

THE RECORD

Our Shared Stories

One reason we collect history is because it helps build community. When we hear someone else's memory, we connect it to that of our own, strengthening the bonds between us. Or, perhaps our experience is not similar, but in hearing a story we learn something about the storyteller and become closer. Simply put: shared stories, whether around the campfire, at the water cooler, or at the family dinner table, unite us. The Burlingame Historical Society has been recording oral histories (both video and audio) since our inception in 1975. Recently, we began a project to transcribe our complete collection so it will be more accessible. Ultimately, our goal is to make much of our rich archive collection available online. We hope you enjoy the excerpts below.

The "Healthy" Small-Town Malt



I get businessmen in my restaurant constantly. They come in a suit and tie and they walk in -- they almost run in -- but they walk in, they look around, they sit at the counter, because they figure this is going to be quicker. And they sit at the counter and they want to order in two seconds. The waitress comes by and they'll say "I want a burger." or "Get me a hamburger." That's it . . . The waitress is writing it down, and they're sitting in there waiting, and they're waiting, and it's been like half a minute and they're going [starts to tap fingers]. So finally, they're looking around and they're watching the fountain waitress make a milkshake, taking the scoop, doing this, doing that, putting the milk in, putting it on the thing. They're watching. Then they watch her make a Coke. She takes a glass with ice, puts the syrup in and then puts the soda water in and stirs it and all this. All of a sudden -- and I've seen it so many times -- they'll say, "Waitress, give me a chocolate milkshake -- no, no, give me . . . make it a malt! I'd rather have a malt. And before they're done, they're still in a hurry, but they're like a half what they were. And, I have actually seen them many times loosen their tie and sit there and drink that milkshake like it was the best cocktail they've ever had after a hard day! I mean, you hear them make that slurping that you hear kids doing -- slurp! And you look, and it's an adult. They get up and they have just a little bit of a smile, and they've gone back in time somewhere where they had lived or grown up or experienced a drug store with a fountain . . . and it's calmed them down for just a few minutes and they enjoy it.

Al Mazzoni owned Towles from 1974-2002

The Maid At the corner of Hillside Drive and El Camino lived Dr. and Mrs. Schultz whose idiosyncrasies endeared them to all the children in the neighborhood. Mrs. Schultz had a pet monkey named Fifi who roamed the house at will. When we rang the bell, we were admitted by Fifi dressed in her French maid's uniform -- a frilly top and black dress covered by a white apron. Fifi had no idea she was a monkey -- she thought she was one of us, but she wouldn't keep her shoes on and hid them all over the house, once in the living room chandelier. **Myrtle "Cookie" Potter, author of "Childhood Years in My Burlingame Paradise" died in 2009. She lived 86 of her 95 years in Burlingame.**

Next Quarterly Meeting:

Tuesday

October 22, 2013

**AN EVENING OF
ORAL &
LIVING HISTORIES**



**PREMIER SHOWING
OF BURLINGAME
LIBRARY'S ORAL
HISTORY PROJECT
AND
A LIVING HISTORY
RE-ENACTMENT OF
THE LIVES OF
ETHEL CROCKER**



A.P. GIANNINI

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OUR SHARED STORIES, continued . . .



Building The Carolands

Before I started practicing on my own, I worked in the office under Willis Polk, a famous SF architect . . . I worked on The Carolands mansion up in Hillsborough . . . that was an interesting job because the Carolands brought plans from France. . . But, of course, the plans were made in France with French word titles and the dimensions were in meters and centimeters. The building contractors here naturally couldn't figure it, so it was redrawn by Willis Polk's office and the building was actually erected from the plans that we made in the office there. It was quite unusual, and I think it was the largest and most magnificent residential building ever built here in California . . . It was a real masterpiece of residential architecture. **Colonel Ernest Norberg, architect of the Burlingame Public Library, Levy Bros., San Mateo High School, and the "Candy Store" among other buildings.**

Everything came through that Burlingame Station, and there was a steady stream of horse-drawn teams up Burlingame Avenue up to the Carolands, carrying slabs of marble and artifacts from France, and that went on for more than a year. We would hop on one of those wagons once in a while, but we could walk faster than those horses could go, about three miles an hour.

Bob Murphy, son of James Murphy, an early train station master and city clerk

Pears, Apples and Cherries

See those apples?

They didn't come from Watsonville. They came from the Donnelly backyard. There was a big orchard. It ran all the way to Primrose Road and there was no Donnelly Avenue then. It was a couple of acres of pears, apples and cherries.

Jed Stuart, early Burlingame resident



The Smell of Carriage Varnish

My dad [Ferguson Owen] was the first Constable of Burlingame. . . Due to the small salary my father received as Constable, he had to supplement his income. He was a painter when he lived in San Francisco, so when he came to Burlingame [in 1909] he opened a paint shop on Lorton Avenue. . . During those days my father painted the carriages from Hillsborough and the fire trucks and did all the lettering and the scroll work on them. He had an area in his paint shop divided off by cheesecloth, and he'd put the carriages, when they were ready for varnishing, in that small area to keep the dust from collecting on them. I can still smell that varnish when I think of it.

Ruth Owen Stevens



DID YOU KNOW?

The City of Burlingame did not have "city water" until September 1913, one year after residents passed a \$175,000 bond measure to finance its construction. What a wonderful modern invention we now frequently take for granted -- fresh, purified water available "on tap"! Part of our archive collection includes the old city water records. The address of each home and the date that it first received city water were hand-recorded on 4"x 6" index cards. Those cards are a handy way for us to establish the build-date of many older homes. One of our board members has been busy identifying how many homes still exist that were among those that first received city water in 1913. Her count to date: 703 -- or approximately 10 percent of our city inventory of almost 7,000 single-family structures.



Oral History Evening

California luminaries Ethel Crocker and A.P. Giannini come to life as portrayed by popular Living History performers **Chuck and Cynthia Arella!**

The Library and Historical Society will also be celebrating their partnership on the



Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2013

7pm

recently completed **Burlingame Living History Project.** Several short clips of local life stories will be premiered on the big screen. Cake will be served!

Tuesday, October 22nd at 7 p.m. in the Lane Room of the Public Library. Please join us for an entertaining trip way back in time.

We would like to thank our member **Kristine Smith** for her generous donation that has been matched by the **BlackRock Matching Gift Program** and welcome new **Lifetime Benefactor Member Joe Cotchett**, who made a donation in honor of retiring Councilmember and Former Mayor Cathy Baylock.

Uncommon Classmates

I went to a private school for boys and girls between E. Bellevue and Poplar [in San Mateo]. I don't know whose big home that was that had the school in it -- it had been a private home. We have some well-known families in our area whose children attended there when I was going there: Mimi and Patricia Tobin, Marjorie Blythe, Jane and Eleanor Christianson, Jennie Crocker's children . . . I went to school with them every day . . . One day, Tanya Whitman invited me to have lunch with her, but I didn't know I was going to go to the Crocker estate, and I didn't know Jennie Crocker was her mother . . . When I drove into the estate, I

had no idea this was where I would have lunch, and into this beautiful mansion, and the children had their own dining room to have lunch in. Tanya's bedroom was out of this world. She had a beautiful French "whatnot" cabinet that she had beautiful treasures of nice little girl things. She had a little blue cloisonee Eversharp pencil that I thought was ever so beautiful, and she said if you would like to have it you may, and I thought I shouldn't take it, but she insisted, so I took it and I wore it on a ribbon around my neck. In those days you carried your pencil. Then we took a long hike down all the grounds of the Crocker's -- they had a swimming pool, statues, and we got far from the house, and I saw a maidenhair fern and I said I'd like a little clump of fern to take home to my mother. Tanya was afraid to ask the gardener who was there because she was not allowed to go away from the house that far without her governess looking after her. So we did get some fern and we stuffed it in my school bag so they wouldn't know we'd been that far from the house. The chauffeur brought me home in a little Ford like my family had, but theirs had an open roof. He brought me up to Carmelita and turned and we came up Cabrillo almost to Broadway and I didn't want him to know I live in this little house at 1212 Cabrillo . . . I [told him to park in front of a bigger house on the street] and said you don't have to wait [for me to safely enter], my mother's expecting me. . . It wasn't too long after that my little friend Tanya Whitman died of leukemia. I was very sad and I really cherished that little blue cloisonee pencil that she gave me that day . . . **Virginia Hower Meitz was a 1932 graduate of Burlingame High School. In 1935, she was crowned the first "Miss Burlingame" and was the "Theme Girl" for the 1936 San Mateo County Fiesta Fair. She is pictured on the beach at right, above with an unidentified friend.**



Address Service Requested - Time Dated Material

Calendar

Quarterly Meeting

Oral History Evening

Tuesday, October 22

7 p.m. Lane Room, Library

Peninsula Rail Service 150th

Saturdays Oct 19 and Jan. 18

(11-3pm check Caltrain website for details)

Museum Open:

Sundays: Oct 6, Nov. 3, Dec 1

1-4 p.m.

***150 Years of Rail on the Peninsula:**

Caltrain Celebration Saturday: Oct. 19th,
MENLO PARK STATION 11-3pm

*Please remember
us in your will!*

THE BURLINGAME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2013, ISSUE # 136

President's Message - *Jennifer Pfaff*



As indicated throughout this newsletter, we have been assisting the library with the launch of their new oral history project that will premiere at our quarterly

meeting in October. By then the library should have touch screen computer kiosks available for visitors to view interviews and hear the life stories of several of the people who call Burlingame "home." Independent from the library, we have been capturing oral histories since our inception. This work has been spearheaded by **Cathy Foxhoven** in the past few years. We would also like to thank posthumously **Robert May** and other late board members who saw the value of capturing people's stories while they were still among us. We have **Bobbi Benson** to

thank for many of the transcriptions you read in this newsletter, in addition to my mother, **Linda Easton**-- it was her way of keeping busy while a brief illness kept her home. Thanks also to **Marci Benson** and **Merrill Komai** for their video and editing skills, **Martha May** and **Mary Packard** for preparatory research, **Linda Field**, **Anita Fernandes**, and **Ron Bulatoff** for organization and cataloguing that will be ongoing. Thanks and congratulations to **Brad McCulley**, **Patricia Harding**, **the Burlingame Library and Library Foundation** for completion of their new project. Thanks also to the **Burlingame City Council** (for the \$925 Community Grant to convert vintage cassettes to digital disk technology).

Oral histories involve a variety of skill-sets, from interviewing, to transcriptions and digital editing. *Please contact us if you think you might have skills to share!*

Current Officers 2013:

President - Jennifer Pfaff

VP - Museum

Russ Cohen

VP - Membership and

Education

Diane Condon-

Wirgler

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Secretary - Rosalie
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