



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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Historical Spotlight	1
President's Report	1
Before & After	2
Vice-President's Message	3
Millbrae Man, Woman & Student of the Year	3
Curator's Report	5
Train Museum News	5
Millbrae Rec Center	5
Calendar of Events	6

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT:
MILLBRAE HISTORICAL FACTS
BY TOM DAWDY



The mission of the Millbrae Historical Society is dedicated to the celebration and preservation of the rich history of Millbrae. Our MHS members all know many of the historical facts about the City of Millbrae. We often see things all around us related to our founder, **Darius Ogden Mills**. We know our city was incorporated on **January 13, 1948**. Millbrae was then transformed from pastures, orchards and farmland into a bedroom community. There are quite a few little-known stories and facts about our town that I will share with you in this article.

Let's start in 1769. A detachment of men under **Sergeant José Francisco Ortega** reported bears where the **Crystal Springs Lakes** are today. In 1776, in the same area, the **De Anza Expedition Party** recorded killing a fierce bear over 6-feet-tall. In the early days, there were over 10,000 Grizzly Bears in California spread over the whole state. History has it that the last Grizzly Bear was shot and killed in California in 1922. This gave our State the dubious distinction of being the only state to have an extinct animal as its State Mammal.

On **July 4, 1862**, the first water began to flow through redwood flumes from the **Spring Valley Water Company** (that later became the **San Francisco Water Department**).

(continued on Page 4)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
JOHN MUNIZ

On August 29th, the Millbrae Historical Society and the Millbrae community lost a great Lady, **Helen Habeeb**. Helen was a lifetime trustee of the Millbrae Historical Society and a member of our Board of Directors. Helen was the last surviving original founding member, who along with **John Brucato** founded the Millbrae Historical Society in 1970, after the failure to save the **16 Mile**

House. Helen is also mentioned in John Brucato's book, *A Sicilian in America*, published in 1971, as being on the newly-formed **Millbrae Beautification Commission**. Helen was an active community volunteer along with her late husband **George Habeeb**, who passed in 2020. She was also **Millbrae Woman of the Year** in 2002 and a Millbrae resident since 1954. We will miss her kindness, sense of humor, hospitali-



ty and dedication to Millbrae and the Millbrae Historical Society.

We now have two Ring security cameras at the Millbrae Museum — one on the front porch and one on the back porch. Now that the front gate
(continued on Page 2)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

of the Museum is locked and we have security cameras, the incidences of transients sleeping on the porches has improved 100 percent. Our smart phones will be activated when there is activity on the porches, which will allow us to speak through the cameras.



The Late Helen and George Habeeb

When will we be able open the Museums? That's the big question after we have been closed for 16 months now. **Millbrae City Hall** is still open only for appointments only. When City Hall opens, we will open.

The **Millbrae Train Museum** grand re-opening, originally scheduled for October 23, has been postponed until next year – no new date has been established.

Friday, October 15 is the annual **Millbrae Man, Woman and Student of the Year Dinner** at the beautiful **Green Hills Country Club**. If you would like to attend, please contact me via e-mail at: jfmflash600@gmail.com.

We need new members who can carry on the great tradition of the Millbrae Historical Society. In 2007, we had 158 members, in 2017 there were 131 members, and now we are down to 126 members. The downward trend is not good. Get your friends, relatives and neighbors to join – only \$20 per year. Thank you. Thank you for your continued support of the Millbrae Historical Society and dedication to preserving the great history of Millbrae.

All the best to everyone,
John Muniz
Millbrae Historical Society President
"The Past is our Key to the Future."

Mayor's Civic Coordinating Council
and
Millbrae Chamber of Commerce
cordially invite you to attend the
Millbrae Man, Woman
and Student of the Year Dinner
honoring
Robert G. Gottschalk & Marian Kong
and Sophia Baltasar
Friday, October 15, 2021
No-Host Cocktails 6:00 p.m.
Dinner 7:00 p.m.
Green Hills Country Club
500 Ludeman Lane, Millbrae

R.S.V.P. by October 8 with check
\$60 per person; \$65 per person if received after October 8
We will comply with current San Mateo covid-19 guidelines.

BEFORE & AFTER



Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



Corey, Luzaich, Pliska, de Ghetaldi & Nastari

BUSINESS - SALESMEN - HOME & CONDO OWNERS - APT. RENTERS
MATEO AVE. MINI-STORAGE
1162 SAN MATEO AVE., SO. SAN FRANCISCO 94080
Security - Fireproof Concrete Bldg.
Lockers 4x4 to 16x12 - Self Stor. - Own Lock
9:30 to 5:00 PM
Monday - Saturday
Closed Sundays
952-6464

**Ferrario
Properties**

FULLY EQUIPPED, RADIO DISPATCHED MOBILE UNITS
COMPLETE LOCKSMITH SERVICES
FOREIGN CARS - SAFES
MILLBRAE LOCK
VERNON W. BRUCE, C.M.L.
CA LIC. LCO 674
www.millbraelock.com
(650) 583-5699
FAX (650) 692-0162
3111 EL CAMINO REAL
MILLBRAE, CA 94030-2609

VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

Hello and greetings to all our Millbrae Historical Society Trustees, members, and friends!

First off are my sincere condolences to all who knew and admired **Helen Habeeb**, who passed away on August 29th (and also for our late friend and Helen's husband **George Habeeb** who passed in 2020). As per her family's request, the services at **Chapel of the Highlands** were for immediate family only, and burial followed at **Holy Cross Cemetery** in the same plot with George. Helen was a driving force in this community in many different capacities for decades, and we will all miss her presence. Helen never slowed down, and until just before her passing was sharp and in charge as we fondly remember her. It is strange to think she is gone, along with so many in Millbrae who we've relied on for historical knowledge and reference. We are losing our living encyclopedias. Say a prayer for Helen, George and for all those we have lost.

For a while in April/May/June/July we were showing signs of relief with regard to COVID. The topic of conversation was vaccinations and how quickly everyone was receiving the various versions from different manufacturers. After more than a year and a half of sheltering in place, a feeling of confidence was taking hold. Live activities were coming back, such as the **Millbrae Lions Club** meeting again at **Green Hills Country Club** with hugging and close contact with face masks down. But, after the realization that a mutated and highly contagious Delta variant of COVID was spreading fast, this behavior was all put aside with safety and responsibility taking over again. Face masks quickly went back on and we are back to meeting with our various organizations via Zoom. There are still a good number of live events and community activities occurring, but they are being attended with the leery assumption that those around us are vaccinated along with an air of caution and a sense of hesitancy.



Still, with a positive outlook and patience, we will all be over the hump and back to normal eventually. As the British say, "Keep a stiff upper lip" - meaning to show courage in the face of pain or adversity (presumably an allusion to the trembling lips that precede bursting into tears). Stay healthy and safe!

All my best wishes to you, your family and loved ones,

Paul Larson
MHS 1st Vice-President

2021 MILLBRAE MAN, WOMAN & STUDENT OF THE YEAR



Man of the Year
Robert Gottschalk



Woman of the Year
Marian Kong



Student of the Year
Sophia Baltasar

You are invited to attend the **2021 Millbrae Man, Woman & Student of the Year Dinner**
Friday, October 15 6:00–9:00 pm Green Hills Country Club
To receive an invitation, please contact Cathy Quigg at (650) 245-2185
\$60 per person; RSVP due by October 8th

MILLBRAE HISTORICAL FACTS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Millbrae is known for its neighborhoods and tracts. In February 1889, **William Dunphy**, a Nevada silver mining millionaire surveyed Millbrae's first tract for 313 lots. He named it the **Millbrae Villa Tract**. Dunphy originally purchased the land for a hunting area and built his hunting lodge up toward the top of Millbrae Avenue. He built his home on Hemlock Avenue near Millbrae Avenue, which was later known as the **Dunphy Mansion**.

The dusty road of El Camino Real was reconstructed into one of California's first highways. In 1912, the crews came through Millbrae building the new highway. In 1904, the population was 16 families. In 1919, when the **West Coast Porcelain Works** opened, the population jumped to 300.

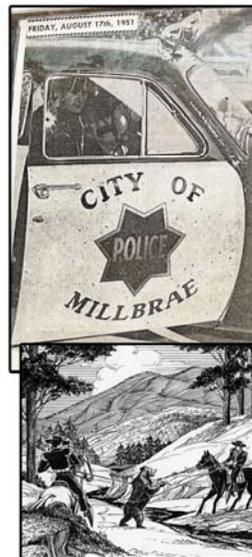
Oyster Beds in Millbrae? In 1876, the **Millbrae Hotel** (formerly the **17 Mile House**) was well known for their fresh oysters. These oysters were harvested across the El Camino, where the oyster beds came almost up to where the railroad tracks are today. The Hotel burned down in 1907 with no firefighters in sight. Speaking of firefighters, Millbrae organized its first **Volunteer Fire Department** in 1931. The volunteer firefighters had to pay 25 cents per month to belong and they were paid one cold beer after fighting a hot fire. In 1948, a 4-man Police Department was established in Millbrae, and the new department bought Millbrae's first Police Car—a new radio-dispatched Chevrolet!

After Neil Schulz built the **Millbrae Highlands** subdivision, he built the **Bayside Manor** tract in 1943. He designed the housing tract for veterans returning from World War II. My parents bought their first house there in the late 1940's for \$4,500, as did many of the families at that time. During the initial earthwork for the housing tract, tusks of five wild elephants were dug up along with their bones and a prehistoric wild horse tooth. By 1950, the residents of the 200 homes in Bayside Manor were well established as a part of the Millbrae community. That year Burlingame was planning to build a drive-in theater across Millbrae Avenue. The entrance to this 12-acre project would be on the Millbrae side. There was much discussion at both Millbrae and Burlingame City Council meetings. Burlingame was all in for the drive-in, but the residents of Bayside Manor protested against the project and stopped it from being built.

In August 1951, the **El Rancho Inn** experienced two holdups. **Earl Wilms** was working in the office and was nervous about two suspicious men outside the hotel. Wilms called the Millbrae Police, and two officers (**Alan Roper & Frank Paglia**) immediately showed up. The call from the dispatcher over the radio said "see man at hotel". As they drove up, the two suspects came out firing their pistols right at the Millbrae Police car. One of the bullets missed Paglia by just a few inches. Roper and Paglia returned fire and the gun battle was on. Several cars were riddled with bullet holes, including some belonging to guests and the Millbrae Fire Chief's car that **Les Pallas** had just parked at the El Rancho.

In August of 1957, **James Richmond**, President of the **Millbrae Chamber of Commerce** made a proposal that would put the City

of Millbrae on the map! With the backing of **Paul W. Trousdale** and **Clint Murchison Jr.** (developers of **Mills Estates**), he made a bid to build a 55,000-spectator stadium on 109 acres for the **San Francisco Giants**, who were planning to move here from New York. The stadium would have been built on the corner of Millbrae Avenue and Old Bayshore Highway, where the **Westin Hotel** sits today. Richmond gave many reasons why this was a great place for the Giants. Some of the reasons that he gave were that it was right on Bayshore Highway, close to SFO, and walking distance from **Southern Pacific** trains (now Caltrain). They also proposed dock facilities on the Bay and maybe a helicopter pad (**Rick Helicopters** were flying 40 passenger helicopters at that time). If this had happened, we might have also enjoyed seeing the **49ers** play here in Millbrae instead of Candlestick Park — which would have allowed us to practically walk to our tailgates parties!



Upper left: Frank Paglia behind bullet hole
Upper Right: 1941 Peterbilt / Challenger
Lower Left: Spanish Soldiers fighting bear
Lower right: New Giants Stadium concept

My final little-known fact is something we are currently researching at the Museum. We were recently contacted by **Jeffrey Smoker** from Bradley, Virginia asking for information on one of Millbrae's former fire engines. Jeffrey is a fire apparatus historian and had tracked a fairly rare **1941 Peterbilt-Challenger** to Millbrae. Challenger only built eight fire engines on Peterbilt chassis, which made our fire engine very unique. The engine went into service for the Millbrae Fire Department in 1956. I had a little trouble tracing its history. Last week **Ray Gier** and I were digging into some MFD articles, and we discovered that Millbrae donated the Peterbilt to the **College of San Mateo's** Fire Science program in October 1983. I have been in contact with CSM, and they are researching their archives to see if we can find more stories on Millbrae's historic 1941 Peterbilt-Challenger.

CURATOR'S REPORT
DOROTHY SEMKE

I hope this newsletter finds you all well and happy. Soon we will be open again and getting back to normal living.

We are most saddened hearing that The **Little Whale Restaurant** closed its doors on September 23rd. It was started by current owner **Tina's** sister and brother-in-law and partner in 1985. Previously the restaurant was called the **Blue Dol-**

phin Restaurant. In 1995, when the partner left to return to Thailand, Tina joined the family business. In 2018, Tina's sister and brother-in-law left to open up another restaurant in Tracy. We are very fortunate to receive four items for the Museum that had been on display for many years in the restaurant – two window boxes, a decorative wooden whale, and a replica fishing boat.



We wish Tina well and will certainly miss this wonderful establishment!

Stay well,
Dorothy Semke
Curator

TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS
VERN BRUCE

Hello everyone,
Even though our Train Museum has been officially closed during the pandemic, we have completed many tasks. After it was discovered that it was relatively easy to open the gates along our fence, our volunteer machinist, **Jay King**, machined several parts that we installed over the last few months, to fully secure our premises. Additionally, **Peter Sheerin** and **Ben Guzzardi** completed our first multimedia exhibit. We now have a wall-mounted LCD television screen connected to a computer and several pushbuttons. Each button is, in

turn, related to seven various displays on the nearby walls. By pushing the appropriate button, you will have an audio-visual presentation that applies to that related display. – quite high-tech!

Also, our volunteers, **Charlie Hegtarty**, **Caelan Jones**, **Rose Shubin**, **Vern Bruce** and **William Bruce**, cleaned-up, washed, waxed and polished the fire truck prior to the Lion's annual car show in downtown Millbrae, on August 21st. It hasn't looked better since it was first donated to us!



Our thanks also go out to all of our above volunteers, as well as the ones that haven't been able to make it out recently.

Vern Bruce
Train Museum Curator

**HELP SUPPORT THE
NEW MILLBRAE RECREATION CENTER!**

Millbrae's beloved Recreation Center burnt to the ground on July 21, 2016. Our new facility will create a beautiful space providing a safe and healthy space for our seniors, youth, and families. Construction is already underway, and the new center is anticipated to open in Spring 2022.

While the City has secured \$30 million in funds to build the structure, we are still in need of addition-

al financial resources to bring this vital facility to life. An additional \$1.75 million is needed to purchase furnishings, fixtures, and equipment, including security, audio/visual, phone and data systems, as well as public art and landscaping. This is a team effort – we need your help now to reach our fundraising goal and giving Millbrae back its beloved Recreation Center! Please consider making a donation TODAY.

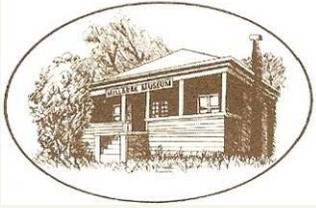
Your contribution can be permanently recognized on the donor wall.

DONOR RECOGNITION CATEGORIES		
Founder		\$100,000+
Philanthropist		\$50,000-\$99,999
Benefactor		\$25,000-\$49,999
Champion		\$10,000-\$24,999
Visionary		\$2,500-\$9,999
Builder		\$500-\$2,499
Supporter	WRITTEN RECOGNITION	\$50-\$499

DONATE TODAY at

www.MillbraeRecreationCenter.com

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT
WWW.MILLBRAEHS.ORG



**MILLBRAE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

Post Office Box 511
Millbrae, CA 94030

Phone: 650-692-5786

MHS OFFICERS – 2021-22

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 15: 48th Annual Millbrae Man, Woman & Student of the Year Dinner

- Green Hills Country Club, 500 Ludeman Lane
- RSVP required by October 8. Contact Cathy Quigg at (650) 245-2185 for an invitation.

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)