

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 COMMUNITY PLAYERS

BY TOM DAWDY



Back in 1939, the people in the quaint unincorporated town of Millbrae wanted to enhance the community's cultural offerings, so the call went out for players to participate in live stage productions. Fifty actors, actresses, directors, musicians and scenery painters showed up at the first meeting. Everything was falling into place for Millbrae's first live theater production! The town had a nice local auditorium with a decent stage at **Chadbourn School**, and **William Gibson** became the first President of the group. The first director was **Fred Carlyle** from the **San Mateo Adult School**. In June of 1939, the **Millbrae Community Players'** first production - ***Nothing but the Truth*** - debuted. The Players called Chadbourn School their home for the next 19 years, occasionally moving to other venues. The cost of admission was thirty-cents, and they played to full houses most of the time. In 1940, **Ralph Schram** of the **College of San Mateo** became the group's second director, a position he held for the next ten years. Ticket prices rose in the 1940's - first to 60 cents then to 80 cents (67¢ + 13¢ tax).

During WWII, the Players presented benefit performances for the Red Cross and Civil Defense Agencies. Also during the war, quality productions were sometimes difficult to maintain because the actors were apt to be drafted for military service during the rehearsals period. The Millbrae Community Players also offered workshops and classes for community members. During the holidays, the Players presented **Miracle of the**

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

On March 13, 1970, the **Millbrae Historical Society** incorporated as a non-profit organization and received its Articles of Incorporation from the State of California. That makes the Millbrae Historical Society fifty years old! For fifty years, the Society has been serving the community by preserving and enhancing the great history of Millbrae. How did the Millbrae Historical Society come about and

why? Because of a failed attempt to rescue the **16 Mile House** from destruction and move it to **Constitution Square**. The 16 Mile House was built in 1872 by **Juan Sanchez** as an inn to provide income for his mother, **Francesca Sanchez**. The 16 Mile House served as a grocery store, inn, restaurant, saloon, speak-easy, and a bordello at one time. Wealthy San Franciscans stopped and watered their horses while en-



joying some cool refreshment in the bar. The 16 Mile House was sixteen miles from the San Francisco City Hall - thus came the name 16 Mile House. As the 20th century marched on, the old 16 Mile House was

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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unable to keep up with the times as a profitable enterprise and was scheduled for demolition early in 1970. In response, a community group called **"The Citizens to Save the 16 Mile House"** was formed. Lead by **John Brucato**

(1905-2003), the group incorporated as the **"Millbrae Historical Society"**. Via a City of Millbrae "straw ballot", an advisory vote was taken to gauge the level of public support for moving the 16 Mile House to city-owned property on Poplar Avenue (the current location of the Millbrae Museum). The Millbrae Historical Society was unable to raise enough funds to move and restore the 16 Mile House to be used as a museum, so it was demolished in January 1971. The 16 Mile House served as the catalyst for the founding of the Millbrae Historical Society and gave the City of Millbrae and its residents an awareness of its unique history.



In 1985, the Millbrae Historical Society fulfilled its dream of creating a history museum by arranging for the relocation of the 1898 **Spring Valley Water Company** (predecessor of the **San Francisco Public Utilities Commission**) Manager's house located on Broadway and Ludeman Lane (now site of **Cadence of Millbrae**). The house was moved to its current location in Millbrae's Civic Center and renovated to serve as the **Millbrae Museum**.

Thanks to dedicated Millbrae residents such as **John Brucato**, the first Historical Society President, who was instrumental in procuring the Spring Valley house, **Helen and George Habeeb**, Historical Society Trustees, and the hard work and self-sacrifice of countless individuals, we are blessed to have today's lasting appreciation for Millbrae's history.



Today we have three beautiful museums, all within the city limits of Millbrae and within walking distance of each other - the **Millbrae Museum**, open Saturdays from 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm, and the **Millbrae Carriage House** and the **Millbrae Train Museum**,

open Saturdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. The Museum and Train Museum have free internet access. By the way, the Train Museum is an excellent location for birthday and anniversary parties for children and adults. It has gone through extensive renovation thanks to **Director Vern Bruce** and his crew of docents, the Millbrae Historical Society, and Caltrain. There are many new interesting and educational exhibits. The Millbrae Train Museum has scheduled a **Grand Re-opening** celebration on **Saturday, June 6th**. This will be a fun event, so mark your calendars and stay tuned for updates. All three Millbrae Museums can be opened during the week by special request for private and school tours. The Carriage House is not always available for tours on Saturdays because of the lack of docents. The Carriage House can be opened by special request on weekdays and Saturdays.

So, what is the next fifty years going to look like for the Millbrae Historical Society? What will become of our legacy, hard work and dedication of the past fifty years? It is up to the residents of Millbrae and the nature of our society in the coming years. Currently we have about 140 Millbrae Historical Society members, and our age demographic is well over 55 years of age. In order to continue as a viable entity in Millbrae we need to attract younger members as volunteers. We also need more cultural diversity within our membership. Finally, we could use more members to volunteer as docents so we can open the Carriage House more often.



Have you been to the Millbrae Museum lately? The exterior has gone through some changes. The farm equipment and picnic table have been relocated to the west side of the museum, which allows for better usage of the picnic area. Last year the City of Millbrae replaced the roof, added new copper gutters and downspouts, and painted the exterior of the building.

Don't forget our annual **Fourth of July Picnic** on **Saturday, July 4th**. The flyer will be out in May, so keep an eye out.

John Muniz
Millbrae Historical Society President
2009—present
"The Past is our Key to the Future"

The MHS Nominating Committee has placed the following names into nomination to serve as MHS Officers and Trustees for the year 2020-21:

President: John Muniz
1st Vice-President: Paul Larson
2nd Vice-President: Joe Teresi
Secretary: Gaetane Andrews
Treasurer: Vern Bruce
Parliamentarian: Mary Vella Treseler

Trustees for 2020-2023 term:
Gaetane Andrews
Tom Dawdy
Cathy Quigg
Dan Quigg
Dorothy Semke

VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

Greetings Millbrae Historical Society Trustees, members and friends,

We've all been hearing the following news reports: We're in the midst of an emerging Coronavirus pandemic! Don't panic...this is not 1918 all over again. Still, according to the **World Health Organization**, countries should be in a phase of preparedness".

Signs of infection with the **COVID-19** virus are fever (high temperature) and a cough as well as shortness of breath and breathing difficulties.

It is recommended to wash your

hands frequently with soap or gel, avoid close contact with people who are ill, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. This can help cut the risk of infection. Catching coughs and sneezes in a tissue, disposing of it in the trash, and washing your hands can minimize the risk of spreading disease.

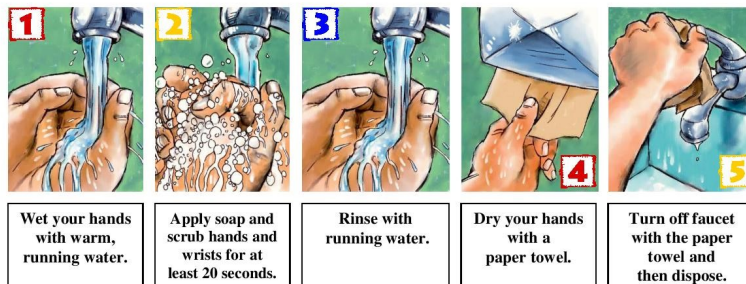
With this MHS Newsletter are my wishes for you to stay healthy, well, and wise!

Paul Larson
MHS 1st Vice-President



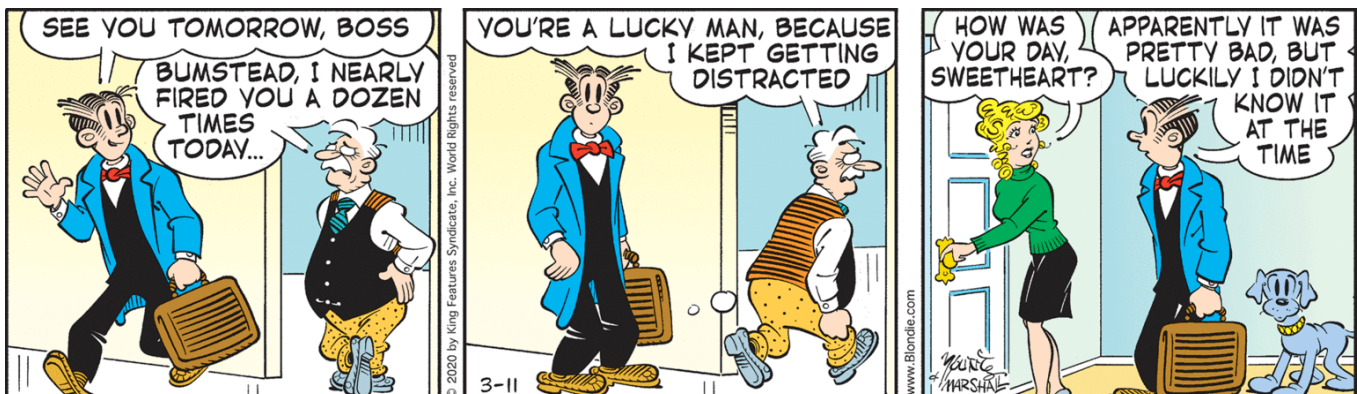
Handwashing

THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF GERMS!



Remember to wash your hands whenever they are dirty.

Just for Laughs



MILLBRAE COMMUNITY PLAYERS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Nativity, often free of charge, and the request for tickets always had a long waiting list.

December 1, 1946 was a real exciting day for the Players (they called it a "red letter day"). At 3:30 pm on that Sunday afternoon, the familiar voices of the Millbrae stage were broadcast on their first radio show (**KVSM 1950** on the dial). The radio play was **A Cake for Dr. Johnny**. Afterwards, some of the Players admitted in their newsletter that although they had previously been critical of radio dramas, they were really happy with the outcome and professionalism of the broadcast.

Throughout the years, the Millbrae Community Players were always a big part of our town. In 1958, when the **City of Millbrae** celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its incorporation and the Fire Department moved into their new station on Magnolia Avenue, the old firehouse at 255 Broadway was put up for sale. The Players made an offer of \$10,000 for the abandoned building, and the City accepted it. **Millbrae Mayor Douglas Morgan** was quoted as saying "This is the City's contribution to the betterment of the community".

The Players spent an additional \$1,000 renovating their new theater. They were the only player group in the area to own their own stage. In 1958, the Players opened their 20th season in Millbrae. During these years, the Players presented many drama and musical performances, and good reviews came in from all over the area. A scrapbook preserved at the Millbrae Museum includes a clipping from the **San Francisco Chronicle Datebook** featuring a review of a Community Players performance highlighted by an image of the "little man" jumping out of his seat clapping. During this era, Millbrae was filled to the brim with local merchants - almost all "Mom & Pop businesses". The Players always had widespread community support and sponsorships from Millbrae merchants.

In 1970, after 31 years of entertaining the Millbrae community, the Players closed their theater and sold the building. For a period of several years, the Millbrae Players continued to support students from **Mills & Capuchino High Schools** with scholarships funded with money from the sale of the theater. Even with the loss of the Millbrae Players, 1970 was a special year in our City, as this is when the **Millbrae Historical Society** was officially chartered. This year we celebrate our 50th anniversary!



Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



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CURATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY SEMKE

Once again we can say the year ended beautifully with our very well-attended **Christmas Party**. Members, residents, and friends came out to join in the celebration of another successful year. Thank you to all who helped decorate and make the evening a night to remember.

Last October, **Spring Valley's** 2nd Grade classes visited the Museum for a **Scavenger Hunt** prepared by their teacher. About 80 students and their chaperones toured both the Museum and the Carriage House. Later we received a written paper from each child telling us what they learned or liked best on the tour. These papers have been added to others in the Spring Valley binder located in the **Dining Room**.

Welcome to new members **Alan & Gloria Stickle**, **Mary Jane Ofiesh**, **Stephanie Hernandez**, and **Ken Miles**. We have also added new Docents **Eunice Danli**, **Lorriane Richardson**, and **Alan & Gloria Stickle**. We are very happy to have you helping us. We are also happy to have **Natalie Koenig** help-

ing out when she can. She is very interested in history and will certainly be an asset to us.

We really appreciate the recent donations from **Dan & Cathy Quigg** of two gorgeous chandelier table lamps that belonged to Dan's grandmother dating back to the 1920s. They have been placed at each end of our beautiful grand piano. Also we received a waffle iron and sifter from **Erik Erickson**, along with kitchen utensils belonging to his grandmother. **Denise Crocker** recently donated a copy of the **Millbrae Sun** dated Nov. 3, 1982, along with a very interesting chart for keeping your flowers fresh from the former **Peters & Wilson Nursery** that was located on East Millbrae Avenue & Rollins Road. The prefix to their telephone number is listed as Oxford 7, not 697. **Nancy Maynard** (1st graduating class of **Capuchino High School**), daughter of **Ruth Maynard** (very active in Millbrae's past), donated a box full of memorabilia, including old newspapers and Capuchino yearbooks,



and a pill box from the former **Hillcrest Pharmacy**, located in the 300 block of Broadway, which we have placed in the showcase in the Dining Room. We also wish to thank **Susan Lepore**, daughter of former Capuchino High School history teacher and 4-time Millbrae Mayor **Art Lepore**, for donating numerous yearbooks that will also be found in the Dining Room. You will notice three new mugs on the window sill in the kitchen. They are replica mugs honoring the well-loved **Kings Bowl**, **Shaw's**, and **Millbrae Theater** - we thank **Greg Abramsom** for these lovely memories. **Eunice Danli** donated a 1976 commemorative Bicentennial telephone and an **SF Chronicle** dated Oct. 17, 2014 with a headline reading "Giants Walk Off to World Series".

Dorothy Semke
Millbrae Museum Curator

TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS

ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR
VERN BRUCE, REPORTER

Hello all! This time we have a definite date of **Saturday, June 6th** for our **Grand Re-opening of the Train Museum!** We had to postpone our original date in October due to circumstances beyond our control. During your visit, you will be able to see our new roof, various repairs, new paint job (inside and out), original light fixtures, resurfaced parking lot, and an operating telegraph station, among many other things. We will also have entertainment for the kids in the form of a bounce-house, our 'rocking train', and various refreshments (for all).

Some of the many improvements we have made recently include the completion of a high-speed Wi-Fi system, enabling the operation of new security cameras, along with other electronic devices to be utilized. We have also stepped up our restoration efforts on the **Larkins two-horse surrey**, removing existing paint and repainting in historically-accurate colors. After repainting, the next and final step is re-assembly.

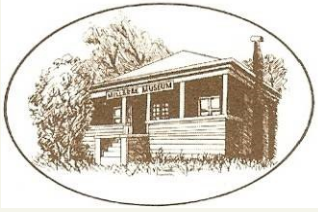
Our thanks go out to our docents and other volunteers, including **Joseph Bonavia**, **Jason Brady**,



Ben Guzzardi, Charlie Hegarty, Richard Kennedy, Jay King, Jorge Quesada, Peter Sheerin, and Vern Bruce.

Vern Bruce
Reporter

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



**MILLBRAE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

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MHS OFFICERS – 2020-21

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, June 6: Grand Re-Opening of the Millbrae Train Museum

- Millbrae Train Museum, California Drive at Murchison Drive
- Come view and celebrate all the improvements and new features at the Train Museum!
- Details and schedule will be announced in May.

Saturday, July 4: Annual MHS Fourth of July Family Picnic, 11:00 am to 3:00 pm

- David Chetcuti Community Room, 450 Poplar Avenue
- Food by Leonardo's Deli, raffle prizes, fun times!!

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