

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: MARTINELLI'S STEAK PIT BY FAYE DAWDY



Frank Martinelli II was a restaurateur from a family of pioneers in the San Francisco nightclub industry. The native San Franciscan started at the famous *Bal Tabarin* nightclub in the North Beach neighborhood. His father **Frank Martinelli** opened the *Bal Tabarin* with bandleader Tom Gerun and restaurateur **Bob Grison** in 1931. An architect named **Timothy Pflueger** was contracted to give the *Bay Tabarin* the sophistication that helped make it a very popular go-to cocktail spot in San Francisco, featuring many famous bands and multi-act floor shows including showgirls. Word has it that in 1936 **Ann Miller** danced there. In 1950, the *Bal Tabarin* was sold to **Austin Giuntoli** for \$100,000 and renamed *Bimbo's 365 Club*. Frank Martinelli's first venture was the hot dog stand at *Playland at the Beach*. He was often written about by columnist **Herb Caen**.

The *Coral Reef* was a Polynesian restaurant in Millbrae owned by **Buddy and Roberta Maleville**. Bing Crosby and Bob Hope frequented the restaurant in the 1950's. Frank Martinelli II bought the *Coral Reef* and renamed it *Martinelli's Steak Pit*. He also owned the *Chalet* in Redwood City, the *Beach House* and *Hillsdale Inn* in San Mateo, the *Adobe Creek Lodge* in Los Altos, and the *Vinegar Barrel Smokehouse* in Calistoga.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT JOHN MUNIZ

Hello friends and neighbors! By now you are pondering the big question - now that COVID-19 restrictions are being relaxed and vaccines are being distributed at a rapid pace, when will our three beautiful museums be opened? On June 8th, the Millbrae City Council will be discussing the feasibility of opening City buildings effective August 2nd. The Millbrae Museum and Carriage House are

City-owned buildings; therefore, we will comply with the decision of the City Council. If the City moves forward with the opening of City-owned facilities, I will schedule the opening of the Millbrae Museum, Carriage House, and Train Museum on August 14th. I will keep you posted.

When the three museums are finally opened, I think you will be impressed by some technology improvements that have been made by



our newest member, Train Museum docent, and Chief Technologist, **Peter Sheerin**. We now have full Wi-Fi access at all three museums, with the same Wi-Fi name and password. In this Newsletter, you will find the

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Wi-Fi instructions for all three museums. Once you are inside one of the museums, you scan the "QR" code with your phone or tablet, type in the password, and you are on the museum Wi-Fi. Once you are on the Millbrae Museum Wi-Fi, it is good for all three museums. Now that we have a more robust Wi-Fi network, we will be requesting approval from the Board to fund the purchase of two outdoor security cameras for the Millbrae Museum - one for the front porch and one for the rear porch.

We have also added some color to the Museum's front porch by adding some potted sunflowers and hydrangeas (see photo below).



If you have ever been to the Millbrae Museum, you surely have seen the 1900 **American Electric** telephone. Well, our vintage phone will not work over modern electronic phone lines - it is just for show. But, not anymore! Peter Sheerin has added the capability of using our American

Electric Telephone via an internet connection. We have connected the **Western Electric** wall phone at the Train Museum to an internet-based telephone service that replicates the sounds and operation of older telephone networks. The best feature is a volunteer human operator, so that when a visitor picks up the earpiece, they can call any normal telephone number and have a free phone conversation on a 1908 phone!

Do not forget the **Grand Re-Opening of the Train Museum** and **51st Anniversary of the Millbrae Historical Society** on Saturday, October 23, at the Millbrae Train Museum from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Thank you to all who serve the Millbrae Historical Society and their efforts to keep the history of Millbrae alive for future generations.

All the best to everyone,

John Muniz

Millbrae Historical Society President

"The Past is our Key to the Future."

BEFORE & AFTER



ROYAL CONTAINER



Please patronize our Millbrae Historical Society Lifetime Business Members:



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VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

PAUL LARSON

Greetings Millbrae Historical Society Trustees, Members, and Friends!

Happy June 2021! As life slowly returns to a more cautious sense of normal, let's reflect on the historic nature of what we've all been through as a society and a population.

Back at the end of 2019, the pending global pandemic wasn't on anybody's radar or even in our imagination. If you told anyone in November 2019 that in the coming months, and for much more than a year, we would close our economy, take up the practice of wearing face masks (eventually becoming a fashion accessory), shelter in place at home, avoid physical contact with our friends and loved ones and conduct meetings and family holidays

via our computers with something called **Zoom**, they would have thought that you were drinking too much from the liquor cabinet or describing the plot of the latest science-fiction movie. But yes, it was all real, and we all lived through it.

On the other hand, we need to remember all those who didn't survive **COVID-19**, look back at what we learned, and also our mistakes. In doing so we can help future generations know our experiences, thereby helping to prevent a repeat of this unprecedented period in history.

We're not out of the woods yet, and still we're seeing other areas of the world struggling with this horrific health crisis. But, if together we all stay focused by following health guidelines and logic, we'll soon be



back on the road to a complete worldwide recovery.

Stay safe, and all my best to you, your family and loved ones!

Paul Larson
MHS 1st Vice-President

Free Wi-Fi at MHS Museums

Log into this Wi-Fi once, and you will be able to connect to the Wi-Fi at all three of our museums:

- Carriage House
- Millbrae Museum
- Millbrae Train Museum

Newer smart phones can scan this QR Code to log in automatically. Just scan it with your built-in camera. (iOS users must set **Settings>Camera>Scan QR Codes** to on.)

Alternately, you can scan the QR code with Google Lens on Android, or with the Google App on iOS. Just look for the icon at right.



Wi-Fi Network Name	Password
Millbrae Historical Society	RanchoBuriBuri

What's new at the Millbrae Museums?

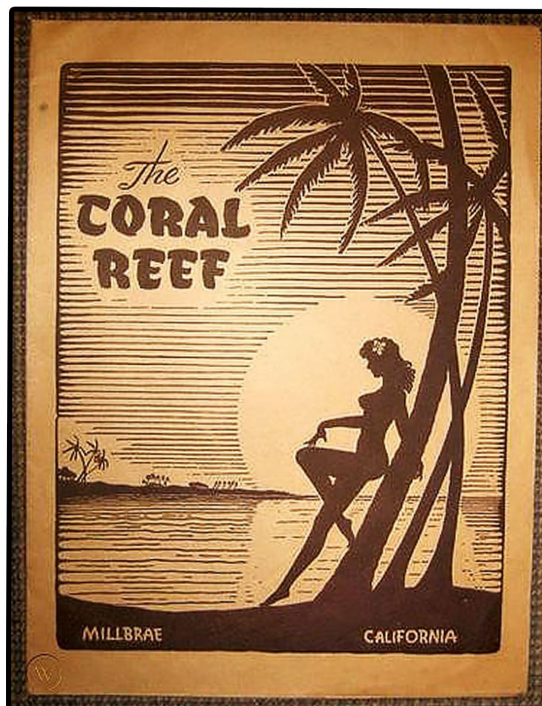


EXCERPT FROM MARTINELLI'S STEAK PIT
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Frank Martinelli II was also an aspiring actor and had parts in some gangster and war movies. In 1942, he joined the US Navy. He was later appointed to a Senate Committee that surveyed the aftermath of the war in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. After that, he became an account executive at a New York advertising agency, but ended up returning to the restaurant business working in both San Diego and Florida before coming to

Millbrae. He and his wife had four children.

Martinelli's Steak Pit was later sold to the **Bocci** family of Colma. Tom Bocci ran the restaurant for many years and it was a go-to establishment for many Millbrae and Bay Area residents. It was eventually sold and converted to ***Zen Peninsula*** restaurant that is still open today.

[illegible]

CURATOR'S REPORT

DOROTHY SEMKE

On Feb. 29, 2020, we closed the doors of the Museum, and it looks like we will be reopening them soon. Hopefully everyone has stayed well. We are looking forward to seeing you!

Welcome to new members **Thomas Day** (New Lifetime Member), **Patria Sundberg**, and **John O'Neill**.

Thank you so much to **Paul Baxter**

for all the boxes of information belonging to his parents, **Bill and Fran Baxter**, about the early days of the Museum and the move to its present location. Also included were WWII newspapers and magazines, and his father's uniform. Paul's parents were instrumental along with many others in making the Museum what it is today. Thank you to Paul also for all the music he has shared



with us over the years.

Stay well,
Dorothy Semke
Curator

TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS

PETER SHEERIN

Throughout the closure, **Millbrae Train Museum** volunteers have been working to build new exhibits, and in particular create interactive exhibits. The first of these links the **Millbrae Museum** and the Millbrae Train Museum together. We've connected the **1908 Western Electric 293A** phone at the Train Museum and the **1900 American Electric** phone at the Millbrae Museum to a vintage Internet telephone service, called the **Novelty Public Switched Telephone Network (NPSTN)**. The



NPSTN is a volunteer project that replicates the sounds and operation of the old North American telephone system. So even though neither phone has a dial, you'll be able to pick up the receiver and be connected directly to a human operator, who will then connect you to any 7-digit number on the NPSTN—a few of which are at other museums. We have also reserved the entire OXford 7 exchange, so that we can use historical Millbrae phone numbers in the exhibit!


HELP SUPPORT THE NEW MILLBRAE RECREATION CENTER!

Millbrae's beloved Recreation Center burnt to the ground on July 21, 2016. Our new facility will create a beautiful space providing a safe and healthy space for our seniors, youth, and families. Construction is already underway, and the new center is anticipated to open in Spring 2022.

While the City has secured \$30 million in funds to build the structure, we are still in need of addition-

al financial resources to bring this vital facility to life. An additional \$1.75 million is needed to purchase furnishings, fixtures, and equipment, including security, audio/visual, phone and data systems, as well as public art and landscaping. This is a team effort – we need your help now to reach our fundraising goal and giving Millbrae back its beloved Recreation Center! Please consider making a donation TODAY.

Your contribution can be permanently
recognized on the donor wall.

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MHS OFFICERS – 2021-22

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

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

Saturday, August 21: *Millbrae Machines Car Show*, 8:00 am - 3:00 pm.

- Community event hosted by the **Millbrae Lions Club** featuring over 250 amazing vehicles.
Downtown Millbrae on Broadway

Saturday/Sunday, September 4 & 5: *Millbrae Art & Wine Festival*

- Celebrate the 50th anniversary of this beloved community celebration!
Downtown Millbrae on Broadway

Saturday, September 18: *2021 Mid-Autumn Festival*, 12:00 noon - 7:30 pm

- Community event hosted by the **Millbrae Cultural Committee** featuring music, dance, and food.
Downtown Millbrae (300/400 blocks of Broadway)

Saturday, October 23: *Grand Reopening of Millbrae Train Museum & MHS 51st Anniversary*

- 10:00 am - 4:00 pm at the Millbrae Train Station, California Drive at Murchison Drive
- Celebrate the reopening of the Millbrae Train Museum featuring new interactive historical exhibits!

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)