Wm. Newell, 26, Ireland", appeared along with 30 other boarders. He opened his medical



Newell Residence, 1886. Courtesy Palo Alto Stanford Heritage

practice in San Francisco around the same period as evidenced in the 1861 directory.

In 1863, the rail line from San Francisco reached Mayfield, making living on the mid-Peninsula more easily accessible from the city. In 1864, at age 31, Dr. Newell purchased 47.5 acres from Henry

Seale on the southeast side of San Francisquito Creek. Newell's land was bordered by San Francisquito Creek and the road, later known as Newell Road, which spanned the creek and continued to Clark's Landing at the bay's edge.

While still living in San Francisco, Dr. Newell built his San Francisquito Creek house in 1866. As of the 1870 Fremont Township census, Dr. Newell, his wife, and three sons (the youngest a month old) were living in the home. The last son, Percy, was born (continued on page 3)

Palo Alto Ranchos

by Board member Leslie Mills

When Mexico took control of California in 1821, it began issuing land grants to both native-born and naturalized Mexican citizens to encourage settlement in the area. The grants were usually one to two square leagues in size (a league is approximately 4440 acres) and were called Ranchos. Present-day Palo Alto was part of two Ranchos. Rancho Rinconada del Arroyo de San Francisquito was a 2230-acre rancho granted to the Soto family. It encompassed the north end of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. Rancho Rincon de San Francisquito was an 8418-acre rancho granted to Jose Pena, and included present day south Palo Alto, future town of Mayfield, part of Stanford, as well as northern Mountain View.



Map of the Palo Alto area in 1890

Following the Mexican-American War of 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo stated that the U.S. government would honor Mexican land grants. However, after California became a state in 1850, the California Land Act of 1851 was enacted requiring all rancho grant landowners to submit a claim proving title within two years. The wait time after filing a petition took up to 17 years! Legal fees caused the sale of much of the land grant.

Rafael Soto was the son of settlers who had been part of the Spanish expeditions. In 1835, Rafael and his family settled near the San Francisquito Creek close to Newell Road where he grazed herds for Mission Santa Clara and sold goods to travelers. Rafael had applied for a land grant but died prior to its issuance. His wife Maria Antonia Mesa was issued the land grant for Rancho Rinconada del Arroyo de San Francisquito in 1841. Their daughter, Maria Louisa Soto inherited the rancho upon her mother's passing. Maria Louisa also became owner of another rancho in Woodside known as Rancho Canada de Raymundo through marriage to John

Coppinger who owned the property. After only 8 years of marriage, Coppinger passed away leaving his wife the rancho. She then wed a visiting ship captain, John Greer, who became joint owner of both ranchos through marriage.

The Soto family filed a claim but was rejected. Upon appeal, the family enlisted the help of Thomas Seale in certifying their title. In return for getting the title certified in 1855, Thomas and his brother Henry received 1400 acres of Soto land. The land encompassed present day Palo Alto from the area now known

as Oregon Expressway to San Francisquito Creek. The Seales later sold a large portion of this land north of Embarcadero Road to Timothy Hopkins. Hopkins developed what was then called University Park and later marketed as Palo Alto, a dry subdivision and future town to support Leland and Jane Stanford's new university.

Jose Pena was an artilleryman at the Presidio of San Francisco. He received permission from the Mission Santa Clara in 1822 to occupy a square league of its pastureland. In 1841, he applied for a grant of the land he had been using, and was granted two square leagues by Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado. In 1847, he sold the rancho to Secundino Robles and his brother Teodoro.



Plaque at intersection of Ferne Avenue and Alma Street

The brothers had accrued their wealth in quicksilver they discovered in south San José. A plaque along Alma Street commemorates Secundino's original adobe site. Pena retained a small plot for himself and his wife on what is now the Stanford golf course. As required by the Land Act of 1851, the Robles filed their claim to the land in 1852 and received grant confirmation in

1868. However, by that time much of their land had been sold pending the claim to pay legal and other expenses including the support of Secundino's 29 children!

(continued from page 2) in 1881. Newell kept a home office in San Francisco and also presided over the Acclimatizing Society, which sought to manage all public streams and ponds in the state to assist in the preservation and propagation of game and fish.

John Whipple knew the Newell family when he was a young boy. According to Whipple, Newell's home had a tower from which to shoot ducks, a cement swimming pool, a 10-acre variety orchard, a well that was run by a gas engine, and "50 or more" Mariana Islanders who tended the lawns, horses, cows, and drove the doctor to

the train depot for his commute to the city. Newell also planted a grove of eucalyptus trees—trees that today align one side of the 1931 Newell Road bridge across the creek.

Dr. Newell died in 1895. At some point, the house was vacated and three of the sons moved to San Francisco. A fourth son had passed away. Dr. Alexander McIntyre, a dentist, bought the estate in 1906 and used the original materials in reconstructing the house. The house has gone through many remodels and owners since the original construction and is one of the few remaining pre-Palo Alto homes.

April Jaunts

While many of us have not strayed far from home for the past 2 years, the pandemic is receding and the continuing dry weather entices PAHA members to go jaunting! Even though Covid restrictions have lessened, it is still a good idea to call ahead or visit websites for latest protocols.

Take the opportunity to visit the **Angel Island Immigration Museum**, recently re-opened after 12-years of renovation and modernization. Its exhibits describe and present “both the dark and bright stories” of immigrants “who passed through it in the early 20th century”. Divided into 3 sections, the narrative is enhanced with powerful artifacts, documents, and commentaries. The Museum, located in the station’s former hospital, is free and open to the public weekends from 11:00am to 3:30pm. Docent tours are also available. For information on the ferry schedule to and from Angel Island, as well as details about the museum, call 415-435-3522 or visit the website www.aiisf.org/visit



Reconstructed detention center at Angel Island Immigration Station



Pomo carrying basket, courtesy of metmuseum.org

As a follow-up to last month’s PAHA program on the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, and Leslie Mills’ Tall Tree article on Palo Alto’s indigenous people, visit the **de Young Museum** to see Jules Tavernier and the Elem Pomo. Tavernier was a French painter and illustrator whose signature work, *Dance in a Subterranean Roundhouse at Clear Lake, California* forms the centerpiece of the exhibit. Through April 17, it features paintings, photographs, basketry, and ceremonial regalia of the Elem Pomo people from the 1860s to the present. The de Young Museum is located at 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Drive, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. It is open 9:30am-5:15pm, Tuesday – Sunday. For information and reservations, call 415-750-3600 or visit <http://deyoung.famsf.org>

The Annual **Gamble Garden Spring Tour** returns to Palo Alto on Friday and Saturday, April 22 and 23. This perennial favorite offers visits to 5 local gardens where docents will describe their development and horticultural highlights. The Garden Tour provides a plethora of activities including a marketplace featuring products of local vendors, the “Over The Garden Fence” sale with its unique bargains, a silent auction, and complimentary refreshments. A boxed lunch may be ordered in advance. Gamble Garden is located at 1431 Waverley Street and is free and open to the public every day during daylight hours. For information about purchasing a ticket to the Spring Tour, including an opportunity to volunteer, call 650-329-1356 or visit the website www.gamblegarden.org/springtour

Welcome New PAHA Members

Bill & Lesley King
Nancy Bischoff
Ruth Gray (Life Member)

Upcoming Programs

May 1: PAST Centennial Plaque
and Historic Preservations Awards
June 1: Parkey Sharkey Story

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

Previous PAHA Programs

If you missed the March 6th
program, *Back from Extinction:
The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe*, you
can find it and other recent PAHA
program videos on Vimeo by
following this link:
<https://vimeo.com/686370743>

The Heritage Program

You can also watch the most
recent PAHA program on local TV.
Visit [https://midpenmedia.org/
local-tv/](https://midpenmedia.org/local-tv/) and enter the word
“Heritage” in the search box to
find the broadcast schedule
for PAHA programs.

In Memoriam

Ted McKee
Lew Silvers

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