



The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

October 2024 Volume 48, No 1

In cooperation with



CITY OF
PALO
ALTO

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents

El Palo Alto: A Fresh Look at the Unsolved Mysteries of the Tall Tree

Sunday, October 6, 2024 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Palo Alto Art Center ~ 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto



Single "Palo Alto" tree photographed by W.H. Myrick, ca. 1887 and
Twin Redwood Trees by Carleton Watkins, ca. 1874

Join us on Sunday, October 6th for the first program of our new season! PAHA member Jeff Watt will unravel some of the mysteries around Palo Alto's famed Tall Tree.

The towering redwood tree we know today as El Palo Alto was first documented by Spanish explorers in the 1700s and has been a landmark of the valley for centuries. Despite the significance to our local history, there are a number of unsolved mysteries about the tall tree that have puzzled historians for many years.

For example:

- Is El Palo Alto, once twin redwoods, really the same towering tree seen by the Spanish explorers?
- Did Gaspar de Portola and his expedition really camp under the tall tree in 1769?
- When exactly did one of the redwood twins fall?
- And when did the tree get its name "Palo Alto"?

The availability of indexed and searchable online historical documents, along with recent translations of long overlooked diaries of the Spanish explorers, and research on the works of the great 19th century landscape photographer Carleton Watkins, have all created a treasure trove of previously unknown information about the Tall Tree mysteries. The result is significant new insight into these mysteries and some surprising conclusions.

Jeff Watt graduated from Stanford University with a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering and has lived in Palo Alto and the surrounding area for over 40 years. Jeff has been exploring the mysteries of local history for over a decade.

Free and Open to the Public ~ Refreshments Served

**2024 PALO ALTO
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In Memory of Bo Crane



Bo Crane

Bo Crane (Robert L. Crane, Jr) passed away on August 21, 2024 at home after a brave 6-year struggle with ocular melanoma. Bo lived his entire life in Palo Alto, graduating from Paly High ('68) and Stanford University ('72), where he majored in English and Creative Writing. His Paly classmates will no doubt remember the 800 Pound Outhouse senior prank.

He and his first wife, Susie Standlee Crane, have a daughter Ellen. Together with his second wife, Kristen Arnold Harrison, they survive him. Kristen and Susie both live in Palo Alto and Ellen lives with her partner Van in Nashville, TN. Other surviving family members include his brothers John and Dave (Kathy), brother-in-law Drew Nosworthy and numerous nieces & nephews. His sister, Ann, passed in 2016.

He joined the homebuilding company Ditz-Crane, founded by his father and the Ditz brothers George & Jack, in 1972 and remained in residential construction and management until his retirement in 2012. At that point he devoted himself tirelessly to the history of Palo Alto and Menlo Park. He served on the boards of Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA), Palo Alto Stanford

Heritage (PAST) and Menlo Park Historical, contributing to their newsletters, writing several books, and leading walking tours of historic homes. Many people probably associate his name with the Daily Post's Mystery Photo column, which he contributed to daily, with both guesses and photos.

Bo's sports career was varied and long. At Paly he wrestled and played football. At Stanford he played Freshman football and later rugby and soccer. His father, "Crunch Crane" & his father-in-law Norm Standlee both played football at Stanford and took the undefeated 1940 team on to win the 1941 Rose Bowl as the WOW Boys. Bo became a passionate cyclist, completing 100,000 miles by January 1, 2023. He completed 13 Death Rides between 1992 and 2022. Along the way he coached AYSO soccer for 14 years as well as serving as the AYSO Commissioner for Palo Alto. He also backpacked in the Sierra with his dogs and friends for years.

A memorial service is scheduled for Sunday, October 20, 2024, from 3 to 6 PM in the Lucie Stern Community Center Ballroom, 1305 Middlefield Road in Palo Alto. In lieu of flowers please consider making a memorial contribution in Bo's name to Dr. Prithvi Mruthyunjaya's ocular melanoma research at Stanford Medicine. Also, consider donations to your local historical society. Bo thanks you.

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, Phone (650) 329-2353.

PAHA Board meetings are conducted using Zoom at 5 pm the first Wednesday of each month (except August).

Public programs are held at 2 pm on the first Sunday of October, December, February, March, and May at the Palo Alto Art Center, 1313 Newell Road. 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.

Mark Hancock

By Steve Staiger

A memorial service for Mark Hancock, who passed away on May 26, 2024, is planned for September 23rd. Mark grew up in Palo Alto and attended Cubberley High School, where, as a student in 1967, he participated in "The Wave," a social experiment conducted by teacher Ron Jones. His involvement in "The Wave" profoundly impacted his life.

After high school, Mark attended college and became an architect in Seattle. Later, he returned to graduate school to prepare for a career in the non-profit sector. Mark is best remembered for his dedication to keeping the message of "The Wave" alive. He traveled the world, giving talks about the experiment, often alongside Ron Jones

and others. Mark was also instrumental in the production of the documentary *The Lesson Plan* (2010), which introduced the story of "The Wave" to a wider audience.

As the Historian/Archivist for "The Wave," Mark compiled and preserved an extensive collection of documentation. I had been relying on him to help develop the Palo Alto Museum's exhibit on "The Wave." Sadly, we won't have his direct involvement, but just last week, 10 boxes of "The Wave" materials he had collected were sent to the Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA). These materials will be preserved both as part of Palo Alto's social experiment history and as a testament to Mark's extraordinary efforts to keep the story alive.

Building Their Dream Home in Palo Alto

By Jane Israel Honikman



House construction at 1991 Webster Street in 1949 started in February and finished in August

On November 24, 1947, my parents, Delmer and Beatrice Israel, paid \$1,000 in cash as a deposit to purchase a lot on Webster Street in Palo Alto. The estimate for building a single story, 5 bedroom, 2 ½ bath residence with an attached 2-car garage on that lot was \$22,425.88. The cost for 44 items was typed out with a removal, adjustment or increase noted in pencil next to it. The cost of nails, for example, was lowered from \$100 to \$85. The fire insurance allowance, metal tiles, Formica in the kitchen, building paper and sheetrock and taping were eliminated. The contractor's fee was lowered to \$1,500. The house also had a large basement. It cost \$240 to excavate the basement and waterproofing the concrete was an additional \$50. My one memory as a 4-year-old was being upset when one of my two brothers pushed the other into the deep basement hole during construction!

Mr. Harris also billed my parents \$4208.57. This total included \$1.00 to record the contract, \$38 for the building permit, a \$50 street deposit, \$1.35 for one set of blueprints, and \$510.66 for the foundation. Rat proofing cost \$76.67. The concrete poured behind the house for the clothesline totaled \$37.08. The city of Palo Alto also charged a monthly fee of \$1.25 for water in May–September.

My parents were smart business partners, and both had good interior taste, aesthetics, and design. The floors were made of oak and cost \$750. It was my job to dust what seemed like miles of baseboards. Their selection of furniture was superb and their mid-century fine pieces are now considered antiques. Our home was filled with music, coming from the radio/record player. Intellectual discussions (a polite word for arguments) accompanied our sit-down three course family dinners every night in the dining room.

The landscaping surrounding the house was as well planned as the interior. Both of my parents had “green thumbs”. A gardener maintained the lawns, but no

one else purchased, planted, and fussed over the rest. On Sundays, my father's only day off from work, we routinely visited the nursery or the dump by the Bay.

My idyllic childhood included playing in the dream home and garden. The basement was an endless source of mystery and hideouts. Children ran up and down the basement stairs from the kitchen. It was spooky when someone turned off the lights and wouldn't let us out! The neighborhood “gang” were children who attended Walter Hayes Elementary, Jordan Junior and Paly High schools. The large front lawn was the perfect gathering place for hanging out, playing outdoor games, building a fort, writing a play, carnival, or circus.

Our family had the good fortune to live at 1991 Webster Street from August 1949 until a year after our father passed away in 1970, when my mother sold it for less than \$100,000. I am nostalgic reminiscing about the two decades of family celebrations spent there, including our wedding reception in 1967. We took a photo in front of my parent's dream home and garden on our 50th wedding anniversary, standing on the brick walkway in front of the original front door. It looks almost the same. My parents would be proud of how beautiful it has remained.



Jane Israel Honikman and one of her older brother John Vance

Editorial note: This article is a shortened version telling the story of the dream home built by Jane's parents. For the full article where you can read more of Jane's fascinating details of this house, go to our website.

The 2024 Steve Staiger Award



Rich Green (L) and Steve Staiger (R)

This year's Steve Staiger Award was presented to PAHA Vice-President Rich Green at PAHA's annual June celebration at the Mitchell Park Community Center. It is fun when an award is given to a deserving honoree who is completely surprised by the event. Rich has served many years as our Vice President, filling in for Georgie as needed, but it is his efforts and accomplishments as the President of

the Palo Alto Museum that earned him the award this year.

Rich Green has been in the trenches, fighting for the well-being of the Museum for many years now. As the Museum inches toward its opening in 2025, the battles have continued. Surprises in the old building's hidden structure have caused problems that have delayed the project and increased the cost. But Rich has stayed in battle mode all these years, using his knowledge and desire to see this museum open so that we can share Palo Alto's history with its residents and visitors.

For all these efforts and his ability to maintain his friendly smile while working to get our museum open, Rich is "richly" deserving of receiving this year's "Steve Staiger Award."

Former PAHA Historian, Ralph Hansen

By Steve Staiger

It has recently come to my attention that Ralph Hansen, the former PAHA Historian, died October 31, 2023, in Hillsboro, OR at the age of 96. He came to Palo Alto in 1962 from Utah when he was appointed Curator of the Stanford Collection at Stanford University. He later became the Stanford University Archivist.

He discovered that the salary of a Librarian/Archivist in the 1960s would not support a wife and two children, so he accepted the position as "Palo Alto City Historian" as a part-time position working evenings and

Saturdays in addition to his position at Stanford.

He gave up his PAHA Historian position in 1967, but continued to be involved with PAHA, including serving as PAHA President in 1970-71. Ruth Wilson took over the position as PAHA Historian. Eventually he left Stanford for a new position at Boise State University where he retired in 1989.

Over the years, I would receive phone calls from him. It was clear that he still felt a connection to PAHA.

Welcome New Our Members!

Terry Beaubois
Jim Gibbons
Ann & Don Rothblatt

Upcoming Program Dates

- Oct 6
- Dec 1
- Feb 2
- Mar 2
- May 4

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held in person on the first Sunday of the months we present programs. Check our website at www.pahistory.org for program information.

Previous PAHA Programs

If you missed the May 5th program, *The 28th Centennial Plaque & Historic Preservation Awards*, you can find it and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link: <https://vimeo.com/945339625>

In Memoriam:

Bo Crane
Mark Hancock
Ralph Hansen
Sherilyn Moody



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



Jon Kinyon, *Lead Editor & Design*
Luana Staiger, Melissa Verber, *Editors*
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Photographs courtesy of PAHA Guy Miller Archives unless otherwise noted.

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