



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:
**ROAD HOUSES, NIGHTCLUBS
 AND GAMBLING HALLS**
 BY TOM DAWDY

The 1920's and 1930's are considered the most corrupt period in the Peninsula's history. During Prohibition, rum runners used our foggy Coast to smuggle Canadian whiskey, and local entrepreneurs made moonshine and bathtub gin. After Prohibition ended, the out-of-work bootleggers made money in illegal gambling rings.

Probably the most notorious road house in Millbrae was **Gypsy's**. Gypsy's was located in Millbrae's back hills close to where the **Green Hills Country Club** sits today. You could get almost anything you wanted at Gypsy's. You could enjoy a great dinner and cocktails (even during Prohibition); upstairs were slot machines, roulette wheels and card games. There was another place to visit at Gypsy's - "**Valentino's Boudoir**" - where you could indulge in "guilty pleasures".

The **16 Mile House**, built in 1872, is the most well-known local road house establishment. Millbrae residents tried desperately to save the 16 Mile House, but the building was demolished in January 1971. During this effort, the Millbrae Historical Society was formed and was chartered with 150 members strong.

Millbrae also had many other drinking and gambling establishments. Many existed up until Millbrae's incorporation in 1948, (some were open even longer). During this period, some people referred to Millbrae as "**Little Tijuana of the North**". There were legal gambling license fees paid by many establishments in the County, but some places were known to be unlicensed.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT
JOHN MUNIZ

Friends and fellow members,

I just realized, now that I am a senior citizen, how time flies. We are heading into fall and should see some fog- and wind-free weather in Millbrae. By the time your receive this newsletter, we will have gone on our annual Millbrae Historical Society field trip on Friday, Sept 13 to the **Essanay Film Museum** in Niles. I will inform

you how the trip turned out in our next newsletter. Every year, **Joe Teresi** plans an educational and interesting field trip for our members; we have visited some great places in and out of the Bay Area.

On August 10, we had our annual **Rummage Sale**, and what a success it was! We sure did have a lot of bargain hunters and some great



gently-used items. Thanks to Assistant Curator **Dorothy Semke** and her crew of volunteers who always work tirelessly to make our Rummage Sale a big success!

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Since our last newsletter, we held our annual Millbrae Historical Society **4th of July Barbeque**. What a great event, with such loyal attendees that make our event a fun way to celebrate the 4th of July! We had tons of raffle prizes, and we had a vocal group called **The Love Handles** serenade us with great old favorite songs and melodies. We presented our San Mateo County Sheriff's Department Millbrae Bureau Chief **Ed Barberini** with a commendation, recognizing the outstanding job the men and women of the Sheriff's Department have done for the residents of Millbrae since taking over the law enforcement responsibility for the City of Millbrae. A big "thank you" to the **Millbrae Lions Club**, the **Millbrae Leo's Club**, and all of our volunteers who make our 4th of July Picnic an incredible, fun community event!

In case you have not received the word, our 2013-14 **Millbrae Man and Woman of the Year** winners have been announced by the **Mayor's Civic Coordinating Council** and **Millbrae Chamber of Commerce**. Once again this year, the Millbrae Historical Society is honored to have two of our members named as award recipients. Man of the Year is our very own **Joe Teresi** and Woman of the Year is our long-time member **Janet Fogarty**. Let's all join in on the celebration honoring our winners and their accomplishments. This year's Man and Woman of the Year event will be held at the Green Hills Country Club, on **Friday, October 18th**. Congratulations Joe and Janet and thank you for your contributions to our community!

The Millbrae Historical Society was represented at the annual **Millbrae Art and Wine Festival** again this year. We had a booth on Saturday, August 31 and had many of our friends and neighbors drop by. This year all the non-profit organizations, including the Millbrae Historical Society, were assigned to a La Cruz Avenue location. Our location was not in a prime spot, but I have no complaints since we did not have to pay for the booth.

If you have not been to the Millbrae Museum lately, you likely have not noticed the condition of the exterior, facing west and south. I have to report that the condition of the exterior of the museum is horrible. The paint is peeling and discolored, exposing the shingles. The last time the museum was painted was in 2004, when it was moved 150 feet to the west to accommodate the new library parking lot. I have contacted the City Public Works Department with letters and photographs of the museum's condition, with no luck so far. The response has been "painting the museum has not been budgeted, and there are other City-owned structures that require painting". There also may be some environmental issues concerning

the painting of the Museum, since paint containing lead was used to paint the museum when it was moved to **Constitution Square** in 1985. My plan is to shelve the discussion for the remainder of 2013 and to bring up the museum painting issue again in 2014. The Millbrae Historical Society Board of Trustees may have to consider partnering with the City of Millbrae to share the cost of painting the museum in order to get the work done.

I hope that everyone got a chance to attend the free **Millbrae Machines** car show held on August 17th. Broadway was blocked off, and there were 175 vintage cars and motorcycles on display. The Millbrae Historical Society had its **1930 Southern Pacific fire engine** on display for all to admire and photograph. Our fire engine won a commendation for best unique vehicle. A big "thank you" to **Dave Hannigan** for driving our fire engine to the event and keeping it running and in great shape.



Our monthly **Millbrae Historical Society Friday Night at the Movies**, during which we show a full-length feature film from Hollywood's golden age (1927-1963) on the big screen, is on hiatus for the season. The season concluded with **Singin' in the Rain** on Friday, September 20th. Next year's film series will start up again in April.

I still consider Millbrae a "small town", small in acreage but huge in spirit, community service and camaraderie. This is what makes a great place to live, educate and raise a family. Millbrae is one of those special places that inspires a sense of well-being. The members of the Millbrae Historical Society are dedicated to the spirit of community service, by enhancing, teaching and inspiring our citizens about the great history of our small town. Thank you to our entire membership and our Board of Trustees for your dedicated service to our community.

John Muniz
MHS President (2009- present)

**V I C E - P R E S I D E N T ' S
M E S S A G E
P A U L L A R S O N**

Greetings MHS Trustees, members and friends,

As of today's date (September 13), I just returned from a wonderful adventure to Europe. Prior to this trip I had never been across the Atlantic Ocean. I was a little leery about the lengthy airplane ride and unfamiliar surroundings, but making a long story short, I loved it! We were lucky with mostly warm weather and only a few days with early morning sprinkles.



Starting off, we flew from SFO via KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) to Am-

sterdam for a few days, then continued via a 7-day Viking River Cruise along the **Rhine River**, stopping at many spectacular and historical locations in Holland, Germany and ending up in Switzerland. Next by car we continued on to **Lucerne**, Switzerland; **Munich**, Germany; **Salzburg**, Austria (location for *The Sound of Music*); **Rothenberg**, Germany; and then by air from **Frankfurt**, Germany back to Amsterdam and on home to San Francisco.

What amazed me the most was the "age" of Europe. It really hit me that here in the United States we measure history in "hundreds" of years, whereas in Europe history is measured in many "thousands" of years. When the Europeans arrived in the New World, the inhabitants they found were the Native Americans, but when looking at European history human inhabitation stretches far, far back to primitive peoples living there hundreds of thousands of years before humans set foot in America. Buildings from the 1800's



in Europe are considered relatively new. I ate at restaurants that have been in business since the 1600's and stayed in a hotel that was constructed over 900 years ago (a beautiful place; go to www.hotel-rothenburg.de/en/hotel-en for pictures and history). These numbers were incomprehensible to me. It's funny that here in Millbrae our previous Safeway store was considered so ancient that it has now been replaced with a new building after only 50 years!

It is nice to be back and I look forward to seeing you soon.

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

Auf Wiedersehen from Paul Larson,
MHS Vice President

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**(COURTESY OF
TOM DAWDY)**



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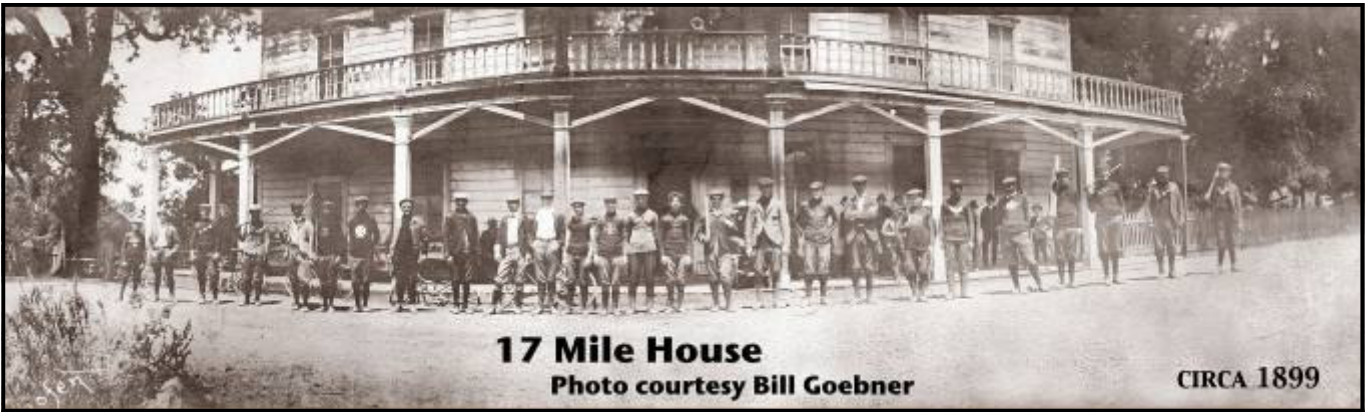
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ROAD HOUSES, NIGHTCLUBS, AND GAMBLING HALLS
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)



17 Mile House
Photo courtesy Bill Goebner

CIRCA 1899

The **Cross Roads**, located on the northwest corner of Millbrae Avenue and El Camino Real, was across the street from my Dad's service station. I remember the day they demolished the building - I begged my Dad if we could bring home some of the barstools that were piled up outside. People from San Francisco would ride the #40 Streetcar down to Millbrae on Saturday nights and frequent the Cross Roads and the other nightclubs in Millbrae. Just a block north of the Cross Roads was another watering hole called **The Bungalow**. A few blocks north on El Camino up by the 16 Mile House (where **Zen Peninsula** sits) was the **Coral Reef** restaurant and nightclub. The Coral Reef earned its fame from being **Bing Crosby's** watering hole. Bing would occasionally bring his buddy **Bob Hope** along for a drink. The Coral Reef advertised

itself as the most unique dining place in the Bay Area, serving "American Chinese Food".



Then there was the **Dunphy Mansion**, located behind and a block north of where **Peter's Cafe** sits today. Dunphy Mansion was built in 1883 and torn down in 1966. The owner also built a hunting lodge at the top of Millbrae Avenue and had plans to run a cable car up Millbrae Avenue to the lodge. In its heyday,

the Mansion offered all the amenities the other Millbrae establishments had to offer.

There were several other drinking establishments in Millbrae during this period, including the **Tip Top Inn**, the **Yellowstone** and **Millbrae Tavern**. One other road house that has almost been forgotten is the **17 Mile House**, which was located on El Camino Real just North of Millbrae Avenue (see photo above).

Want to know more about Gypsy's? Stop by the Millbrae Museum and talk to **Alma Massolo**. Alma and her late husband Sil often went to Gypsy's on their Saturday night dates before it burned down in 1947. Alma tells me they just had dinner, drinks and sat by the fire place!

Tom Dawdy, MHS Historian



CURATOR'S REPORT

ALMA MASSOLO
DOROTHY SEMKE

A large framed oil painting that was donated to be sold at our Yard Sale was in turn donated to the **Life Steps Foundation** for disadvantaged families, to be offered at their fundraiser auction. We thought that this was a better avenue to realize the true value of this beautiful painting. The painting was donated by **Carol Fields**, former resident of Millbrae.

Carol, the daughter of **Erna Camicia**, also donated a very early collection of old antiques. The collection consists of a manual drill that is one hundred years old or more, a lunch pail, three different sizes of rag rugs that belonged to her mother from Pennsylvania, a Depression glass cake dish, and many other articles that will be put on display in the Museum. Mr. & Mrs. Camicia lived in Millbrae for 75 years — "very pioneer".

A very important gentleman from China visited the Museum and was very interested in the beginnings of

Millbrae. He was a university law professor in China. He was very pleased with Alma's rendition of how the city was incorporated.

A profound thank you to **Tom Dawdy** for the great hardcover airport history book, a rare find. He located and purchased the book from the Internet. He also donated a wall picture of his father's gas station and his planning to arrange for other early businesses. Thank you to Tom as well for the glass set from an early Art & Wine Festival.

This year's **Yard Sale** was a huge success! Profit from the sale totaled \$1,289, a very good amount generated from "nickels and dimes". Thanks to **Dorothy Semke** for chairing this fundraiser. We now have a little more money in support of our Museum. Anything left behind was picked up by the Salvation Army, so they also benefited from our Sale. Dorothy thanks everyone who donated items or participated on the day of the Sale. Your help



made the Sale a big success!

Paul Larson donated many, many articles that belonged to his mother. The terrific glassware and many antiques and old books were in great condition. Many of the donations are displayed, and many were sold at fair prices. Thanks to Paul for being so generous!

We are delighted to welcome **Raymond Gier** to the Museum as a new docent. After traveling in the Fall, he will begin volunteering as a Museum docent in November. Thank you for volunteering to serve as a docent. We are looking forward to your presence!

Alma Massolo, Curator
Dorothy Semke, Asst. Curator

**Congratulations
to the Millbrae
Man & Woman
of the Year!**



Man of the Year
Joe Teresi



Woman of the Year
Janet Fogarty

Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



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MHS OFFICERS—2013

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

Joe Teresi, Newsletter Editor

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

Friday, October 18: Millbrae Man and Woman of the Year Dinner

Green Hills Country Club, 500 Ludeman Lane

- No-Host Cocktails at 6:00 pm
- Dinner at 7:00 pm

- Reservations required — call Jack Gardner at 777-0061 for an invitation

- Co-sponsored by the Mayor's Civic Coordinating Council and Millbrae Chamber of Commerce

Wednesday, December 11: Millbrae Historical Society Annual Holiday Party, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue. All members are encouraged to attend!

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