

40^{YEAR} ANNIVERSARY

Forty years ago, a handful of Burlingame residents, inspired by the upcoming U.S. Bicentennial celebrations in 1976, met to form a local historical society. The first officers were Martha Rosman May, Beverley Evans, Don Ringler and Nancy Constantino. They were a real estate agent, a graduate history student, a high school teacher and a long term resident. What they shared was a passion for the Burlingame-Hillsborough area and a desire to preserve its unique history. For ten years, the “archive” was located in home closets. Forty years later, that archive collection has grown from one donated item to nearly 140,000. Those first four members have grown to just under four hundred. In this special anniversary insert we invite you to take a glimpse at what our small all-volunteer Burlingame Historical Society has accomplished in 40 years – and invite you to make a special contribution in this anniversary year to ensure a strong future.



Founding member Martha May (left) is still active in the archives, spending at least two days a week there.



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead



The First Twenty Years our Society focused on collecting our history and building a sense of Burlingame Pride. Among many other donations, precious photos from the turn-of-the-century Burlingame County Club days were donated and catalogued. Two books were published (one containing interviews with long-time residents and a history of building development in downtown; the other containing a reprint of early newspaper columns). Heritage walking tours were conducted of Burlingame Avenue and North Burlingame. Burlingame Day parades were held for several years. We were a regular fixture at Art in the Park. In 1983, the city celebrated its 75 anniversary. Residents raised money to save and restore the collapsing 1894 train station and the aging 1920s Broadway neon arch. In recognition of the importance of our young Society, in 1986 the city agreed to let us house our archive in the city-owned former Gunst estate carriage house. In one year, with advice from professional archivists and librarians and with the help of 17 volunteers, our growing collection of stories, photographs and ephemera was moved to our new home and catalogued for easy access. The archives, affectionately called “Burlingame’s Attic,” was, and is, the soul of our organization. Our volunteers donate thousands of hours annually. The archives is the “go to” spot for obtaining rare images of the past, for conducting research, (including the age of buildings which can be dated through city water records and Board of Realtor listings) and for keeping alive the stories of our community.

In granting our archives a home, the city seemed to realize that we were more than just a “group of white-haired collectors and hoarders reminiscing about the past in a musty environment.” We are preserving the city’s soul.

The Second Twenty Years have seen continued growth. Once the archives had a home and a professional system of cataloguing was established, our efforts turned to education and outreach (in addition to the ongoing work of archiving). Our "Passport Tours" (i.e. educational field trips) have provided thousands of third graders a memorable trip through their city's history. We've installed historical markers along Burlingame Avenue. We restored an early 1900 wall mural advertising the Severn Lodge Dairy. The old city hall cupola was repainted, the Norberg library chandelier was rewired and restored. We published a third book at the time of the city's centennial. Shortly thereafter we opened a museum to showcase our history and a portion of our archive collection. Our robust website allows for persons around the world to view the many exhibits we've placed online. Video equipment allows us to record oral histories on film, as well as audio tapes, and a joint program with the library facilitates the viewing of the films on computer screens at the library. Computers have allowed us to more easily transcribe oral histories and offer them in a variety of ways. Our row of Howard-Ralston eucalyptus trees along El Camino Real were listed in the National Register of Historic Places, in recognition of the historic importance of those trees to this community. Our quarterly meetings are drawing overflow crowds. Perhaps most satisfying, is that there seems to be a renewed awareness of our history and the importance of keeping it alive for future generations.



Our Future depends on you! Perhaps the biggest change in our recent history has been technological. Computers and the internet have allowed us to extend our educational efforts worldwide to anyone on the web. We know, for example, that people are enjoying our website information in over 50 countries around the world. We are in the process of digitizing many of the photographs, letters and other documents in our archives. Ultimately, we would love to put at least a portion of our archive online to enable arm-chair researchers to access our collection. Where we once told our stories exclusively in person or in print, we would love to be able to produce short films. All of this takes both time and money, as do basic supplies and insurance. Please consider a way you can contribute something extra this anniversary year: \$40 for 40 years; help us recruit 40 new members by encouraging your friends to become members or, better yet, give them a membership; spend 4 hours sorting through your photographs and give us (or let us scan a copy) of that one photograph "you've been meaning to donate"; spend 4 hours as a docent in our museum or volunteer in some other capacity. Remember, we need each and every one of you in order to continue doing what we do with an all-volunteer workforce and a tight budget.

Happy 40th Anniversary, Burlingame Historical Society!

We wish you many many more!

Please consider a gift of \$1 for every year

\$40 for 40 years

