

# 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:  
EXCERPTS FROM  
**DON PRICE'S MEMOIR**  
CONTRIBUTED BY TOM DAWDY



**1942-1949:** We lived these years in Millbrae. Our house was super because it was two-storied and had a vast garage, two balconies, an outdoor patio, and even a fishpond in the back yard where I kept goldfish — in other words, a fun house for us kids. It was located on the downtown corner of the primary Millbrae thoroughfare, Hillcrest Boulevard, only one block from a supermarket, and very convenient for friends to come by.

Millbrae was a small cohesive town of about 6,000 people with its own weekly newspaper and its own telephone service. It was bound on the north by Water Department property which was leased to farmers. During the war, a huge quarry was developed with a private highway leading down to the airport which was being expanded. The quarry pit is now developed as **Millbrae Meadows**. For a couple of years, there was a 24/7 rumble of dirt trucks and lots of dirt in the air. To the south was the **Mills Estate**, a vast park created by **Darius Ogden Mills**, even including three small lakes. The estate was used as a convalescent hospital during the war, but was unfenced and we could roam all over it. There were marshes and cow pastures to the east, down to the old **Bayshore Highway** and the fledgling airport, then called **Mills Field**. To the west was the land of the **Crystal Springs Water Company** which was totally off-limits. The rest of the open lands around Millbrae were available to us for hiking and exploring and that we did!

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT  
**JOHN MUNIZ**

Hello Friends and neighbors, I hope you are all safe, healthy, and prosperous! As you might guess, the three Millbrae Museums, the Millbrae Museum, the Carriage House, and the Millbrae Train Museum have been shuttered since March 16th, 2020. I am an optimist that we will be able to open by at least this summer if progress on the pandemic continues to improve. Although our

beautiful museums have been closed, our docents continue to make improvements during the shutdown - especially at the Train Museum, located on California Drive at Murchison Drive in the old Southern Pacific Depot. Train Museum Director **Vern Bruce** and his crew (**Charlie Hegarty** and **Peter Sheerin**) are doing an Incredible job of restoring the museum to an era when it was an actual working rail-



road depot. There will also be a lot of hands-on activities in the completely refurbished museum, I am impressed, and I know you will be. Long-time residents of Millbrae will recall when the museum was the

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**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

old Southern Pacific Depot, then located where the Millbrae Avenue overpass is today. The Train Museum team is planning a grand re-opening celebration along with a commemoration of the 51st anniversary of the founding of the Millbrae Historical Society in October of this year. I will keep you posted!



Millbrae Caltrain Station (Millbrae Avenue) prior to the 1992 move to its current location.

Millbrae will have a new street at the **Gateway Project at Millbrae Station** (adjacent to the BART Station). **Republic Urban Properties** has announced that “**South Station Road**” will be renamed “**Harriet Tubman Way**”. Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) was an American abolitionist and political activist. Looking forward to seeing the completion of the Gateway Project, It should be a big plus for the Millbrae economy and another go-to location in Millbrae in addition to our downtown.

The Millbrae Historical Society's **Annual Meeting and Installation of Officers** is scheduled for **Sunday, March 14th** at 1:00 pm via Zoom. The Zoom login information is provided on Page 5. We will have an interesting guest speaker, which will be a surprise. Our new Board will be sworn in along with myself as Society President. This will be my 12th year as President. Because of the pandemic, we were unable to hold our Annual Meeting, Fourth of July Picnic, and

Christmas Party last year. This year we will have to play it by ear and evaluate the status of State and County public health mandates.

Please continue to follow the Millbrae Historical Society on **Facebook** and on the web at [www.millbraehs.org](http://www.millbraehs.org). Now, you can pay your annual Society dues online and even sign up as a new member on our web site. Speaking of memberships, we are always looking for new members who appreciate history and would be interested in making our community a better place to live and work through history. We also need folks who would like to volunteer at our three museums. Remember, everyone has something to contribute somewhere! Membership in the Millbrae Historical Society is \$20.00 per year.

Thank you to all our members and volunteers who continue to donate their time and energy to the Millbrae Historical Society, where “the past is our key to the future”.

All the best to you and your families,

**John Muniz**

Millbrae Historical Society President  
2009—present



**Harriet Tubman**  
(1820-1913)

Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



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## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

2021 is here and hopefully will be more of an anti-climactic year than 2020! It is predictable that COVID-19 will fade into the background now that vaccines are being distributed around the world.

Speaking of predictions and time, traveling backwards 100 years, it's fun to look at those who forecasted a future world of 2021 as being far different than in the Jazz Age of 1921. After recently surviving World War I and the Spanish Flu of 1918, they were witnessing transformations in electricity, aviation, radio, etc. The following 1921 predictions are from an article you can read in full at [www.entrepreneur.com/article/362607](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/362607).

Let's see what they got right:

1. Mexico will be a greater power than any in Europe (they aren't quite there yet).
2. We will be the masters of temperature (controlling of heating and cooling in our homes).
3. Entertainment will happen at home (no need to go out to a hall to hear music).
4. Electricity will power our wheels (automobiles, electric bicycles and tricycles available to almost everyone).
5. Books will be read to us (the best books will be reproduced on plates for use in speaking machines).
6. Faster, Brighter, Better (moving sidewalks and elevators, traveling through tubes connecting cities, color photography and movies, tides used for power along with rays of the sun, utensils and dwellings manufactured of pulps and cements).
7. Oceans are no obstacle (you don't go over the Atlantic in a



boat anymore, but under it in a tunnel).

So, what do you think our world will be like in 100 more years in 2121? Let me know your thoughts if we ever get to see each other in person again!

Take care and stay safe,  
**MHS 1st VP Paul Larson**

## EXCERPT FROM DON PRICE'S MEMOIR

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Once while roaming in the **Mills Estate** with a friend, we stumbled upon rolls of coins in the dirt and an old trunk full of papers and things. The police found the guy from whom it was stolen, and he gave the coins to us as a reward. Once I caught goldfish in one of the lakes in the estate and brought them home to my fish pond. Shortly after that, all of the goldfish in the pond died. Such are life's lessons.

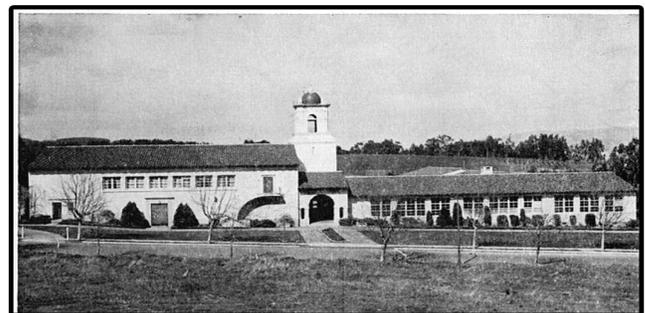
In 1943 we spent two weeks at **Camp Mather**, the San Francisco camp near **Hetch Hetchy**. We had a wonderful time up there. We spent a lot of time chasing turtles in the lake. We caught one and decided to take it home. In Millbrae we let it out by our fish pond, and the next morning it was gone forever. This was an indication that our parents and most people weren't thinking about conservation in those days.

The **Taylor Boulevard School** where we spent the 6th through 8th grades was modern with large open areas. It was a great contrast with the three-storied, confined **Lafayette School**. On our first day we were warmly welcomed by a good friend from the 1st grade in San Francisco.

My twin brother Doug and I had few organized activities. We belonged for a short time to a **Boy Scout** troop and once went to a two-week **YMCA**

camp in the Santa Cruz Mountains. On the third day, I got a severe ear infection and had to go home. On Saturday afternoons, the school showed movies for the kids with a feature and exciting cowboy and rocket ship serials. There was no movie house in Millbrae at that time, no swimming pool, and only a rudimentary branch of the County library. Sunday evenings, we participated in a youth group at the local **Community (Methodist) Church** where we didn't get much religion. These were the war years, but blackouts had ceased and we suffered little privation.

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**Taylor School late 1940's**

**EXCERPT FROM DON PRICE'S MEMOIR**  
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

At the end of the eighth grade, I scored at the top of my class of 60 in a comprehensive academic test, but I wasn't chosen among the group that gave speeches at graduation (thank goodness!).

The war ended in 1945, just when we started high school, and then commenced a welcome period of peace and prosperity. **Burlingame High School** drew its students from solidly middle class Millbrae and Burlingame. These were also predominantly white due to pervasive "racial covenants" whereby real estate agents wouldn't sell or rent houses to non-whites. Sadly these covenants lasted well into the 1950s.

I had a good time all through high school. It was satisfying to me to be a good student. I took the usual college prep courses in English, foreign language, history, science, and mathematics. When I got an "F" on my Chemistry final, it was like the roof fell on me. I earned a "B" in the course anyway. I didn't go on to physics for fear of getting another "F". Recently I've read some physics books to try to learn what I should have learned in high school. After two years of Latin, I started German, probably because it would be of use in a science career. I graduated fifth in my class of 250. None of the top four became famous. Neither did I.



### **Skinny-dipping @ Mills Estate Lake**

I was not good in sports and did not participate in any after-school sports. I joked with my friends that I let my twin do the sports for the two of us. I couldn't throw a ball well either which, I found out later, was because I couldn't lift my arms above or behind my back. My father, but not Doug, also had this disability. I guess that I had other things to do after school - one being useless piano practice.

We had various ways to get down to our high school. Up until it closed down in about 1947, we took rickety, boxy streetcars on the **San Mateo Line**. These were really a lot of fun - a regular Toonerville trolley, jammed with stu-

dents heading down the line to Burlingame and San Mateo High Schools. Biking was impossible because, other than the highway, there were no side roads between Millbrae and Burlingame, and no bike paths. Next, we were provided tickets and had to take the train. Before long, Doug and I were caught jumping onto a moving train so we were banned from that travel mode. By then school busses began to go to Millbrae, so we took them. That posed a problem for after school activities. We had to depend on an inferior **Greyhound** bus service if we stayed late at school.

I went to parties and dances with various girlfriends. We danced to the kind of music that can be described as crooning. We danced only with our dates and just the close two-step - not very interesting events. We not only had to dress well, but the boys were always obliged to present a corsage to their dates. They weren't cheap. At home I listened to a radio station **KSMO** which played only classical music. I got hooked on that for life. A co-ed group started having bridge parties with favors, etc., just like our parents, but without the liquor. In hindsight these were ridiculous. Doug had the good sense not to participate. I've hardly ever played bridge or any other card games since.

The first summer after high school, my friend **Dwight Allen** got me a job in his father's auto dealership in San Francisco. They soon realized I barely knew how to drive or to park the bulky **DeSotos** and **Plymouths** in the parking lot, so I was soon reassigned to the office. My father had just taught me to drive in our beloved 1940 **Pontiac**. It was convenient to have Dwight as a friend and as a roommate at Stanford because he always had a brand new car. Riding in one of his various cars provided the only chance I ever had to ride in a convertible. I bought my first car at the end of my army days in 1956 when I bought a **Volkswagen** in Berlin.

This brings me to the next phase of my life. I applied only to Stanford. The alternative for me was UC Berkeley, which I considered to be too cold and windy. I think my main motive in choosing Stanford was to be in a warmer, less windy place than Millbrae. I knew nothing about Stanford. My friend Dwight's decision to go there also influenced me. The application process consisted of high school grades, teacher references, and a vocabulary test. When Dwight and I drove down to Stanford in the spring to take the test, that was the first time I'd ever been on the Stanford campus. At that time, I've learned since, Stanford took about 80% of its male applicants, so applying to only one school was not risky.

**Don Price**  
**August 2015**

## CURATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY SEMKE

Hello everyone!

Since our last newsletter came out, we sadly have lost three of our MHS members. I am so sorry to report that life-time member and docent **Ann Gardner** has passed. Also **June Bianchi** and **Marian Fellman**, all of Millbrae. They will certainly be missed!

Hopefully everyone else is doing well and staying masked up. By now, I am sure we all have the cleanest drawers and closets we have ever had! In rearranging my things, I found a few items I am going to do-

nate to the Museum. My dog tags issued, but I believe not mandatory, from **Chadbourn Elementary School** in Millbrae at the very end of WW II. Also an air raid whistle used by my father-in-law, **Edward B. Semke, Sr.**, as he patrolled his assigned area every night. He said they mainly were checking to see that all the black-out shades were in place, and that the lights that were on all had dimmers. If anyone has anything of interest you find around your home, especially old pictures of local businesses that are no longer



with us, we would love for you to share them.

Stay well,  
**Dorothy Semke**

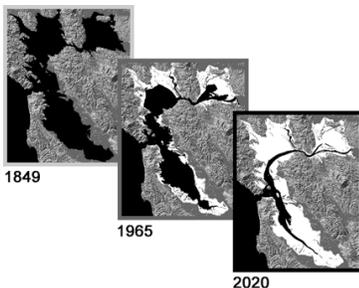
### Millbrae Historical Society Annual Meeting and Officer/Trustee Installation

Sunday, March 14 1:00 pm

Virtual event via Zoom

## The Saving of San Francisco Bay

EVENT PROGRAM: A presentation on the valiant efforts in the 1960's to save San Francisco Bay from being filled in and from the threats of pollution from industrial waste, illegal dumping, and raw sewage.



To join Zoom Meeting on March 14, click on this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85750867462>

You may be prompted to enter the meeting ID: 857 5086 7462

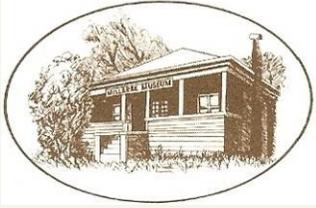
The MHS Nominating Committee has placed the following names into nomination to serve as MHS Officers and Trustees for the year 2021-22:

|                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 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 2021-2024 term:

|                 |
|-----------------|
| Faye Dawdy      |
| Alicia Espinoza |
| John Espinoza   |
| Ray Gier        |

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**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**

**Sunday, March 14: Millbrae Historical Society Installation of 2021-22 Officers and Board of Trustees, 1:00 pm, virtual event via Zoom.**

- featuring a presentation on the valiant efforts in the 1960's to save San Francisco Bay from being filled in and from the threats of pollution from industrial waste, illegal dumping, and raw sewage.

To join Zoom Meeting on March 14, click on this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85750867462>

You may be prompted to enter the meeting ID: 857 5086 7462

OPTION TWO - Participate on a tablet or smart phone (you'll still be able to see and hear/be seen and talk): Download the Zoom App on your device. Get the app in the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android). Open the app, click 'Join a Meeting' and enter the meeting id: 857 5086 7462

OPTION THREE - Participate by phone (you won't be able to see, but will be able to hear and talk):

If using a smartphone, click on either phone number below:

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If using a phone that is not a smartphone:

[+1 669 900 9128](tel:+16699009128) Enter meeting ID 857 5086 7462#

**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! (Please note that Board meetings are being held online via Zoom until further notice)**