

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:

THE MACCO PIT

BY TOM DAWDY



In March 2014, I wrote a story called "The Battle of Millbrae" in the Millbrae Historical Society Newsletter in which I talked briefly about the **Macco Pit**. Now it is time to "dig deeper" and provide more details about this part of Millbrae history that not only changed the landscape, but the climate of our town.

In the early 1940's, **San Francisco Airport** (formerly **Mills Field**) was on the move for some major expansions that would turn the domestic airport into an international airfield within a decade. All they had to do is look to the western hills of Millbrae that were uninhabited at the time. The **Macco Corporation** along with **Morrison-Knudsen, Inc.** secured the contract to supply landfill for the new Airport expansion, including runways. One of the first things they did was to blast off the top of the hills above **Green Hills Country Club**. The **City of San Francisco** (owners of the airport) had signed a contract with the two companies to haul 4 million cubic yards of dirt through Millbrae from what our City Administrators called "a hole in our town".

Within a few years, the Macco/Morrison-Knudson group had completed a new haul road for their trucks. It ran down Helen Drive (where the water tank is), then turned south (where Tioga Drive is), then east paralleling the current Richmond Drive, over El Camino Real (via overpass), and finally on another overpass over the #40 Streetcar Line and Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. If the airport project were not big enough,

(continued on Page 4)

PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

I hope we are all doing well during these days of pandemic and political challenges. Look how much has changed since our last MHS Newsletter was published on March 8th! Our three Millbrae Museums have been shuttered since March 16th because of the **COVID-19** pandemic and shelter-in-place order. When will the Millbrae Museums reopen to the public? How long will it take be-

fore the public and docents feel comfortable visiting a museum? The Millbrae Museum, being a confined space, may prove to be challenging. What guidelines will the County impose on museums to reopen? We will have to be patient and wait for the County guidelines regarding indoor museums. Fortunately, we do not have a paid staff for the Millbrae Historical Society museums; we are all volunteers, so there are no finan-



cial burdens. Stay tuned.

Also, our 35th annual Millbrae Historical Society **4th of July Barbeque** has been cancelled. Our 50th annual Millbrae Historical Society (continued on Page 2)

P R E S I D E N T ' S R E P O R T
(C O N T I N U E D F R O M P A G E 1)

Installation scheduled for March 22nd was cancelled. All Millbrae Historical Society officers retained their current positions. This year was the **50th Anniversary** of the Millbrae Historical Society's founding, and no celebration has been scheduled. We had a tentative date of June 6th for the grand re-opening of the Millbrae Train Museum, but that also had to be cancelled. The Train Museum has been completely re-configured and updated with wonderful new exhibits, such as a working telegraph station. Let us hope we can re-open the museums by this fall.

Due to the after-effects of the shelter-in-place order and shuttering of the American economy, many in our community have experienced family and personal hardships. Many in the Millbrae community have been hit hard by a situation not of their making. In response to the impacts many Millbrae residents are facing, the Millbrae Historical Society and many fantastic community volunteer organizations have stepped up to assist Millbrae families, youth, and seniors. The Millbrae Historical Society is not a philanthropic organization, and the funding we receive via dues and donations is normally applied towards museum expenses, but as Eleanor Roosevelt said—"These are no ordinary times". After a discussion with the MHS Officers and Board of Trustees, a motion was approved to set aside \$10,000 to aid Millbrae families, seniors and youth who are in need because of the COVID-19 crisis, pending identification of a specific request for assistance.

Our first request for financial aid came on behalf of the **Juan Villalvazo family**. This family of five, 25-year residents of Millbrae, includes three children—one attending Mills High School, one at Taylor Middle School, and the oldest at the College of San Mateo. **Juan** lost his job as a house painter two months ago due to the pandemic. His wife **Ana** is undergoing chemotherapy to treat an aggressive form of cancer. The family is going through a difficult time. The Villalvazo family's dire situation was brought to my atten-

tion by **Karen Soo**, who has known the family because their oldest children attended school together. Karen has been advocating to aid the family since the nationwide lockdown has affected so many Millbrae families. On June 7th, In front of the Millbrae Museum, I presented a check to the Villalvazo family for \$2,000 from the Millbrae Historical Society. Accepting the check was Juan Villalvazo and his 16-year-old daughter **Dariana**. It was an especially emotional and heartwarming moment for all who attended. Left to right in the photo are MHS President John Muniz, and Juan and Dariana Villalvazo. I am pleased to report that Juan has been re-called by his employer. Thank you MHS Board for your generosity!



In Italian we say "Sempre Avanti" — "Always Move Forward", and that's what we do at the 50-year-old Millbrae Historical Society. Thank you all for your patience and cooperation during this distressing time in our history. Be safe, and may the force be with you!

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

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VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
PAUL LARSON

Greetings Millbrae Historical Society Trustees, members, family and friends!

"PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE". Definition: The ability to wait for something without frustration is a useful skill and a good aspect of one's personality. Patience is a virtue because it requires self-control. It requires you to have the insight to think about other people and their happiness.

Some things have become quicker to acquire in life, but there are still some pretty great things that require time to arrive, and in order to get those things, patience is required. Life just doesn't run on a set schedule.

Why patience is a virtue? Look at it the opposite way: Being "IMPATIENT" can do some real negative things to you and your life such as...

- It can cause you to make poor decisions that affect your health and your happiness.
- It can waste your time.
- It can put you under a lot of stress.
- It can affect your relationships in a very negative way.
- It can cause you to feel self-doubt and decrease your confidence level.
- It makes you feel downright horrible!
- It can put your life in danger.

The point I'm making, with the above in mind, is that our months-long experience with this historic COVID-19 pandemic and its effects are taking a toll on all of us, so patience is vital to our mental and physical health.

Implemented for our own safety, sheltering at home, wearing protective face masks, social distancing, closure of non-essential businesses and avoiding human interaction may be frustrating to some, exacerbating to others and financially exhausting to many. Normalcy is what we all

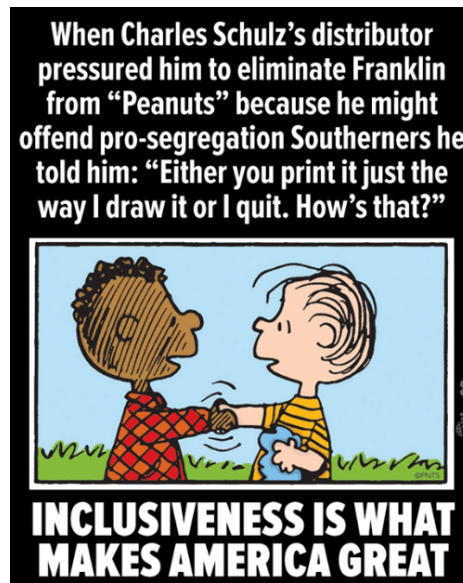


want back. Remaining calm and patient is the key.

Medical science is rapidly developing ways to cope with this new Coronavirus. Soon, we as a human race will breathe a collective sigh of relief as we slowly resume our lives with this pandemic behind us. Good things come to those who wait...and our patience will be rewarded in the near future.

Take care and stay safe, from MHS 1st VP Paul Larson

Food for Thought



THE MACCO PIT (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

there was a second landfill contract signed in 1946 for 6 million more yards of fill to be used for completion of 5 miles of the **Bayshore Freeway** between Colma Creek and Burlingame. At this time, this project was the largest single road contract for the **State Division of Highways**. The trucks often rolled 18 hours a day at high speed over this route through our little town of Millbrae.

In 1947, 147 homeowners in **Meadow Glen** and **Millbrae Highlands** signed a petition and presented it to the County Board of Supervisors demanding relief from what they described as an unbearable situation caused by the landfill operations. Restrictions were placed on the company's operation, and they did reduce the amount of blasting powder and space out the time between blasts, but windows in the neighborhood were still shattering during the blasting. Millbrae then passed ordinances further restricting the operation, and several Morrison employees were arrested by **Police Chief Walter Swope** for violating the new ordinances. The next day they were released without bail, and the blasting and hauling went on as usual. The Police Chief then arrested project manager **John L. Greg**, and two workers, which temporarily halted the operation. The City of San Francisco then became involved. Our little town of Millbrae obviously could not stand up to San Francisco in Superior Court. Millbrae officials pleaded with the judge that they were digging an enormous hole in our town and filling in the Bay with the dirt. In 1949, the operations continued at full stride. **Max Schmidt**, developer of the Meadow Glen tract, declared his own war and "gun in hand" halted the trucks crossing his land (near Tioga Drive). This did not last long, however. The Division of Highways took legal action, and Schmidt had to surrender his title to the right-of-way property.

In 1950, the project was finally completed. The overpasses were removed and the operations of the project

ceased. Headlines in the **Millbrae Sun** read "The Pit will be remembered as a sore spot in Millbrae History". According to the article, 17 million cubic yards of dirt was hauled out of this 245-acre site. That area also became known as the largest excavation in California to-date. The site was then purchased by **Stoneson Development Corporation** of San Francisco for \$400,000. Millbrae local realtor **Tony Rossi** handled the deal. The land was purchased from the **McCloud Family** of Los Angeles, principal stock holders of the Macco Company.



It did not take long for the Stoneson Company to start development of what was to become the **Millbrae Meadows**. On April 16, 1953 the headlines of the **Millbrae Sun** read "Stoneson to start development of 700 new homes in the Macco Pit". Early in 1955, there were 100 new homes nearing completion in the Meadows, and on September 30, 1955, the first family (the **Swift's**) moved into their new home at **1315 Ridgewood Drive**. The new homes were advertised starting at

\$15,450. Today, according to **Neighborhood Scout**, the median price of a home in Millbrae Meadows is \$1,399,583 - more expensive than 93.8% of all neighborhoods in California, and 98.8% more than all neighborhoods in the United States.

All cities on the Peninsula have their own unique microclimates including Millbrae, which is different than **Burlingame** and **San Bruno**. When I worked at my Dad's service station on Broadway in the 1960's, more than one "old timer" would tell me "these gusty winds blowing down Broadway were not as bad before they chopped off the top of our hill". I have also read sources that support the claim that the Macco Pit did in fact change Millbrae's climate. So next time someone asks you "Do you know where the Macco Pit was?", tell them to visit our Millbrae Museum and learn the whole story!

CURATOR'S REPORT
DOROTHY SEMKE

We are all hoping that all our members are safely sheltering at home and have all their needs met. It has been 14 weeks since we closed the Museum on February 29th due to the virus. We are looking forward to opening up as soon as we get the OK that it is safe. Since closing, we want to welcome a

new member – **Peter Sheerin**. We are all very saddened by the passing on April 19, 2020 of our dear, dear Trustee, Lifetime member, Docent and friend **George Habeeb**. He will truly be missed.



Dorothy Semke
Millbrae Museum Curator

TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS
ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR
VERN BRUCE, REPORTER

Hello everyone! As you may know, we had to close both our museums due to the virus scare. We also had to delay our **Grand Re-Opening** until an unknown date in the future. At that time you will be able to see our 'new' Train Museum with the new roof, various repairs made, new paint (inside and out), original-style light fixtures, re-surfaced 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).

Fortunately, we have been able to get quite a bit of work done in spite of being closed to the public. Much more of our operating telegraph system has been installed. Kudos to **Peter Sheerin** for creating that system. We have also made significant progress on preparing the **Larkins' surrey** for painting.



Our thanks also go out to our volunteers, including **Ben Guzzardi, Charlie Hegarty, Richard Kennedy, Jay King, Peter Sheerin,** and **Vern Bruce**, that have been helping out since our last news report.

Vernon Bruce
Reporter

Millbrae Word Search

J Y T L C B P L I T T L E W H A L E P M
 U U S S A V E X E L E F S Y G E Q H H A
 J K K U K L N I K E T I N A E L R M F C
 M F A F R A I F L O G D H B C C I I X C
 X A L M B I N Z I N M D I R H A K L A O
 C C G Z P L S E V A I L S O A M O L C P
 A A N N A A U Y I R L E T A D I O B M I
 U L Q D O I L Z N D L R O D B N P R A T
 S T G I A L A K G O S S R W O O S A L C
 D R S T N W I E S S E G I A U R D E M G
 C A N J U E J A P W S R C Y R E V X Q J
 X I W F J D M E A B T E A R N A X I S C
 K N B J F B N O C U A E L Y E L C A F A
 Y O U M S D W W E P T N M U S E U M A W
 G M V O S K G L S Y E V X W U J E Q Y G

- | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| FIDDLERS GREEN | LIVING SPACES | EL CAMINO REAL | LITTLE WHALE |
| HISTORICAL | MILLS ESTATE | LEONARDOS | MILLBRAE |
| PENINSULA | MAGNOLIA | MUSEUM | CHADBOURNE |
| CALTRAIN | BROADWAY | MACCO PIT | LAI LAI |

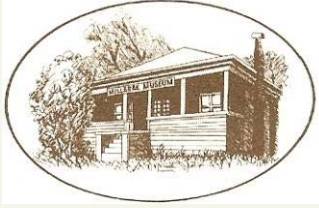
Pandemic Word Search

G	E	C	R	Z	R	O	N	T	C	S	M	R	V
N	H	I	E	I	S	M	P	I	T	N	C	S	F
I	M	C	C	A	P	S	I	A	I	C	T	T	A
T	U	U	E	R	S	E	Y	A	H	N	A	I	C
E	E	A	S	Y	I	A	I	E	V	O	I	M	E
E	F	F	S	E	T	U	C	H	R	C	F	U	M
M	S	R	I	H	O	M	N	Y	L	N	T	L	A
M	E	D	O	I	C	S	C	O	V	I	D	U	S
O	I	M	N	C	E	N	U	M	T	H	L	S	K
O	E	E	M	L	A	T	I	P	S	O	H	C	C
Z	D	T	E	A	V	I	R	U	S	K	A	H	O
D	M	P	A	N	D	E	M	I	C	C	C	E	T
E	N	I	C	C	A	V	M	C	S	A	C	C	A
H	T	M	T	R	A	C	A	T	S	N	I	K	L

- HOSPITAL
- VIRUS
- RECESSION
- ZOOM MEETING
- STAY AT HOME
- STIMULUS CHECK
- PANDEMIC
- COVID
- DR FAUCI
- FACE MASK
- VACCINE
- INSTACART

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/1245502/>

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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

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!
(Please note that Board meetings are being held online via Zoom until further notice)

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

(Please note that the Museums are closed to the public until further notice)