



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

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: WHEN DRIVE-INS WERE KING

BY JOE TERESI

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Back in the days before McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants dotted the landscape from coast to coast, local drive-ins were the places where young people and families gathered for camaraderie and comfort food during the 1950's and 60's. Millbrae had two drive-in restaurants along El Camino Real that long-time residents remember fondly. **Smith's Drive-In**, located at the site of the current

Burger King restaurant, was opened by **Elmer Smith** in 1945, three years before Millbrae became an independent city. Smith's featured a wide variety of menu items, ranging from hamburgers to fully-trimmed turkey dinners to milkshakes and ice cream sundaes. Although traditional sit-down meals at indoor tables were offered, it was the outdoor service that enabled patrons to eat their food in the comfort and convenience of their own car that set the drive-ins apart from mainstream restaurants. Waitresses were replaced with carhops, young women in short pleated skirts or pants, who took your order and delivered it on a tray right to the driver's side window of your car. Unlike today's fast-food disposable packaging, drive-ins served their fare on ceramic plates, with glasses and metal silverware. MHS Trustee **Clay Priola** (continued on Page 5)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

Since our last newsletter, our Millbrae Historical Society has participated in two great projects. In August we had our third annual rummage sale, held in front of the Museum. Our Assistant Curator, **Dorothy Semke** and her crew did an outstanding job, pricing and arranging the gently-used merchandise. We had some great items, which drew

large crowds of shoppers and browsers. This type of event increases the public's awareness of our Museum and attracts a lot of questions and interest in what we are all about. Yes, we also did very well in our sales. Thank you to all who donated items, all who patronized our event, and to Dorothy and her crew.



Again this year, we had a two-day booth at the **Millbrae Art and Wine Festival**. This was our second year with a U-shaped display booth, which enabled patrons to walk into (continued on Page 2)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the booth to view our displays and purchase photos and old Art and Wine Festival glasses. We drew a lot of interest in the Millbrae Historical Society and our service to the community. A big thank you to our members who helped assemble and disassemble our booth and to those who staffed our booth over the weekend.

We also had our annual Millbrae Historical Society **Fourth of July Picnic** at the Chetcuti Room on Monday, July 4. We had a great group of old-timers and some new faces. This event has become an annual institution in Millbrae. So many of our senior residents look forward to the picnic to reunite with old friends and acquaintances and to rekindle old memories.

We have now entered the fifth month of our new program called "**MHS Friday Night at the Movies**". Once a month at the Museum, we show a vintage movie from the Golden Age of Hollywood (1930-1959). So far we have shown several classic movies to captive audiences on our wide screen. Everyone is welcome to attend - just show up at the Millbrae Museum at the appointed time. Hurry, the loges fill up fast!

I want to take the opportunity to congratulate our long-time member and Mayor, **Dan Quigg**, for being named "Millbrae Man of the Year" for 2011-2012. Many of us enjoyed this year's "Man and Woman of the Year" gala on October 13th at the Westin Hotel.

I am excited to announce the great new exhibit we will be housing at the Millbrae Train Museum! Our long-time member, **David Hannigan**, is donating a fully-restored, 1929 Ford Model AA truck to the Millbrae Historical Society. What an incredible, beautiful addition to our railroad museum! The truck is a fully-restored and operable Railway Express Agency vehicle used to deliver freight. Many thanks to David for his dedication in restoring this timeless treasure. The Historical Society will be its proud custodian and caretaker. Thanks also to Train Museum Curator **Vern Bruce** for his support in coordinating the acquisition of this beautiful piece of automotive history.

Upon taking possession of the Ford Model AA, we are planning a community celebration and unveiling at the Train Museum on **Saturday, November 5**, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. In addition to the dedication ceremony, other vintage cars will be exhibited. All are invited — please bring your kids and grandchildren.

On Friday, June 24th, a group of enthusiastic Millbrae Historical Society members went on a field trip to the SFO Museum, located in the International Terminal of San Francisco International Airport. **Dennis Sharp**, the Museum's Assistant Curator, gave us an in-depth tour of the museum and a 'behind the scenes' look at the activities that support the museum. If you have never been to the SFO Museum, I strongly recommend that you plan a visit; it is fully restored to look like the interior of the original San Francisco Airport terminal built in the Art Deco style in 1937. There is no charge to tour the museum. Check out the Museum's web site at www.sfomuseum.org, for more information.

Speaking of web sites, check out our new, revamped Millbrae Historical Society website at www.millbraehs.org. Webmaster **Joe Teresi** has really brought our old web site into the modern age.

I am putting out a call for old pictures of people and places in Millbrae. If you have any pictures of historic places in Millbrae and would like to share them, please contact me. Old family pictures of Millbrae residents or class pictures of your school days in Millbrae would be greatly appreciated. I will scan your pictures and return them to you. We are attempting to get as many old pictures of Millbrae and the surrounding area before they are lost forever.

Mark your calendar for our annual Historical Society Christmas Party, to be held on **Wednesday, December 14**. As always, our Christmas Party is a lot of fun and draws a big crowd of partiers.

Once again, thank you to all of our Millbrae Historical Society members and Board of Trustees for working so hard to keep the memories of the past alive and well for future generations.

Best wishes from your Millbrae Historical Society President, **John Muniz**

Special thanks to Rudy Alva at Allied Security Alarms for providing alarm service at the Millbrae Historical Society Museum free of charge for many years. Thanks, Rudy!

	<p>Rudy Alva</p> <p>269 Watts Way South San Francisco California 94090</p> <p>650.871.8950 Fax 871.8975 ratty@alliedsecurityalarms.com Mo. 34856-9-112295</p> <p>allied security alarms</p>
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VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE PAUL LARSON

Greetings Millbrae Historical Society Members, Trustees and Friends!

Here is something for you to ponder: Have you ever thought of asking a friend to join the Millbrae Historical Society as a new member? If you have, congratulations... it is now time to ask another friend to join. If you haven't yet asked a friend to join, then it's now your time to help this wonderful organization and ask a friend to make the very easy step into membership with the MHS. The process is very easy. If you don't have access to a membership application form then just call us at the Museum and we will help you, or we can call your friend and guide him or her every step of the way. Membership dues are inexpensive and are as follows:

- **Family Membership** (\$15.00 per year)
- **Business Membership** (\$35.00 per year)
- **Sustaining Membership** (\$25.00 per year)
- **Lifetime membership** (\$250.00 one-time)
- **Lifetime business membership** (\$400.00 one time)

We can guide your friend towards which type of membership is appropriate for them and will explain the advantages of each. If they have access to the internet, they can learn all about the MHS by going to www.millbraehs.org and seeing all the superb information provided at our revamped web site. Members can take advantage of special events such as our



annual "4th of July Picnic" and our new "MHS Friday Night at the Movies" taking place monthly at the museum and presented by our great MHS President John Muniz (see movie dates/times below).

Thank you for your membership in the MHS and for your continued support, and good luck on your quest to invite new members to join the wonderful Millbrae Historical Society!

All my best to you and your family,
from Millbrae Historical Society
Vice President,
Paul Larson

MILLBRAE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE MOVIES



WHAT: Come watch classic movies from the Golden Age of Hollywood.

WHERE: Millbrae Museum
420 Poplar Avenue

Bring your own popcorn and a spouse or friend for a fun Friday night on the town!!

Title	Year	Star	Date and Time	
<i>All About Eve</i>	1950	Betty Davis	May 2011	
<i>The Postman Always Rings Twice</i>	1946	Lana Turner	June 2011	
<i>Mildred Pierce</i>	1945	Joan Crawford	July 2011	
<i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i>	1938	Earl Flynn	August 2011	
<i>Gilda</i>	1946	Rita Hayworth	September 2011	
<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	1939	Clark Gable	10/21/2011	6:00 PM
<i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	1939	Judy Garland	11/18/2011	7:00 PM
<i>White Christmas</i>	1953	Bing Crosby	12/16/2011	7:00 PM
<i>From Here to Eternity</i>	1953	Burt Lancaster	01/20/2011	7:00 PM

TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS
 ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR
 VERN BRUCE, REPORTER

We have a great new exhibit that will be unveiled at a special presentation on **Saturday, November 5th**. It is a fully-restored 1929 Ford Model AA



heavy-duty truck. It has been restored as a Railway Express Agency (REA) delivery vehicle,

typical of the era. Our Historical Society Lifetime Members **David and Dianne Hannigan** donated the vehicle on October the 1st and deserve a huge thanks for the time, effort and money expended on this historic artifact.

Make sure you come to our dedication ceremony on the 5th of November, starting at 11:00 am at the Millbrae Train Museum, where you will also learn the history and significance of the REA.

Additional thanks go to our volunteer docents that have kept our Museum open and flourishing. These volunteers include: **Robert Gorran; Gino and Gerry**



Micheli; Richard Kennedy; and Vern, William and Theresa Bruce.



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CURATOR'S REPORT

ALMA MASSOLO

We are happy to have our faithful volunteer **Angela Zinc** back from her stay and studies in Italy. Nice to have you working with us again. Welcome back, Angela!

Mr. and Mrs. Gene Kirkbride have donated many antique farm tools and ten ceramic insulators that were taken from power poles by **Niels Schultz** in preparation for the development of the Millbrae Highlands residential subdivision. Thank you, Ann and Gene!

Bob Dye, a long-time member of MHS, has written and published a great true story on the life of **Bruce H. Goldsborough** and his contributions to aviation instrumentation. The book contains an interesting chapter on the preparation of the *Spirit of St. Louis* airplane that **Charles Lindbergh** flew across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927.

Don La Clergue, former coach at Capuchino High School, has donated personal celluloid dresser articles and a collection of interesting Christmas, birthday and other special occasion cards of the late 1800's and early 1900's. All from the estate of **Flo Nelson**.

Thank you, Don!

The US Army uniform on display was worn by **Caruso Lagrimas** during World War II. It was donated by his sister **Rosemarie Ceroni**. Thank you, Rosemarie!

John Bowers has donated a beautiful hand-cut crystal punch bowl. It is a piece of great art. Thank you, John! It has enhanced our Museum.

The **Abramson Family** donated a magazine with a cover photo featuring **Greg Jeffries**, a Millbrae native who played Major League Baseball with the New York Mets. Thank you!



Robert Garrison donated memorabilia belonging to **Gussie Suhr**, another baseball player from Millbrae. In the collection is a 1931 Association of Professional Players membership card, and a copy of the Uniform Players Contract, National League of Professional Baseball Clubs, which states that his annual salary was \$8,500. He also donated snapshots of Gus Suhr and his wife in front of the liquor store that he operated after he retired.

These articles will be displayed in the sports section of the Heritage Room. Special thanks to the Abramson Family and Robert Garrison!

WHEN DRIVE-INS WERE KING

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

remembers working as a dishwasher at Smith's in 1955 for less than \$1 per hour to earn spending money. Smith's was a hangout for local teenagers to socialize and listen to music on the juke box, but was also the site of many rowdy brawls according to historical police blotters. Smith's popularity eventually waned, and its "#1 hot spot" status shifted to **King's Drive-In**, which opened at the corner of El Camino and Millbrae Avenue in 1957. Smith's closed in 1958 and was shuttered until former Smith's busboy **Niki Cruz** re-opened the place as **Niki's Drive-In**, which he operated until 1970.

King's was one of a chain of drive-in

restaurants on the Peninsula that catered to America's love affair with the automobile. MHS Asst Curator **Dorothy Semke** recalls that cars were lined up three deep on Friday and Saturday nights to pull into one of the coveted drive-in slots. She has fond memories of a lemon-lime drink called Green River that was one of her favorite soda drinks.



Something changed in the late 1960s, perhaps the rise of modern fast-food restaurants or other more significant societal shifts, that spelled the beginning of the end for drive-ins. King's Drive-In closed in 1967 and was bulldozed in 1968 to make way for **Great Western Savings** (now Chase Bank). The iconic Smith's Drive-In building was bulldozed in 1972, and eventually was replaced with a restaurant called the **Brave Burro**, which in turn was converted to a **Burger King** in 1977. Burger King is reportedly going to be closing soon, to be replaced by yet another venture. Alas, the drive-in is no longer king!

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—2011

John Muniz, President
Paul Larson, Vice-President
Alicia Espinoza, Secretary
Vern Bruce, Treasurer
Alma Massolo, Curator & Historian

Joe Teresi, Newsletter Editor

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

Saturday, November 5: Dedication of 1929 Railway Express Agency Truck
Millbrae Train Museum, California Drive at Murchison Drive, 11:00 am to 1:00 pm
- Come celebrate the acquisition of our newest historic treasure!

Wednesday, December 14: Millbrae Historical Society Annual Holiday Party, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue. All members are encouraged to attend!

Third Fridays of the Month: MHS Friday Night at the Movies
Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue. See schedule on Page 3.
- Bring your own popcorn and a spouse or friend for a fun Friday night on the town!!

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