

# Millbrae Life & Times

M I L L B R A E   H I S T O R I C A L   S O C I E T Y   N E W S L E T T E R

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HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT:

## MILLBRAE'S 16 MILE HOUSE

BY TOM DAWDY



Last fall I had the pleasure of joining **Vanessa Garcia**, the owner of the **7 Mile House** in Brisbane, for a presentation at the Millbrae Library. Vanessa lectured about the history of the 7 Mile House and talked about her book **See you at the 7**, and I put together a program about the history of the **16 Mile House**. While digging through old stories and historical tidbits about the "16", I came across many facts and even a few myths. One of the surprises that I learned is that the 16 Mile House was never a stage coach stop. Although the **14 Mile House** in San Bruno and the **17 Mile House** down the road in Millbrae were both stage coach stops, I found no evidence that the stage stopped at the 16 Mile House. Looking back in the historical archives, there are records of a stage coach stop at an adobe on the **Sanchez Ranch** in the 1850's. This stop was just a half block from where **Juan Sanchez** later built the 16 Mile House in 1872. There are some old records calling the old adobe the 16 Mile House, but from what I could find, the stage coach never had a scheduled stop at the actual 16 Mile House location. I also found old County Maps that show the marshy fringes of the Bay extending almost to the back door of the 16 Mile House. Old historical records note that fisherman would set out at high tide and gather oysters to sell at the 16 Mile House and the **Millbrae Hotel** down the road.

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

Well, here we are again - a new year and a new beginning for the Millbrae Historical Society. At last, the Millbrae Museum has tectonically entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We now have wi-fi access in the museum via an AT&T hub. Next time you visit the museum, you can bring your laptop, phone, or tablet and have access to the outside world. The wi-fi password is posted in the museum. You can also print

from all your devices to the HP printer in the museum office.

The Millbrae Historical Society's 48<sup>th</sup> **Annual Meeting and Officer Installation** will be held on **Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup>** in the Temporary Millbrae Community Center, commencing at 1:30 pm. Come on down and hear guest speaker **Mitch Postel** from the San Mateo County Historical Association present on the



250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the discovery of San Francisco Bay by the **Portola Expedition**. Members and non-members are invited to attend and enjoy light refreshments, mingle with friends, and learn some history.

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**P R E S I D E N T ' S R E P O R T**  
( C O N T I N U E D F R O M P A G E 1 )

I send warm greetings of “Kung Hei Fat Choi” to all MHS members. On **Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>**, the annual **Lunar New Year Festival** will be held from 10 am to 4 pm in the upper Civic Center parking lot next to the Museum and Carriage House. The parking lot will be closed, and the event stage will be set up in front of the Carriage House. Come on down and enjoy the performers and music!

The **Millbrae Theatre** sign has been shining brightly and welcoming visitors to Millbrae since 1949. The Millbrae Theatre sign is a beautiful example of art deco neon that is a significant piece of Millbrae history. It has become the “symbol and icon” of Millbrae, a welcoming beacon to all who come to Millbrae. The former Millbrae Theatre which once graced the site showed its first film on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1949 – *It Happens Every Spring*, starring **Ray Milland** and **Jean Peters** (wife of **Howard Hughes** from 1957 to 1971). The theatre and parking lot were sold in 1992. There were big plans for the area that never came to pass, and instead Millbrae got something that looks like it belongs in a gulag. Now, fast-forward to the present. The property is once again up for sale. I think that we need to do all we can to save the Millbrae Theatre sign!

The current owner of the property is responsible for the upkeep of the sign and to keep all the letters in working order. When the property is eventually sold, the future of the sign is in doubt. At right is the Millbrae Theatre sign as it looked on February 13<sup>th</sup>. What a disgrace and insult to the City of Millbrae! The two unlit letters have been out for months.

The City of Millbrae is in the process of conducting design review of two huge projects that will change the face of Millbrae forever. Millbrae’s small-town feeling will be gone forever once these large developments are constructed. The **Gateway at Millbrae Station** adjacent to the BART station and the **Millbrae Serra Station** along El Camino Real will be the biggest developments in Millbrae since the arrival of BART. These projects should prove to be great economic engines for Millbrae and the developers. The placement of the Millbrae Theatre property up for sale is a great opportunity for one of these developers to consider incorporating the Millbrae Theatre sign into their project design. Another option would be for the City of Millbrae to incorporate the Millbrae Theatre sign into the large electronic billboard located along Highway 101 at the Millbrae Avenue exit. We should

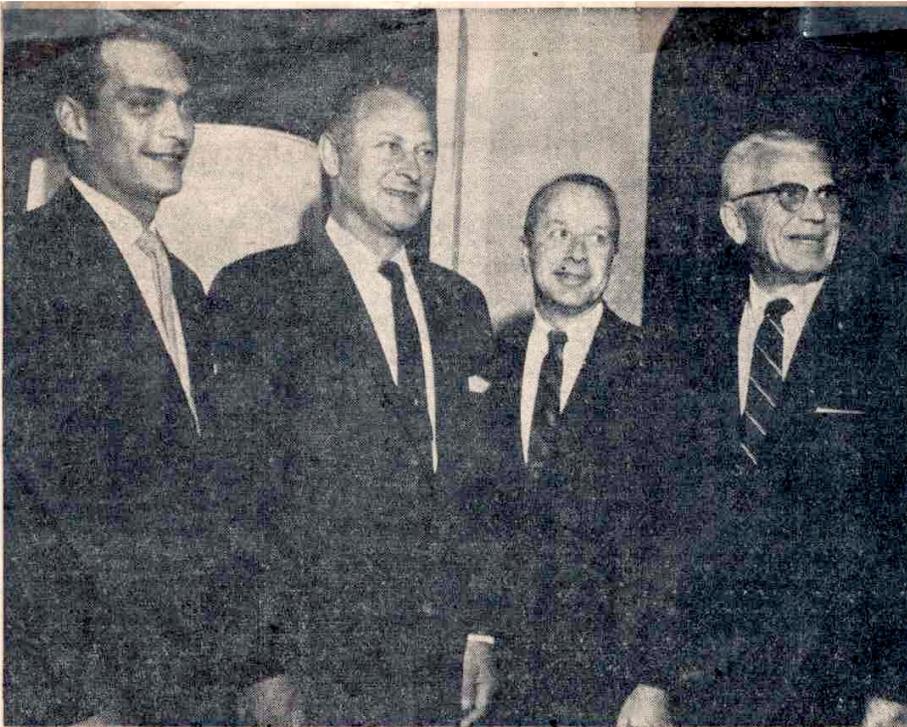
be emulating other local examples of the preservation of iconic historical signage. The Town of Orinda has preserved their beautiful art deco **Orinda Theatre** and its neon marquee dating from 1941. The 1929 **Fox Theatre** in Redwood City still has its original marquee. The story goes on and on where so many neighboring communities have been able to save their historical treasures. Millbrae no longer has a theatre, but we still have the theatre sign. If we as residents of Millbrae do nothing, I fear that the Millbrae Theatre sign will be lost to history. As the MHS motto states – “**Our Past is our Key to the Future**”. Let’s work together to ensure that the historic Millbrae Theatre sign is preserved as part of our shared future!!

Best wishes,

**John Muniz**  
Millbrae Historical Society President  
2009—present



VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE  
PAUL LARSON



CHAMBER CHIEFTAINS — Installed as leaders of Millbrae's Chamber of Commerce last night at Green Hills Country Club were

Treasurer Ken Fowler, President Clarence Larson, Vice President Grant White, and Secretary-Manager Walter Hart. (Times Photo)



Greetings Trustees, members and friends,

The following news clipping is from 1959, and I am confident it was published in the *Millbrae Sun*. It shows Millbrae Lion **Ken Fowler** and my dad, Lion **Clarence Larson**, when he was both Millbrae Lions Club President and also Millbrae Chamber of Commerce President. Thanks to Lion Ken Fowler for keeping this bit of history.

From MHS 1st VP Paul Larson

IN MEMORY OF JUNE LARSON LYERLA

MHS Member **Faye Dawdy** received the following news from one of **June Lyerla's** daughters:

**Anelma June Larson Lyerla** passed away just shy of her 91st birthday on May 16, 2018.

June lived at 196 Poplar Avenue (one of the oldest houses built in Millbrae) and was one of Millbrae's very first residents. She was born on June 4, 1927 to **Albert** and **Ethel Larson**.

June married **Jerry Lyerla** on July 13, 1945 and together they raised their seven children: **Sandra, Jerrilyn, Toni, Michael, Debbie, Gary** and **Lesley**.

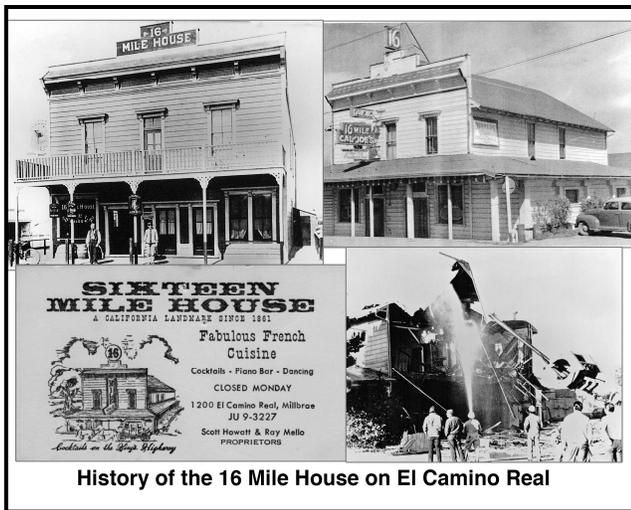
June and Jerry retired in Visalia to be closer to some of their children, however, most of Millbrae's earliest settlers will remember June. She was a very proud Life Member of the Millbrae Historical Society and was a wonderful person to go to for the most reliable facts regarding Millbrae's history. She always considered Millbrae her home.



## MILLBRAE'S 16 MILE HOUSE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

In 1872, **Juan Sanchez**, grandson of the original **Rancho Buri Buri** land grant owner **Jose Antonio Sanchez**, built the 16 Mile House for his widowed mother in her later years. The building was built with prime redwood boards nailed together with square nails to create a Victorian-style false front structure.

Throughout its history, the 16 Mile House was a grocery store, residence, saloon, and restaurant, and at times it was rumored that the upstairs rooms were occupied by "ladies of the evening". The property changed hands many times over the years, but always remained a community social meeting place.



History of the 16 Mile House on El Camino Real

As the years went by, the **San Francisco Municipal Railway** ran its #40 street cars down the Peninsula to San Mateo. They advertised "take your family on a picnic in the country down to the 16 Mile House". On Sundays, the street cars would pull off onto a spur track full of families spending the day on the green fields in the sunshine enjoying their fried chicken, but by the late afternoon most of the men would end up inside the 16 drinking cold beer and enjoying man talk.

In the 1940's, there were many establishments on the Peninsula that offered gambling to their customers, and Millbrae had plenty of them. In 1947, gambling was still legal, and Millbrae had seven establishments that had gambling licenses. These bars paid the federal government \$100 per machine per year for the permit. When Millbrae incorporated in 1948 and became a self-governing city, gambling was outlawed. On May 28, 1948, **San Mateo County Sheriffs** were in the North County conducting gambling raids on saloons. When returning home, they decided to swing by the 16 Mile House and found slot machines operating. The owner and bartender were both arrested, fined, and released on bail, and of course had their slot machines confiscated. The most unusual part of this

raid was that the Millbrae Police knew nothing of it.

In 1970, **Phillip Gaynor** of San Francisco bought the building and announced plans to tear it down and replace it with a modern structure. The residents of Millbrae were up in arms and worked very hard to try and save the 16. The **Millbrae Beautification Commission** joined forces with the newly-formed "**Citizens Committee to Save the 16 Mile House**" to raise funds to move the 16 Mile House to a new location. They determined that the building had good bones and could be moved across town. Mr. Gaynor initially announced he would demolish the building in April of 1970, but later agreed to postpone the demolition and donate the building if enough money was raised to move it. The City of Millbrae was very sympathetic to saving the structure, but could not offer any financial help. In April 1970, the City held a "straw poll" to determine the feasibility of the relocation and offered up a site for the building just off Palm Avenue at the base of present-day Central Park. Millbrae resident and writer **Audrey Harris** served as publicity coordinator for the committees. Audrey spent countless hours doing research and writing stories on the history of the 16.

The campaign to save the 16 Mile House was in full swing with many events during mid-1970. There were auctions and parties downtown at **Pardini's Grotto**, a fundraiser dinner and fashion show at the 16 Mile House, a 49er luncheon at the **SP Depot**, along with an historical photo contest, art contest, and of course bumper stickers and buttons. The cost of moving the building was bid at \$6,000 by Anderson Moving Co. of Mountain View, \$1,000 to move utilities, and \$2,000 for the new foundation. Fundraising fell short, however, with a little over \$6,000 raised. In the final days, several busloads of history buffs from the area came to see the only Victorian false front structure left standing in the county. In January 1971, Millbrae's best link to the past was demolished in about three hours.

During this time, the **Millbrae Historical Society** was chartered on March 13, 1970 with 150 members. **John Brucato** was our first President, assisted by First Vice-President **Betty Carlson**, Second Vice-President **Edwin Haager**, Secretary **Sally Scholz**, Treasurer **Kay Tracy**, and Historian **Audrey Harris**. **Scott Howatt** and **Raymond Mellow** reopened the new 16 Mile House at 448 Broadway in the former location of **Cable Car Burgers**. They were able to decorate the new restaurant with much of the original decor. After the 16 went down, Mr. Gaynor did build his new structure, and **Color Fair Home Improvement** opened. It was later replaced by **Bjorner Electric** and then **BlockBuster Video**. Following a long vacancy, current tenant **O'Reilly Auto Parts** opened. Whenever I go to O'Reilly, I always think of the 16 Mile House and all the effort the community expended to try and save it.

**CURATOR'S REPORT**  
DOROTHY SEMKE



As 2018 came to a close, we have to reflect on what a good year it was for all of us. It ended with a wonderful **Christmas Party** at the Museum in early December. Guests were greeted by a 5-foot-tall photo cut-out of **D.O. Mills** now on display in the Living Room, courtesy of **Tom Dawdy**. They also had the pleasure of singing Christmas carols to **Marilyn Cooney's** playing on our beautiful square grand piano. Thank you Marilyn for once again enriching our party! The food, catered by **Leonardo's Deli**, was enjoyed by all as were the delicious desserts brought

in by members and friends. Special thanks go to those members who came out to decorate the Museum for the Holidays. It looked extra nice this year!

On display now in the Community Room is a replica of the Titanic, donated to the Museum by President **John Muniz**. It is a wonderful added attraction to the room! In the Living Room, you will notice the addition of a homemade Grandfather Clock lovingly donated by the grandson of the late **Dario Pieraccini**. We understand that he made 16 clocks in all! We also want to thank **Misa**

**Sakaguchi and Sam Hocke** for the two Millbrae Bowl Shirts they used during their league days. They will soon be placed on display.

Welcome to new members: **Marco Beckwith, Daniel Goldvekt, Sharon Himebrook, Bob Kern, and Dale & Joy Saunders.**

**Dorothy Semke**  
Millbrae Museum Curator

**MHS 2019-20 OFFICER / TRUSTEE INSTALLATION**

Please join us at this year's MHS Officer/Trustee Installation on **Sunday, March 10 at 1:30 pm** in the **Temporary Millbrae Community Center** (next to the Library), featuring a presentation by **Mitch Postel**, President of the San Mateo County Historical Association, about the 250th Anniversary of the Discovery of San Francisco Bay by the Gaspar De Portola Expedition. Mr. Postel will give a talk on the topic, followed by questions and answers. Light refreshments will be served. Please invite your family and friends!

The MHS Nominating Committee has placed the following names into nomination to serve as MHS Officers and Trustees for the year 2019-20:

President: John Muniz  
1st Vice-President: Paul Larson  
2nd Vice-President: Joe Teresi  
Secretary: Gaetane Andrews  
Treasurer: Vern Bruce  
Parliamentarian: Mary Vella Treseler

Trustees for 2019-2022 term:

Gloria Borruso  
Paul Larson  
David Massolo  
Joe Teresi

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Post Office Box 511  
Millbrae, CA 94030

Phone: 650-692-5786

**MHS OFFICERS – 2019-20**

**John Muniz, President**

**Paul Larson, 1st Vice-President**

**Joe Teresi, 2nd Vice-President**

**Gaetane Andrews, Secretary**

**Vern Bruce, Treasurer**

**Mary Vella Treseler, Parliamentarian**

**Dorothy Semke, Curator**

**Tom Dawdy, Historian & Carriage House Curator**

**Ray Gier, Museum Facilitator**

**Joe Teresi, Newsletter Editor**

**C A L E N D A R   O F   E V E N T S**

**Saturday, March 2: City of Millbrae Lunar New Year Celebration and Parade**

– Cultural Arts & Crafts activities, Performing Arts from 10 am to 4 pm in the Upper Civic Center parking lot (next to Museum and Carriage House)

– Lucky Golden Boar Parade starts at 11:30 am in the Living Spaces parking lot and proceeds down Broadway, ending at Civic Center Plaza

**Sunday, March 10: Millbrae Historical Society Installation of 2019-20 Officers and Board of Trustees, 1:30 pm, Millbrae Temporary Community Center, 623 Magnolia Avenue (next to Library).**

- featuring a presentation on the 250th Anniversary of the Portola Expedition/Discovery of San Francisco Bay by **Mitch Postel**, President of the San Mateo County Historical Association. Light refreshments will be served.

**Fourth Wednesdays of the Month:** Millbrae Historical Society Board Meetings, 7:00 pm, Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue. MHS members and guests are welcome to attend!

**Millbrae Historical Society Museum Operating Hours**

**Millbrae Museum:** Saturdays, 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm

**Millbrae Train Museum:** Saturdays, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm