

# 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 DUST BOWL - THE STORY OF THE MACCO PIT

BY JOE TERESI



Aerial view of Macco Pit and haul road

Shortly after **Jack and Ann Gardner** moved into their home on Anita Drive in May 1955, the parade of dirt trucks started their endless cycle up and down Helen and Anita Drives. The Stoneson Corporation was preparing home sites up the hill in the newly created Millbrae Meadows residential subdivision. From early in the morning until dusk each day the uncovered dump trucks rumbled by

their home spewing clouds of dust that left a layer of fine residue everywhere—even inside the house with the windows closed. No one in the neighborhood was happy with the noise and dust, but folks simply learned to live with it as a part of their daily lives in a growing community.

Unpleasant though it may have been, historical news accounts tell of even worse tales of dust-filled air during the mid-1940's through 1950, when an entire hillside in western Millbrae was leveled to produce soil used to fill large expanses of San Francisco Bay for local infrastructure projects. Work started in 1946 when the Macco Corporation and Morrison-Knudson, Inc. purchased the hillside land and received contracts to blast and excavate the hill to create landfill for the expansion of San Francisco Airport. (continued on Page 5)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

Soon, the beautiful roses which surround our Millbrae Museum will be in full bloom as spring-time brings an end to a long, cold winter. Your Millbrae Historical Society has some exciting new events planned for 2012. We start the year with our annual Installation of Officers and Board of Trustees at 1:00 pm on **Sunday, March 18th** in room 'A' of

the Millbrae Library. The event will feature an historical program, a fun game, and refreshments. **Mayor Marge Colapietro** will be the installing officer. Please make a note to join us for an enjoyable afternoon with many of your friends and neighbors.

This year the Society ventured into a new project, which was met with



great success. We had a **Children's Christmas Party** at the Millbrae Train Museum, complete with **Santa Claus**. In November, **Vern Bruce**, our (continued on Page 2)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Train Museum curator had a visitor. **Mrs. Kimberly Beliso** and her son visited the Museum and were so impressed that she broached the idea of using the Train Museum for a Children's Christmas Party. Vern and I discussed it, and we went ahead and scheduled the party for **Saturday, December 10.**



It was a fantastic morning for our thirty youngsters and their parents. We had games, treats, and Santa Claus came in for a visit. Thank you Santa for helping at our Children's Christmas Party! Our Board of Trustees un-

animously voted to continue and expand the Children's Christmas Party in future years, with the help and support of Mrs. Beliso. Watch for our Fall Newsletter for the date and time of this year's Children's Christmas Party — your grandchildren will love it!

Remember back in the day when you loved to go to the movies? Sitting in the dark and watching those exciting scenes on a big screen, nestled in the loge seats, and stuffing your face with popcorn, candy and soda! And of course the stars — **John Wayne, Tyrone Power, Errol Flynn, Cary Grant, Lana Turner, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Rita Hayworth** — just to name a few who come to mind. Well, you can relive the days of "Hollywood's Golden Age" by showing up at the Millbrae Museum for our free, monthly **Friday Night at the Movies.** The curtain goes up at 7:00 pm, and the loges fill up fast. See the list of upcoming feature films on Page 3.

Our annual Millbrae Historical Society **Fourth of July Picnic** is just around the corner. Again this year, the picnic will be on **Wednesday, July 4<sup>th</sup>** in the David Chetcuti Community Room. This is the definitive Fourth of July celebration in Millbrae, a chance to celebrate our nation's birthday with the Millbrae Historical Society and your friends and neighbors. We will also have our **1929 Ford Model "AA" truck** available for viewing. This is one of our biggest fund raisers, so please plan on attending!

In case you missed our annual **Christmas Party** on December 14th, I have to say it was a "hum dinger".

The Museum was packed with hungry holiday revelers. As usual, we sang Christmas carols, and feasted on a complimentary holiday buffet and Champagne. Yes, Santa also came to our holiday party; we now have an in-house Santa. Thank you to our Society volunteers (too



numerous to mention) who helped decorate the interior and exterior of the Museum. If you are wondering who Santa was, take a close look at the photo, and you may be able to figure it out. At right is Santa with **Vern Bruce's** darling children.

Upcoming activities:

- In August, our annual **Rummage Sale** in front of the Millbrae Museum; keep checking for a date.
- Our annual **Field Trip** (time and place TBD); keep an eye open.
- Our annual **Docent Lunch** for members who are docents at the Millbrae Museum and Train Museum.

One great resource, for Millbrae Historical Society events, plus other information like the Board Meeting agendas and minutes and past newsletters, is our web site. Our webmaster, **Joe Teresi**, has done an incredible job revamping the old web site into a master of information. You can find the Millbrae Historical Society web site at: [www.millbraehs.org](http://www.millbraehs.org).

In closing, I want to thank all our members who have been with the Society for so many years and for renewing your membership. Also, I welcome our many new members to the fold. Thank you also to our docents who serve our Museum by guiding guests through the history of Millbrae and to the Board of Trustees, who make the decisions which serve you our members.

Thank you and best wishes,

**John Muniz**

MHS President (2008 - present)

"The past is our key to the future."

## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

Greetings members, Trustees and friends of the Millbrae Historical Society!

This is a busy year... at least for me. So many activities, projects, meetings, and *Chapel of the Highlands* duties keep me very occupied. I must admit that it can be a little like living in a whirlwind, sometimes like Dorothy's dilemma in the *Wizard of Oz*... but not quite as bad. I'm fortunate to have a good crew at the *Chapel of the Highlands* to support me, and Lions who I rely on to assist with Lions Club matters. Unfortunately I've been absent from a number of MHS Trustee meetings due to conflicting circumstances. I miss being in the middle of the MHS action, but I always have my heart close to the MHS and everyone involved.

I'm looking forward to the upcoming **Millbrae Historical Society Installation on Sunday, March 18** at 1:00 pm at the Millbrae Library. I was asked by MHS Past President **Mary Vella Treseler**

along with MHS President **John Muniz** to come up with an entertaining and informative guest speaker for this event. When this question came up I was slightly "thrown for a loop", and didn't quite know where to begin looking. As luck would have it, I received an e-mail the following day from a representative of the **USS Hornet Museum** in Alameda asking if they could speak at one of our events. I jumped at the chance and am currently making preliminary arrangements for a USS Hornet docent to attend our MHS Installation. As of this writing, the question of whether or not a speaker is available is still up in the air. A speaker confirmation has not yet come through... but I'm keeping my fingers crossed. If they are not available for the Installation, I am sure that we can arrange a suitable date for them to speak at a future MHS event.

A different upcoming event is the **Police & Firefighters Awards on Friday, March 30<sup>th</sup>** at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Foster



City. The Peninsula Council of Lions (PCL) hosts this annual event and I am PCL 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President. My duty is to coordinate nominations for various Police Officers and Firefighters on the Peninsula sent in to me by their Chiefs. I am happy to announce that Millbrae Police Officer **Steve O'Malley** was nominated to be recognized for his service. Congratulations to Officer O'Malley and to every officer who puts his or her life at risk to protect our Millbrae community.

Here is a belated Happy New Year and all my well wishes for a healthy and happy 2012.

All my best to you and your family,  
From MHS 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>The Bad and the Beautiful</i>	1952	Lana Turner	03/16/2012	7:00 PM
<i>Dark Passage</i>	1947	Humphrey Bogart	04/20/2012	7:00 PM
<i>The Lineup</i>	1958	Eli Wallach	05/18/2012	7:00 PM
<i>Vertigo</i>	1958	Jimmy Stewart	06/15/2012	7:00 PM

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



Our unveiling of the fully-restored Railway Express Agency delivery truck, donated by **Dave and Dianne Hannigan**, was a great success. On **Saturday, November 5th**, we had a great turnout of guests. Both out-going **Mayor Dan Quigg** and incoming **Mayor Marge Colapietro** rode the 1929 Ford truck through the parking lot at the Train Museum. We thank the Hannigans for this inspiring and valuable addition to our museum!

We had another wonderful event just before the end of last year.

On **Saturday, December 10th**, we had a Christmas party for children, at our Train Museum. Millbrae resident **Kim Beliso**, together with her family and friends, put together a very well organized and attended party for approximately 30 to 35 kids, ranging in age from 2 to 10. The museum site was well decorated, and Kim had numerous activities set up, such as making up Christmas cards, cookie decorating, building ginger bread houses, etc. This event was so successful that our Board of Trustees voted unanimously to

make this an annual event. We thank Kim for the great job she did, and her time and expense with this project!

Additional thanks, as always, go to our docents, who help to keep our museum going strong. These volunteers are: **Robert Gorran; Gino and Gerry Micheli; Richard Kennedy; and Vern, William and Theresa Bruce.**

**FAREWELL TO MARJORIE WILSON**

Longtime Millbrae volunteer and Millbrae Historical Society member Marjorie Wilson died peacefully on

January 23 at the age of 88. Marjorie moved to Millbrae in 1962 with her husband George and

touched the lives of many over the years through her dedication to volunteerism. We will miss her!

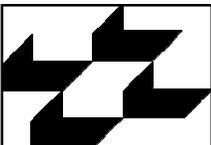
**MHS 2012-13 OFFICER/TRUSTEE NOMINEES**

The MHS Nominating Committee has placed the following names into nomination to serve as MHS Officers and Trustees for the year 2012-13:

President: John Muniz  
 Vice-President: Paul Larson  
 Secretary: Alicia Espinoza  
 Treasurer: Vern Bruce

Parliamentarian: Mary Vella Treseler  
 Trustees: Faye Dawdy, Alicia Espinoza, John Espinoza, Doris Golder, and Walter Haag.

**Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:**



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## CURATOR'S REPORT

ALMA MASSOLO  
DOROTHY SEMKE

A thank you to President **John Muniz** for arranging a Museum visit for **Boy Scout Troop 355** and a pack of Cub Scouts from San Francisco, who immensely enjoyed their tour of the Museum. Thanks also to **Denis Fama** for showing them the Scout House at Taylor School.

**David Hartly** donated a beautiful rose-colored antique glass kerosene lamp on display in the Heritage Room. He also donated many other antique artifacts, including a pair of high-laced shoes from the 1800s and an antique bird cage. We are using the cage to hold donations from our Museum visitors. Thank you, David!

**Pat Kroft** donated some Art & Wine Festival glasses to the Museum. For those of you who collect these glasses and have some missing years, call or visit the Museum on Saturdays to see if we have the glasses you need.

**Gene and Ann Kirkbride** have donated so many artifacts that we cannot list them all. On display in the Fran Baxter Room are two handcrafted ship models - one a sailboat and another that is also a music box. Thanks to Gene and Ann for their generosity!

With the closing of the Millbrae/San Bruno Chapter of the **Soroptimist Club**, we are now housing their Club books and albums.

**Janice Green**, President of the Mills Estate Women's Club, has donated several books documenting the Club's history. Thank you!

**Arnette Bonzani**, a longtime Millbrae resident, is writing a book about growing up in Millbrae. We have been able to supply some historical information about her family to assist her with her writing. She will be coming back to the Museum to do additional research. We are anxiously awaiting the publication of her book!



We all enjoyed the annual **Holiday Party**. The party was catered by **Leonardo's Deli**, with desserts donated by the Society's Board members. Great voices were heard during the singing of carols, and all had a great time!

Our annual **Rummage Sale** will be held in August. If anyone has items to donate (no clothing, please) or is interested in helping with sorting/pricing of items or working at the Sale, please drop by the Museum or call 692-5786.

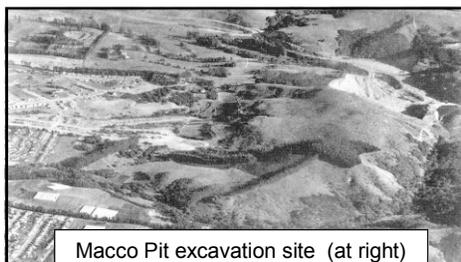
The Museum staff needs your help with finding and clipping newspaper articles about Millbrae and posting them in albums. If you can lend a hand, please call the Museum at 692-5786.

## THE STORY OF THE MACCO PIT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

The excavation activity quickly turned a large swath of quiet, idyllic Millbrae into a full-time construction zone. The contractors built a haul road right through the undeveloped middle of town, roughly following present-day upper Helen Drive, Tioga Drive, and Richmond Drive, onto temporary overpasses crossing El Camino Real and the railroad tracks, and out to the Airport. Seeking to finish the job as quickly as possible, the truckers reportedly hauled dirt from the huge excavation, which became known as the Macco Pit, 18 to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Shortly after the Airport project started, the contractors

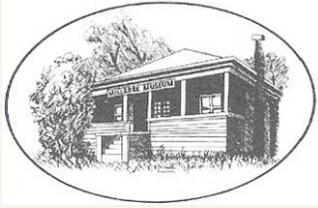
were awarded an even larger contract to provide fill material to the State Division of Highways for construction of the Bayshore Highway between Colma Creek and North Burlingame. The work continued unabated for nearly five years. The *Millbrae Sun* is filled with articles chronicling the disputes between the contractors and



Macco Pit excavation site (at right)

local residents over incessant blasting, loud, speeding trucks, and the ever-present clouds of dust. The battle with the operators of the Macco Pit became one of the first legal battles for the new City of Millbrae following its incorporation in 1948. Eventually the work ended, but not before over 17 million cubic yards of soil were excavated and hauled across the length of Millbrae, transforming rolling hills into a flat, sloping plateau large enough to accommodate the entire Meadows neighborhood. Jack and Ann experienced the daily taste of dust, but luckily for them Millbrae's true Dust Bowl days had already passed.

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



**MILLBRAE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

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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**

**Sunday, March 18:** Millbrae Historical Society Installation of 2012 Officers and Board of Trustees, 1:00 pm, Millbrae Library Community Room, 1 Library Avenue.  
- featuring a guest speaker, simulated game show, light refreshments, & good company.

**Wednesday, July 4:** Annual Fourth of July Barbeque and Family Picnic, 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, David Chetcuti Community Room, 450 Poplar Avenue.  
- Co-sponsored by the Millbrae Historical Society and the Millbrae Lions Club.

**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