

# 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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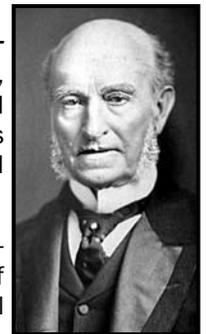
HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT:  
**DARIUS OGDEN MILLS - "MR. MILLBRAE"**  
 BY TOM DAWDY



It is fitting that **D.O. Mills** is known as "Mr. Millbrae". After all, he named his Estate "Millbrae" - "Mill" for his name Mills, and "brae" which is the Scottish word for rolling hills. In 1848 at the age of 23, Mills sailed from New York to California to join the gold rush in search of fortune. Soon after, he abandoned the effort and decided to "mine the miners" by setting up a shop selling picks and shovels. Mills turned his \$5,000 investment into \$40,000 in only one year. In 1850, after shipping a huge safe to Sacramento, Mills founded his own bank - *The Gold Bank of D.O. Mills & Co.* At this time he also invested and was part owner of the *Virginia and Truckee Railroad*.

In 1864, Mills joined with other investors to found *The Bank of California*. The bank flourished in the 1860's and into the early 1870's, but suddenly collapsed due to irregularities. Mills used his personal fortune to revive the bank, and in less than three years the bank was strong once again. At this time, Mills was the wealthiest resident in all of California.

During this time, **Jose de la Cruz** (son of **Jose Antonio Sanchez**) defaulted on his inherited property and the County Sheriff auctioned off the property that went from present-day Skyline Blvd to El Camino Real to **James Wilson** for \$1,000. In 1860, Wilson sold the property to



(continued on Page 4)

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**  
**JOHN MUNIZ**

Well, if you attended the Millbrae Historical Society's annual **4th of July Picnic**, I hope you enjoyed the new catering format. I did receive a lot of positive comments concerning the new menu. Gary at **Leonardo's Deli Café** always provides a great menu at reasonable prices. Thank you Gary!

The annual Millbrae Historical Society **Docent Lunch** is once again

at the beautiful Green Hills Country Club in Millbrae. We host an annual docent lunch for our volunteers who work at the Millbrae Museum and the Train Museum on Saturdays. The Docent Lunch will be held on **Sunday, November 10th** at 12:00 noon. Docents, please let our **Curator Dorothy Semke** know whether you will be attending.

In case you have noticed more activ-



ity around the Train Museum lately, it is because Caltrain has been doing some upkeep on the old station, built in 1907. Caltrain replaced the roof, painted the interior and exterior, and polished the floors.

(continued on Page 2)

**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'm excited because the Train Museum will be getting Wi-Fi service soon. I also hear that there will be a "Grand Re-Opening" of the Train Museum on **Saturday, October 26**. **Vern Bruce** has more information and some exciting news on the Train Museum in this edition of the Newsletter.

Thank you to our **Second Vice-President Joe Teresi** for heading up this years Millbrae Art And Wine Festival booth. The two experts on Millbrae history – Joe and **Tom Dawdy** – promoted the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first European sighting of San Francisco Bay by the **Portolá Expedition**.

In case you are wondering what the City of Millbrae is planning to do with the landscaping surrounding the Museum (not the front) and Carriage House – well so far, nothing. It is supposed to be replanted with eco-friendly landscaping, but the three bids submitted to the City by landscaping contractors exceeded the project budget. Staff recommended to hold off on award-

ing a contract and will revise the scope of the work. So, we will just have to wait and see what happens.

Next year, in 2020, Millbrae has two big anniversaries coming up: the fiftieth anniversary of the **Millbrae Art and Wine Festival** and the **Millbrae Historical Society**. We will have to plan on a big celebration for the MHS. I think that early August will be a good time. I will keep you posted in the coming months.

A special "Thank you" to MHS member **Janet Fogarty** for her "pro-bono" legal advice on contractual matters.

Thank you all for your service and continued support of the Millbrae Historical Society!

"The past is our key to the future" - Remember, we have three museums within the Millbrae City Limits.

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

**M I L L B R A E M A N , W O M A N & S T U D E N T**  
**O F T H E Y E A R D I N N E R**



**2019 Man of the Year**  
**Paul Larson**



**2019 Woman of the Year**  
**Karen Bettucchi**



**2019 Student of the Year**  
**Desiree Lin**

**Friday, October 18 6:00 to 9:30 pm**

The Millbrae Mayor's Civic Coordinating Council and the Millbrae Chamber of Commerce are proud to announce the **2019 Millbrae Man, Woman, and Student of the Year** honorees. The 47<sup>th</sup> annual awards dinner honoring extraordinary community volunteers will be held on **Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>** at the Green Hills Country Club. Once again this year we will be honoring three outstanding Millbrae residents for their exemplary community volunteerism. Tickets are \$55 per person. RSVPs are requested by **Friday, October 11<sup>th</sup>**. To request an invitation, please contact Dan Quigg at (650) 245-2185 or at [cqanddq@gmail.com](mailto:cqanddq@gmail.com).

## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

Greetings MHS Trustees, members and friends!

I was planning on writing about an interesting historical tidbit for this issue, but as of now I will write about the “elephant in the room”, which is good news. On Wednesday, August 14th, I discovered that I had been named **Millbrae Man of the Year!** Here's how events of that day transpired: In the morning I was occupied at the **Chapel of the Highlands** with a funeral, followed by funeral arrangements in the afternoon. I had planned to attend the **Millbrae Lions Club** Board Meeting at the Chetcuti Room that evening, but because of events at the Chapel I arrived late. As the meeting progressed, **Lion Past President John Muniz** stepped up and quietly congratulated me, and I whispered...“for what?”. He said “You don't know?” As a member of the **Millbrae Man, Woman & Student of the Year Committee**, he informed me of the good news and asked me to talk to **Mary Vella Treseler**. I was very surprised and grateful. After John Muniz' congratulations, I looked at my cell phone and discovered that Mary had been trying to call me all afternoon. I

stepped away from the meeting to return her call outside the Chetcuti Room. She answered right away and gave me the good news. Mary indicated that there were four nominees, and that the judges were neutral parties from out of the area who do not know the nominees. Mary told me to call **Cathy Quigg**, who would give me further instructions. I returned to the meeting and whispered to both John Muniz and **Randy Sahae**, who was seated beside him, about the good news from Mary (Randy had written up the nomination on behalf of the Lions Club). Randy clarified to me “you made it?” and I nodded “Yes”, and her reaction was smiles with a hug! I returned to my seat and listened to the rest of the agenda items. Before the conclusion of the meeting, Lion Randy reported the good news to the group of about 30 Lions. All were pleased and vigorously shook my hand after the meeting. Every day since, I've been getting continual congratulations and happy returns.

I appreciate the honor of being selected as Millbrae Man of the Year for 2019. It was an honor just to be nominated...not only by the Millbrae Lions Club, but also by the **Millbrae Historical Society** and the **Italian**



**Catholic Federation** Branch 403 at Saint Dunstan's. The **2019 Man, Woman & Student of the Year Dinner** will take place at Green Hills Country Club on Friday, **October 18th**. My congratulations to the 2019 **Woman of the Year Karen Bettucchi**, **Student of the Year Desiree Lin**, and to all the previous years' honorees.

Thank you to the members of the Man, Woman & Student of the Year Committee and to all who nominated me for your congratulations and well wishes, and to all who have the confidence to place me in this position of honor. I will do my best to represent Millbrae and our community.

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

## PORTOLA EXPEDITION 250TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Check out the following events commemorating the 250th Anniversary of the Portola Expedition's sighting of SF Bay:

**Heritage Day - October 26th** at the **Sanchez Adobe** in Pacifica. This event will celebrate the completion of the new Interpretive Center and commemorate the first contact the Ohlones had with the Spanish explorers of the Portola' Expedition and include a Speaker Forum on Ohlone-Portola sponsored by the [San Mateo County Historical Association](#).

**Ohlone-Portola' Heritage Day - November 2nd** (8 am—3 pm) at the **Pacifica Community Center**. Commemorating 10,000 years of Ohlone settlement in San Mateo County and the 250th Anniversary of the Portola' Expedition's sighting of San Francisco Bay. Join others for an anniversary hike, fun, exhibits. View a historical display and see a film entitled **Fascinating Facts Along the Path of Portola**. Sponsored by the [City of Pacifica](#) and the [Pacifica Historical Society](#).

**Hike to Bay Discovery Site - November 4** (10 am - 2 pm). Join [San Mateo County Historical Association](#) President **Mitch Postel** for a guided hike to the Bay Discovery Site atop Sweeney Ridge. Meet at the trailhead at the top of Sneath Lane in San Bruno at 10 am. Bring a reusable water bottle, sunscreen, a hat, and sturdy shoes.

## DARIUS OGDEN MILLS - "MR. MILLBRAE" (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

D.O. Mills for \$10,000. This parcel was 1,100 acres and became a major section of Mills' future estate. Mills then acquired many acres of marshland east of El Camino Real. He partnered with San Bruno resident **Alfred Green** to build a dairy which they named **Millbrae Dairy**. Green ran the Dairy and built his house across Millbrae Avenue at **1 Lewis Avenue**. This house still stands and is currently the oldest house in Millbrae.

Mills and his wife **Jane** built a small house at the base of the hills before constructing their three-story, 42-room mansion, which also had 2 elevators. This mansion was the envy of all. Mills nicknamed the mansion "**Happy House**". The family landscaped their estate with trees and flowers collected from throughout the world. Mills was a very keen businessman. After his move to Millbrae, he continued his financial career as President of the Bank of California. He was also Regent and Treasurer of the **University of California** until 1880. He moved back to New York in the 1890's when he retired, but always spent the winter in his Millbrae home. In 1888, Mills' wife Jane died after a long illness. Mills was a widower for 22 years and died of a heart attack in his Millbrae home on Jan. 3, 1910. The gross value of Mills' fortune at his death was appraised at \$36,227,391. The estate was divided equally between his son **Ogden** and his daughter **Elizabeth**. After all the deductions, Ogden and Elizabeth were paid \$17,509,901 each.

Following the death of D.O. Mills, the family continued for several years to visit Millbrae in the spring time. The Dairy continued to operate, and the mansion was staffed to maintain the home and beautiful grounds. In 1937, Millbrae Dairy was consolidated with the **Borden Milk Company** and eventually ceased operations and was torn down.

By the end of the 1930's, the Millbrae mansion was outliving its usefulness as a vacation home for the Mills family. During World War II, the family allowed the mansion to be used to house merchant seamen on leave. By 1947, only three of the original five Mills grandchildren were alive. Two granddaughters lived in Europe, and only one lived in the States (in New York). None of them

wanted the aging mansion. In January 1950, part of the Mills Estate property was obtained by the County, and Peninsula Hospital was built. A large portion of the property was then sold to a Los Angeles development syndicate headed by **Paul W. Trousdale** from California and **Clint W. Murchison** from Dallas, Texas. They paid \$3,000,000 for the 1,100 acres, which included the mansion, gardens, and lakes.

At this time the drama really started with the Mills Estate. The City of Burlingame and the newly-incorporated City of Millbrae were at odds with each other. Millbrae wanted Mills Estate to be part of their town and Burlingame wanted to annex the property. This fight went on for several more years, but there was one thing both cities and their residents agreed on - "let's save the man-

sion and the gardens and lakes". Residents of Millbrae and Burlingame fought hard with the **Trousdale Construction Company**, but the company was growing very impatient and wanted to get started with the project. Things got out-of-hand when the developer threw a tantrum and stormed out of Burlingame City Hall in June of 1954. Right after this happened (June 23, 1954), the mansion burned down. The flames were

over 150 feet high, and the house was burned to the ground in only two hours. The official investigation concluded that it was a workman's chainsaw that accidentally caused the fire, but most people at the time felt that because of the rapid spread of the fire and the timing of the incident with Trousdale, it was probably not accidental.

Soon after the fire, the bulldozers came right away and stripped the hills bare. Everything from the Mills Estate just became a memory. The developer named a short street "Garden Lane" where the world-famous gardens were and built some apartment buildings on it.

I found this quote from the late **Frank Stranger** (a local historian): "The property that was finally divided was not the Mills Estate as we knew it, for it had ceased to exist. It vanished without a trace, leaving only a leveled plain of bare clay. There can be no better example of what not to do where historic values are concerned"



Mills Family 1890



Mills Mansion early 1950's



Millbrae Dairy



June 23, 1954

**CURATOR'S REPORT**  
DOROTHY SEMKE

It was wonderful seeing all the members with friends and family who attended our **4th of July Picnic Celebration!** The change in menu was delicious. Our thanks to all who helped and to those who donated raffle prizes.

Welcome to new members **Michael & Janet Henretty** and new Lifetime Members **Dean & Helen Woo.**

**Doris Morse** has recently joined our hard-working, dedicated group of docents at the Millbrae Museum.

It is our policy to occasionally honor and thank our docents with a luncheon. We will be holding this year's event on **Sunday, November 10th** at Green Hills Golf and Country Club at 12 noon. If you are interested in hearing more about becoming a do-



cent and would like to join us, please call the Museum at (650) 692-5786 and leave a message. We will return your call. The luncheon is free for docents; guests are asked to pay \$35.

**Dorothy Semke**  
Millbrae Museum Curator

**TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS**  
ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR  
VERN BRUCE, REPORTER

Hello everyone!

We have a Grand Re-Opening date of **Saturday, October 26** for our restored Train Museum!! The only things left for the restoration are the repainting of the office and putting back the displays, photos, and artifacts. We will have a completely new working telegraph display, along with many other new Museum interpretations. Again we thank **Seth Worden** of Transit America

(subcontractor to Caltrain) for getting all of the restoration efforts done in an efficient manner, as well as our volunteers for setting up the new displays, moving everything back and forth, etc.

We thank the following volunteers for their efforts as docents and volunteers that have given their time on the above and other numerous projects: **Joseph Bonavia, Charlie Hegarty, Richard Kennedy, Jay King, Jorge**



**Quesada, Peter Sheerin, and Vern Bruce.**

We hope to see you all in **Saturday, October 26** at 12:00 noon for the Grand Re-Opening!!

**Vernon Bruce**  
Reporter

Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



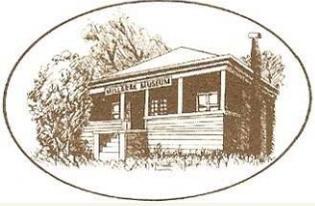
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HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

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**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**

**Friday, October 18: 47th Annual Millbrae Man, Woman & Student of the Year Dinner**  
– Green Hills Country Club, 500 Ludeman Lane  
– RSVP required by October 11. Contact Dan Quigg at (650) 245-2185 for invitation.

**Saturday, October 26: Grand Re-Opening of Millbrae Train Museum, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm**  
– Join us in celebrating the renovation, repainting, and new exhibits  
– Official re-dedication ceremony at 12 noon

**October 26 - November 4: Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Portola Expedition's Sighting of San Francisco Bay**  
– See Newsletter Page 3 for events details.

**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**