



The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

March 2025 Volume 48, No 4

In cooperation with



CITY OF
PALO
ALTO

The Palo Alto Historical Association presents

THE ELIZABETH F. GAMBLE GARDEN



MICA PIRIE *Our moderator*
Executive Director of Elizabeth F.
Gamble Garden.



KAREN OLSON *Panelist*
Garden Club of Palo Alto Vice
President, 1980s.



HERB FONG *Panelist*
Grounds Services Manager at
Stanford University, retired.



SCOTT LOOSLEY *Panelist*
1st Garden Director, Elizabeth F.
Gamble Garden.

Sunday, March 2, 2025 2:00 – 4:00 pm
Palo Alto Art Center ~ 1313 Newell Road, Palo Alto

In May, the Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden will turn 40!

This horticultural center, historic house, and extensive garden was once the home of the Gamble family, who purchased the lot in 1902, built the house in 1904, and were officially in residence by 1909. In 1939, their daughter, Elizabeth, inherited the property, and she lived there until her death in 1981. In her will, she deeded the property to the City of Palo Alto.

The story of the founding of Gamble Garden is one involving a broad-based community group led by the Garden Club of Palo Alto. They studied other horticultural centers, determined that they needed the entire property, knew the property must be accessible to the entire community, agreed the organization must be self-funding, and enlisted the community at large to support their vision.

The Gamble Founders developed a convincing proposal to lease the estate from the city, and when it

came before the city council for a vote, their community supporters filled the council chambers, bearing flowers to remind everyone that this was a garden. On May 13, 1985, the Palo Alto City Council voted to accept the proposal. The city leased the estate to the Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden Center, a non-profit organization whose stated goal was “to restore and maintain the garden and buildings for use as a horticultural center for people of all ages and to provide the opportunity to learn the skills of horticulture through education, observation and participation within the tranquil setting of an urban garden.”

Today Gamble Garden is a busy non-profit center with a garden that is visited annually by thousands of people, but that didn’t happen easily or quickly.

Join us to learn what it took to turn a private home and garden into a thriving center for all to use and enjoy.

**2025 PALO ALTO
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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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, 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.

The Red Streets

By Bo Crane (1950-2024), Former PAHA Board Member

Off East Charleston Road, several streets were named in the 1950s for prominent quasi-socialists and less publicly known communists. These streets were named by James Henry San Jule, Vice President of marketing for Burke and Wyatt, contract builders, whose houses are on streets throughout neighborhoods flanking East Charleston Road.

Carlson Court and Circle were mapped in 1951 as part of the Fairmeadow subdivision. The streets were named by San Jule after Marine Brigadier General Evans Fordyce Carlson. Prior to WWII, Carlson visited Chinese Communist troop headquarters, where he met Mao Zedong and other leaders, learning the tactics of the Communist guerrillas fighting Japanese troops. Carlson later adopted similar tactics in the Pacific during WWII. One general said of him: "He may be red but he's not yellow."

Carlson Circle is adjacent to Roosevelt and Starr King Circles. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt introduced many socialist federal programs, and the Reverend Thomas Starr King espoused social justice. The choice of these names indicates San Jule's socialist inclinations. As of 1940, San Jule was living in San Francisco, employed as a newspaperman, likely with the newspaper of the Longshoremen's Union, led by union activist and communist Harry Bridges.

The Meadows subdivision, south of East Meadow, was mapped in 1953. San Jule also named a street "Oliver" for Oliver Law, a Black American communist and labor organizer who died fighting in Spain. Because "Oliver" sounded too much like "Olive," San Jule had to change the name, selecting Duncan Place for Duncan Hallas, a British member of the Trotskyist movement

and a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Great Britain. Dixon Place was named for Richard Dixon, an Australian trade unionist and president of the Australia Communist Party from 1948 to 1977. Lewis Mumford, the namesake of Mumford Place, was an historian interested in the social context of urban life.

While working in San Francisco, San Jule met Steve Nelson, the namesake of Nelson Drive and Court in the Greenmeadow subdivision, mapped in 1954. Nelson, born Stjepan Mesaros in Croatia in 1903, immigrated to the US at age 16, where he became a union organizer and joined the Communist Party. In 1931, he and his wife, a typist with the Party, were sent to Moscow for Nelson to study Party doctrine. Stationed in San Francisco as head of the local chapter, he was tasked with surreptitiously gathering information on the Manhattan Project from young Communist scientists at Berkeley's Radiation Laboratory. In 1950, Nelson was arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the government. He was convicted and sentenced to prison but released on bail pending an appeal. In 1957, the Government dropped all charges against Nelson due to various technicalities. He left the Communist Party after the atrocities of the Stalin regime were revealed and died at age 90. Born ten years after Nelson, San Jule also died at age 90.

Another social visionary involved in these neighborhoods was Joseph Leopold Eichler, who bought hundreds of lots on which to build his houses, available to buyers without regard to religion or race. These lots were scattered among already named streets, many of which were discreetly "red."



Story Hour at the Children's Library, 1941

TELL US A STORY!

It is PAHA's mission to collect, preserve, and present Palo Alto's history, and we'd love to hear from you!

We are always interested in hearing your stories and recollections of Palo Alto and the surrounding communities. Please consider writing your story down and submitting it for publication consideration in a future Tall Tree newsletter!

Submit your story to pahatalltree@gmail.com

Kirk's Steakburgers

By Jon Kinyon, PAHA Board Member



Kirk's original location on El Camino Real, mid-1960s

Before Bill Sincere found his niche in the business world, he was a jack-of-all-trades. He worked in the movie industry, the jewelry business, several department stores, and even delivered coal. Then, he discovered burgers.

Sincere, who owned and operated the Peninsula restaurant chain of Kirk's Steakburgers for decades, said the whole thing had all been an accident.

In the early summer of 1948, when he was 42, Bill came to California from Cleveland, Ohio, to visit his mother. He decided to stay and lined up employment with the Emporium department store in San Francisco. Since his job didn't start until August, Sincere decided to open a hamburger stand to occupy his idle summer days.

He found a butcher at JJ&F market who would grind steak for him and set up shop as close as possible to L'Omelette because many Stanford students congregated there on Friday and Saturday nights. He aimed to win them over, as well as families in the nearby neighborhoods.

This strategy proved so profitable that Sincere never showed up for his first day of work at the Emporium.

Bill named Kirk's after his first wife, Helen Kirkendale, and it operated for 20 years near the corner of Arastradero Road and El Camino Real. At that time, drive-ins and car hops were extremely popular, and most people ate in their cars. However, in case a customer wanted to eat outside their car, Kirk's had four small stand-up tables available.

Back in 1948, customers could buy a Coca-Cola for 8 cents and a Kirk's charcoal-broiled steakburger for 25 cents. The spot became so popular that the line for steakburgers often stretched around the building.

When rival 19-cent burger stands later sprang up on El Camino, Sincere faced a problem. He could not compete with the lower price while still providing the more expensive charcoal-broiled steakburger, so he decided to increase his price from 35 cents to 39 cents.

The popularity of Kirk's Steakburgers only kept increasing, becoming the favorite of Stanford students, high school students, and employees of early electronics companies such as NM Electronics (Intel), Fairchild, Hewlett-Packard, Varian Associates, Watkins and Johnson, among others.

Sincere quickly mastered his niche in the Peninsula hamburger business. In 1953, he opened a second restaurant on El Camino in Santa Clara, which later moved to Bascom Avenue in San Jose. The original Kirk's Steakburgers lost its lease in 1968 and moved to 351 California Ave. Further expansion occurred in 1978 when a third Kirk's opened on Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road in San Jose.

Kirk's has undergone ownership changes at least three times. Recently, its Palo Alto location has relocated from Town & Country Village to Midtown, taking over the space most recently occupied by Mike's Diner Bar. The building itself used to house the Peninsula Hardware store. The current owners are restaurateurs Giuseppe and Mauricio Carrubba, whose father runs Caffe Riace on Sheridan Avenue. The new Kirk's boasts a full bar, making it an even better spot to savor their signature charbroiled burgers.



Palo Alto Stanford Heritage

Our citizens' group that supports the value of our buildings' and neighborhoods' heritage

NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

Do you have an interest in our local history?

Do you have time available?

Skills that could help us reach out and connect, educate, research, communicate?

Qualifications may include other historical work, active communication or teaching experience, or just the ability to make yourself heard... Interested?

Send us an email -
president@pasterheritage.org



Darla Secor and her son Ryden at Rinconada Library

Love Your Libraries: Rinconada Library's 10 Year Anniversary Celebration

These are some photos of PAHA Historian Darla Secor's photo exhibit at Rinconada Library. Featuring images from the PAHA archives, the exhibit covers the history of the library, originally named the Main Library when it opened in 1958. After a remodel, it was renamed the Rinconada Library in 2015. PAHA Board Member Brian George helped with printing the images and Darla's son Ryden helped with the installation. The photos will be on display during the month of February.



Welcome New Our Member!

Larry Horton

Upcoming Program Dates

• May 4 • June 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 Program

If you missed the Feb. 2nd program, *Peter Coutts, His Farm in Mayfield and His Legacy*, you can find it and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link: <https://vimeo.com/1054393369>

Got Jaunts?

Our "Jaunts" column needs you! If you're passionate about the Bay Area's trails, history, and hidden spots, you could be a valued contributor to the Tall Tree Newsletter.

- ❖ Share your love for local adventures 6 times a year.
- ❖ Curate 2-4 must-visit places each edition.

Contact: jon.kinyon@gmail.com

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