

# 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:

### GOOD OLE DOWNTOWN MILLBRAE

BY TOM DAWDY

I was extremely fortunate to grow up in Millbrae at a very magical time in our town's history. In the late 1950's, I turned 10-years-old along with our great little town. Every day, especially during the summer, my friends and I would venture out of our houses and walk downtown. We all had favorite stores on each block of Broadway. One of my all time favorite stores — **Jack's Hobby and Bicycle Shop** — was located in the 200 block of Broadway (**Provident Credit Union** is there now). At Jack's, you could buy almost anything that a kid needed to survive. One of my favorite items was called the "**Bangsite Cannon**". With the mixture of a little Bangsite powder and water, you could set off a blast that would shake up the whole neighborhood! You can still buy these cannons on eBay or watch them in action on YouTube.

(continued on Page 4)



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

I have exciting news to report regarding the new **Millbrae Museum Carriage House**! The exterior of the building has been painted, the electrical system has been roughed-in, the wall and ceiling insulation has been installed, and the rain gutters will be mounted soon. Next comes the sheetrock, taping, texturing and painting, followed by interior and exterior lighting. Then the carriage-style gar-

age door will be installed, and permeable interlocking concrete pavers will be placed in the driveway. And finally, a weather vane will be erected on the roof! I estimate completion of the building by mid-August. We can then plan a grand opening and dedication ceremony. Not bad for a project fully funded by the **Millbrae Historical Society**!

Wait until you see some of the new



exhibits we will be showcasing in the Carriage House. We will be displaying photos and artifacts that will knock your socks off! Some, never before seen, one-of-a-kind relics of the past will be on display!

(continued on Page 2)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

### ***Millbrae: The Early Years***

I hope that you were able to attend the Sunday night June 11th premiere of ***Millbrae: The Early Years***. I found it to extremely entertaining and well-produced. A big "thank you" to **Dana Sahae** and the **MCTV crew** for working so hard to get this project off the ground and into production. Thank you also to **Tom Dawdy** and **Cathy Quigg** for your special efforts to recruit participants to share their stories of Millbrae's past. Finally, thank you to the interviewees, whose memories of our wonderful Millbrae community will live forever for young and old to enjoy!



**Millbrae Carriage House** site as it looked in April 2017.

### **Millbrae Historical Society Fourth of July Picnic**

See you at the picnic, yep, the annual **Millbrae Historical Society Fourth of July Picnic**. See the event flyer enclosed in this newsletter for further details. The best Fourth of July picnic on the Peninsula will be held on Tuesday, July 4th in the Chetcuti Community Room. Lunch starts at high noon.

Best wishes,

**John Muniz**

Millbrae Historical Society President  
2009 – Present



Current state of **Millbrae Carriage House**, as of June 2017.

### **San Mateo County History Museum**

2200 Broadway  
Redwood City, CA 94063

**650.299.0104**

**[www.historysmc.org/](http://www.historysmc.org/)**

**Accredited by the American  
Alliance of Museums**

The History Museum features interactive experiences where you can explore the county's rich and colorful history.

Hours: Tuesday - Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Admission: \$6 adults, \$4 seniors & students,  
Free children 5 & under



## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### PAUL LARSON

Greetings MHS Trustees, members and friends,

**"June Gloom".** I just heard that term the other day on the radio (having never have heard it before). After doing some investigating, I discovered that it originated in Southern California and refers to a pattern of weather that results in cloudy, overcast skies with cool temperatures during the late spring and early summer. It appears that now our Northern California weather broadcasters are using the term to refer to what has been taking place recently here on the Peninsula... overcast clouds with lots of cool strong winds blowing in from the Pacific. But, today (as I write) it is bright, warm, and sunny... a beautiful clear Bay Area day!

Do you want to play a game? See how many of the following questions you can answer regarding these June-related events:

1. **June 1st Birthday:** Name this founder of the Mormon Church.

2. **June 2nd Birthday:** Name this famous movie star who was featured in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.
3. **June 5, 1968:** Name this Presidential candidate who was mortally wounded while leaving a victory celebration at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.
4. **June 6, 1944:** Name the military term for the largest amphibious landing in history by the Allied forces on the coast of Normandy, France.
5. **June 10th Birthday:** Name the singer, entertainer and movie star known for her role as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.
6. **June 20th Birthday:** Name this Texas-born military hero and movie actor who was the most decorated American soldier of World War II.

(See the answers at the right).



Here are wishes for a wonderful spring and summer, along with health and happiness all year long.

**Paul Larson**  
MHS 1st Vice President

Answers:

1. Brigham Young
2. Marilyn Monroe
3. Senator Robert F. Kennedy
4. D-Day
5. Judy Garland
6. Audie Murphy.

## MILLBRAE FACTS AND FIGURES

Population: 23,136 (2016)

Incorporated: January 14, 1948

San Mateo County Seat Established: 1856

Land Area: 3.2 Square Miles

Registered Voters: 12,472 (November 2016)

Number of Households: 8,472 - Units, 8,116- Occupied (2014)

United States House of Representatives 14th District

California State Senate 13th District





## GOOD OLE DOWNTOWN MILLBRAE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Every block on Broadway had a Mom & Pop store to fill your every need. On the 300 block was the **5 & 10 Cent Store** (where **Lai Lai** & the **Cleaners** are today). There were other variety stores in Millbrae like **Cassidy Variety** (where **Nummis** is), but the 5 & 10 Cent Store had all your household needs and was a downtown staple. Across the street (where **Broadway Bistro** is) was the **Hillcrest Pharmacy**. This store was more than a pharmacy — it had a great record department, and an excellent camera department. I have a good friend that is several years older than me that worked in the camera department. He always tells me that he remembers me constantly coming in with my nose against the glass cases looking at the cameras! There were other locally-owned pharmacies in Millbrae as well, and of course all of them delivered anything you needed — especially after your local doctor made a personal house call to your home. There were also plenty of clothing stores with old-fashioned service on the three blocks of our quaint downtown. Men's store? **Ritz Shop**, one of the best on the Peninsula.

Women's clothing? The **La Mia Shop**. Shoes? **Belvini's Shoes**. No one ever had to go out of town for back-to-school shopping.

All these stores were great, but there was nothing that could compare to my favorite — the **Brick 'O Gold (Round Table Pizza)** is there today). I really believe that if "The Brick" were here today, it could be a National Treasure! The Brick 'O Gold, run by Howard Cobb, was open from the late 1940's until 1965, when Howard closed the doors to this Millbrae landmark. I really doubt that there are any Baby Boomers that grew up in Millbrae or even nearby that would not feel the same as I do about "The Brick".

So what happened here? Downtown Millbrae, like a lot of other quaint downtowns across the country, went through many changes for the same reasons. Regional shopping centers were a big part of the puzzle that caused the Mom & Pops to close. In Millbrae, **Millbrae Square** opened in the 1960's with a big **Walgreens** store. The smaller pharmacies on Broadway eventually closed their doors. **Britt's Department Store** (now **Living Spaces**) had all the stuff to fill your needs. At the same time, **Hillsdale Shopping Center** opened, soon followed by **Tanforan Mall**. This

was a new era in our economy. In 1958, **Safeway**, which was located where **Pape's Meats** is today, moved to their new location. A few years earlier, **Broadway Market** opened (where **Office Depot** is today). We now had two major supermarkets in town!

In 1990, I moved my business back downtown (where **Dean's Produce** is today). Our studio had been on El Camino for quite a few years, and I wanted to get back downtown to my old stomping ground. Downtown was more bustling, but still had some of its old quaintness. In 1996,

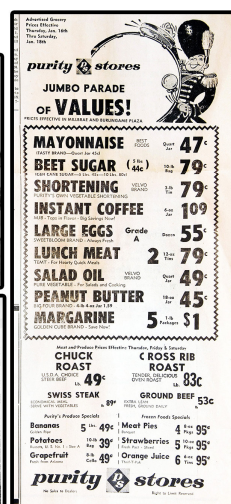
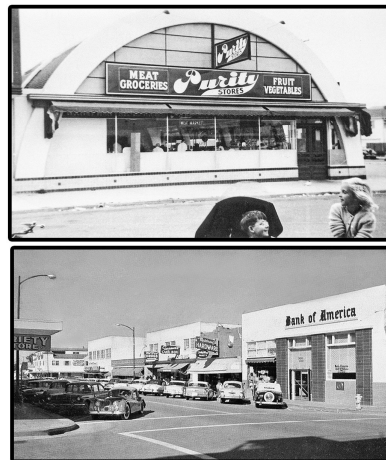
**Mark Simon** from the **San Francisco Chronicle** asked to interview me about downtown Millbrae. We walked up and down the three blocks full of stores, talked about the old times and new times. On August 9, 1996 the *Chronicle* ran a full-page story titled "Millbrae Looks to the Future But Cherishes its Past". The quote of the week in the paper was mine — "I love Millbrae and I don't want to have my business anywhere else."

My wife **Faye** and I were always active downtown. In 2000, we were recognized as the "**Millbrae Business of the Year**". A couple of times we organized a small **Millbrae Christmas Parade** for

the **Millbrae Chamber of Commerce**, with Santa Claus on a fire engine throwing out candy canes to the children. We worked several years on the **Art and Wine Festival Committee**, going several days with little sleep. In the 1990's we helped organize downtown cleanups with the Chamber and the **Rotary Club**. We swept the sidewalks and scraped all the gum off with putty knives. I had my own power washer and was proud of my clean storefront. We loved downtown Millbrae and were each honored as "**Man and Woman of the Year**". We were very sad in 2004 when we left downtown and moved our business to Burlingame.

Over these last few years, a new chapter in shopping has opened. Online shopping is now causing all the big retailers to suffer. It is ironic that a lot of these same businesses were the ones that caused the Mom & Pop stores to close their doors decades earlier. Who knows, maybe someday there may be a resurgence of small businesses with personal service, and the Mom & Pop stores might return to our little town. It's very common to have recurring dreams — in my dreams I'm often back in the 1950's in "Good Ole Downtown Millbrae".

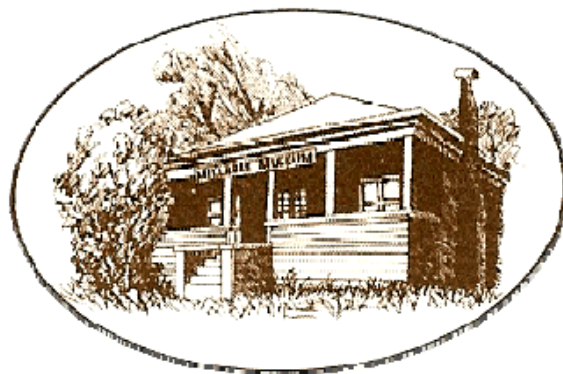
Downtown in the 1950's



# The Millbrae Historical Society

Proudly Presents

## The 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Fourth of July Picnic



Appetizer

BBQ Sirloin Hamburgers with all  
the trimmings  
Green Salad  
Chili Beans  
Ice Cream & Cookies  
Soda & Water  
Raffle Prizes



### Where can I find this wonderful event?

On Tuesday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Dave Chetcuti Room at Civic Center Plaza: 450 Poplar Avenue between the Millbrae Library and the Millbrae Museum - 11:00 AM until 3:00 PM. \$15.00 adults, \$5.00 for kids under 12 years old. Lions will cook, Leo's will serve



Lunch starts at High  
Noon



### Please join us for this fine Independence Day tradition - Everyone is welcome

Please use this handy coupon to RSVP or call (650) 697-3319 (deadline for reservations is **Monday, July 3**)

Number attending MHS BBQ \_\_\_\_\_ Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

RSVP's Only. Sorry, No Walk-Ins

Checks Payable to:  
Millbrae Historical Society  
P.O. Box 511  
Millbrae, CA 94030



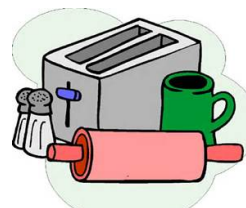
The Millbrae Historical Society Annual Yard Sale  
and Library Book Sale is Fast Approaching

Saturday, August 12, 2017 from  
10:00am to 3:00pm

If you have any items you wish to donate,  
please contact Dorothy Semke  
in Apt. #306, phone (650) 697-7670

As a reminder, we accept all household items,  
toys, baby items, cookware, jewelry, etc.

We do not accept Clothing or Computer  
Components





## CURATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY SEMKE

We are once again happy to report adding a new Museum Docent to our list of hard-working docents. Welcome to Kelly Rodriguez! We are happy to have you join us.

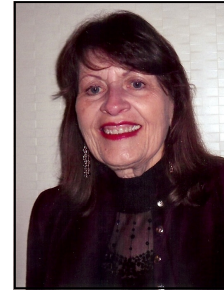
We have just recently started a project to put together an album of old MHS newsletters. Thank you to **Mary Vella Treseler** for her large contribution of copies dating back to her time as MHS President. This is going to be an ongoing project, and anyone can contribute to the album.

Recently we cleaned out an area below the hat display in the Muse-

um hallway, and our **Facilitator Ray Gier** is planning to make shelves to house some new articles.

Our beautiful old square Grand Piano has just been tuned — if you play, come and hear its lovely new sound.

On **Saturday, August 12**, we will once again be holding our annual **MHS Yard Sale** from 10 am to 3 pm. If you have any items you would like to donate (no clothes, electrical items, or large furniture pieces please) call Dorothy at the Museum (650-692-5786) or at 650-697-



7670 to arrange for a drop off. Thank you so much for all the donations that you have given in the past. I hope to see you at the sale!!

**Dorothy Semke,**  
Curator

## TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS

ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR  
VERN BRUCE, REPORTER

So far, the wild weather that we had this past winter and spring has not scared away any of our visitors. We are still experiencing many visitors to the **Train Museum**. Our docents — **Joseph Bonavia; Jason Brady; Vern Bruce; Robert Gorran; Richard Kennedy; Gino & Gerry Micheli; and Jorge Quezada** — have been quite busy with numerous projects, as well as showing our guests around.

One of our more ambitious projects is the rebuilding of the 1890's vintage horse-drawn carriage. Joseph, Jason, Jorge, Richard and Vern recently completed priming all four wood and steel wheels for it. We expect to start priming and painting the rest of the carriage soon.

Another project includes weather-sealing the **Civic Center** railcar and repainting portions of the inside, as well as similar duties inside the building.



If you haven't already, please come by for a visit and a personal tour, between 10 am and 2 pm Saturdays on California Drive at Murchison Drive.

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



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9:30 to 5:00 PM  
Monday - Saturday  
Closed Sundays

**952-6464**

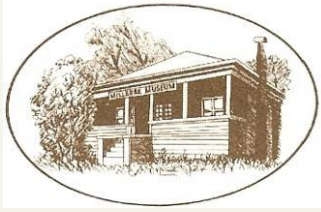
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**MILLBRAE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

Post Office Box 511  
Millbrae, CA 94030

Phone: 650-692-5786

**MHS OFFICERS – 2017-18**

**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**  
**Ray Gier, Museum Facilitator**  
**Joe Teresi, Newsletter Editor**

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

**Tuesday, 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.

**Saturday, August 12:** Annual Millbrae Historical Society Yard Sale, 10:00 am to 3:00 pm,  
Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue.

**Ongoing basis:** Take time to visit the area behind the Millbrae Museum from time to time to  
check out the progress on our new **Carriage House** as it approaches completion!

**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