

THE RECORD

2022
ANNUAL :
“Tales from Auto
Row”
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THE MAGIC OF NEON

BY RUSS COHEN

Before the introduction of neon, cities may have seemed a wash of grey. It's hard to imagine Las Vegas, Broadway or the Moulin Rouge without their bright neon lights—those glowing, colorful, intricately curved glass tubes of gas that provide “art in the air.”

Neon lights were named for neon, a gas discovered in 1898 that gives off an orange light. Soon thereafter, it was discovered that when combined with other gases and chemicals neon could produce a range of colors. By adding hydrogen one could obtain a **red** color. The addition of helium produced **yellow**, carbon dioxide white and mercury **blue**.



A businessman with a flair for advertising, Earle C. Anthony, introduced neon signs to America in the 1920s—the decade of consumerism and the car. On a trip to France in 1917 he saw neon for the first time and ordered three large neon signs to promote his Packard dealership in Los Angeles. By 1928, Anthony also had opened a dealership in the growing community of Burlingame. His showroom featured large neon letters spelling out “PACKARD” atop a large tower that sat at the peak of the building’s roof.

This showroom, located at 1021 Burlingame Avenue near the train station, still exists (just across from the Washington Park tennis courts) but now without its once prominent neonized lettering on the metal tower. (*Fun facts: Anthony was also responsible for the concept of gas stations. Not only did he sell all of his stations to Standard Oil, now Chevron, he designed the chevron-shaped logo that is still in use today, although the design has been slightly modernized. He was also instrumental in the concept of the interurban bus, that later became Greyhound.*)



Sterling Cleaners - 1140 Howard Ave.

Neon signs in Burlingame were not (and are not) relegated to automobile dealerships. Neon can be found throughout the city. Neon provided direction to visitors looking for the city's Police Department at Burlingame's early city hall on Park Road. The Sterling Cleaners sign, newly painted pink on Howard Avenue, was originally located around the corner on Highland Avenue marking an early location of the cleaners.



Years ago, a neon sign highlighted the "Hotel Burlingame" (now Sephora) on the corner of Burlingame Avenue and Lorton Avenue. Where to eat? Just look west and one could see the bright neon of the Towle's Fountain sign that once graced the southwest corner of Primrose and Burlingame Avenue. On Burlingame's Broadway in the 1940s, 50s and 60s you'd find neon



Your Cleaners - 1321 Broadway



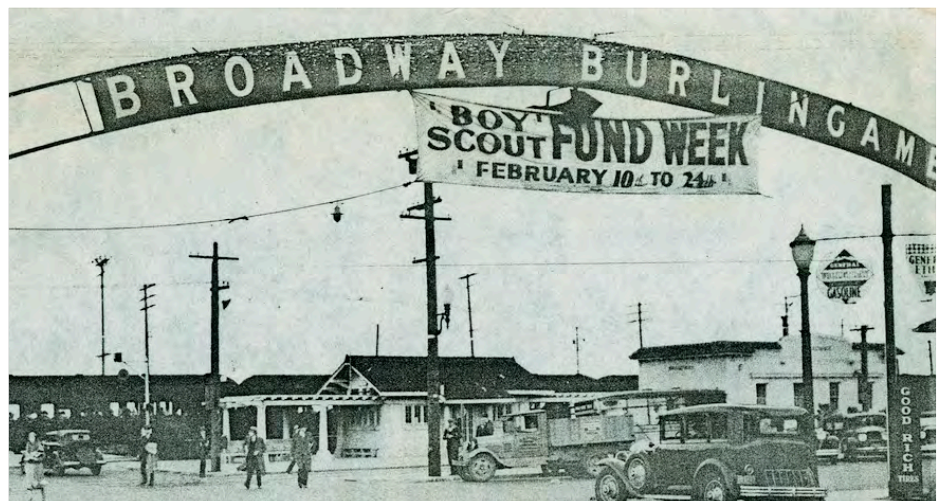
Preston's - 1170 Broadway

advertising great food at *Bob's on Broadway* or, to this day, if you crave an ice cream or hand dipped candy the neon Preston's Candies sign might lure you inside the store. At *Your Cleaners*, a bright red and green neon sign continues to greet customers on Broadway.



The Broadway Arch - Photo by Mark Hundley c. 2015

Perhaps the most recognizable neon sign in Burlingame, the Broadway Arch, has quite the history. Concerned citizens have saved it from destruction on at least two occasions. The 100-year-old sign used to read "PACIFIC CITY" and hung over Howard Avenue near today's Safeway store to direct traffic to the long defunct amusement park at Coyote Point. By the mid-1920s, the Broadway Development Association had acquired the arched signage and reconfigured it with individual backlit tiles to spell: *BROADWAY-BURLINGAME*. Within ten years, however, the electric (but not neon)



The Broadway Arch - pre-neon, tiled lettering c. 1933

sign had fallen into disrepair due to lack of maintenance, and there were calls to dispose of it. Admitting the sign had not been serviced properly, the Broadway Development Association in 1937 requested that the “old-fashioned” sign be “neonized” with red 18-inch letters. This request was approved by the City Council in 1938, at a cost of \$500. Twenty years later, there were again calls by the City Manager to dismantle the sign, due to the cost of maintenance. By the late 1970s came the energy crisis— the sign went completely dark; it was decided no repairs would be pursued “to save power and energy costs”.

By 1987, the Broadway Merchants Association launched a drive to properly restore the sign. A street fair raised \$5,000, but repair was initially estimated to be \$15-\$20,000. No company stepped forward to do the work or absorb the cost. Another snag was hit when it was learned the sign would need to be relocated 50 feet westward, due to a public works project at the intersection of California Drive. When all was said and done, the city absorbed a chunk of the cost of staff hours, and the lit and refurbished neon sign was dedicated on November 26th, 1988, at a cost of nearly \$44,000. *Learn more about the Burlingame Arch by visiting the Burlingame Historical Society Youtube channel.*

Many of the signs mentioned here have been saved and are in the collection of the Burlingame Historical Society. These include the Towle’s Fountain sign, the original city hall Police sign, the Burlingame Hotel sign, Ricci’s sport shop, the Shoe Clinic and many more. Currently the Police



Lower left and above:

Newer neon signage adorns the Broadway Grill, 1400 Broadway - Original sign design and photos by Martin Dreiling c. 2006 (Dreiling Terrones Architecture, Inc., Burlingame)

sign is being restored and will be on display inside the museum when it returns to a regular schedule. Other signs are in the planning and fundraising stages to be restored as well. If you would like to help fund the restoration, simply send donations specifying the restoration to The Burlingame Historical Society, PO Box 144, Burlingame, CA 94011.

ANNUAL PRESENTATION:

"Tales from Auto Row"

We are excited to plan our first in-person meeting in two years—**Sunday, February 13, 2022 at the Lions Club Hall (990 Burlingame Ave.) 1:45** for Election of Executive Officers (see page 7). **At 2:00 pm** society member, classic car enthusiast and long-time Burlingame Auto Row salesman **Richard Griffith** will present *Tales from Auto Row*.

Using many historic images from our collection, Richard will discuss why one of the first auto rows in California



Photo by Norton Pearl

was in Burlingame, and how Auto Row has evolved over the last century. With many decades of experience, Richard has tales to tell! This is a presentation car lovers will not want to miss!

Bring your mask and dress warmly (we will have windows open for ventilation). Since Covid regulations may change by Feb. 13, check our website: burlingamehistory.org or call our office phone (650-340-9960) and listen to our outgoing message to learn of changes to plans, including phone and meeting numbers for a ZOOM session, if we cannot meet in person.

ACQUISITIONS: With thanks to...

Mollie Ricker of Dostart Development Co. for images (such as those shown at right, of the stone relief "The Letter" by James L. Hansen being carefully removed from the Lorton Avenue wing of the former Burlingame Post Office for reuse on their new office and retail project; **Jim Shypertt** for various digital files, including images of significant new building projects underway in Burlingame in 2021 (250 California Drive, 920 Bayswater Avenue, "Public Garage" on Highland Avenue, Burlingame Village on Primrose Road, 220 Park Road, etc.); **Ron Bulatoff** for a digital image of the demolition of 1920 Carmelita Avenue (aka the Constantino home) in October 2021; **Jim Kelly** for a Sept. 1954 *SM Times* article on Rorke's store that includes information on the then "new" owner, but also a brief history of their two prior locations in Burlingame, before erecting the 1939 building at 261 Park Road (now Pet Express) and 1928 *SM Times* clippings related to the feud between architect E.L. Norberg and the City of Burlingame, regarding ownership of creek bed property running through the business district; **Lee Livingston** for a web-based Delaware publisher *Wall St., LLC Special Report*: "America's 50 Best Cities to Live" © 2021 by Grant Suneson, that ranks Burlingame, California as the "best city to live in America"; **Mark Lucchesi and Ray Tyler** for conducting and filming a podcast of **John Horgan** on October 13, 2021,



and the DVD thereof; **Linda Field** for photos related to Preston's Candies and Ice Cream 75th anniversary celebration on Saturday, October 16, 2021 at 1170 Broadway, Burlingame; **Ben Maiden** for in-depth information related to Jim Kelly's article (published in our Fall 2020

edition) about the origins of the 1920s radio station that operated from Burlingame High School's auditorium. According to Maiden, the station "call letters"—in this case KFQH and KFOB—the "K" typically meant a station located "west" of the Mississippi, the "H" likely

designated "Hillsborough" initially, and then was later changed to bring in a "B" for "Burlingame"; **David Day and the Dessin Families** for glass slides from the early 1900s depicting unidentified scenes from the early 1900s as well as a Hillsborough Fire Dept. truck, all of which were photographed by pioneer **Harry Dessin**; **Martin Dreiling**, DTA, Burlingame for 6 digital images (c.2006) of the new Broadway Grill neon signage at 1400 Broadway, Burlingame (see pg. 4); and **Mark Hundley** for one image of the Broadway Arch in neon, in 2015 (see pg. 3)

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2021:

Archive work resumed: In the Spring of 2021, many of us were vaccinated allowing our volunteers to return to the archives to do the important archive work of cataloging and recording our acquisitions.

Quarterly meetings: Cases of Covid-19 continued to be problematic enough that we held 3 of our quarterly meetings on Zoom. Although these Zoom meetings are less than ideal, the good news is that if you

missed them you can see them online at our



author John Horgan (shown at left) joined us to present a *Walking Tour of Burlingame High School* (this tour was filmed and will be posted soon on the SMCHA website). In our Fall quarterly titled, "What's your Story?", society members read vivid memories from Burlingame residents, past and present, and then we were joined by Liz Dossa, a certified guided autobiography instructor, for a brief presentation on how you can start recording your story.

Newsletters: In 2021, we also made a conscious effort to provide longer, more substantive stories in our newsletter. In Spring, we gave you the story of Agnes Poett Howard Howard Bowie, the matriarch of

Burlingame and Hillsborough. In the Summer newsletter, we gave you the story of Burlingame's first fire-fighting equipment, the chemical wagon, and its restoration. We also noted the passing and included short obituaries of the progeny of local pioneers (Jack Gates, Duffy Offield and Bobby Henderson, Jr.) In the Fall, we bought you the charming history of many of our "Beasts of Burlingame."

Podcasts and Films: This year we also partnered with society member and semi-retired Mollie Stones Manager Mark Lucchesi (at right) with the creation of podcast interviews of local residents, such as John Horgan and Jerry Mangini (son of Burlingame Mayor and Burlingame High School Principal, Vic Mangini). We also added a tenth short film to our Burlingame Before series (topic: Pacific City). Each of these digital items will be added to either our YouTube channel or our website Burlingamehistory.org (or both).

Museum: We are busy working to get our museum back open, when Covid-safety protocols allow, building new walls to hold exhibits and restoring some of our collection of neon signs.



The James R. Murphy house being reconstructed and enlarged at 524 Oak Grove Ave. (seen in Nov. 2021) following its move from Douglas Ave. in Fall 2020

Burlingame Historical Society channel on YouTube or our website Burlingamehistory.org. The Winter Quarterly, titled "New Places for Old Homes," was a fascinating look at the history of house-moving in Burlingame. The Spring Quarterly featured "Cathy Foxhoven: A Tribute". Once again our summer quarterly was a walking tour done in conjunction with San Mateo County Historical Association's Victorian Days. Society member, newspaper columnist, sports announcer and



A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS *(in no particular order)*

for generously contributing to our 2021 Year-End Fundraising Drive

Anonymous
-in Memory of Nick Baylock
 Linda Easton
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 Shar Beckheyer
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 Lorraine Smith
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 Mary Thompson
 Joanne and Pete Garrison
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 Don Donoughe and Beth Concoby
 Patrick Gilbride
 Michael Gaul
 Richard Kirchner
 John and Leslie McQuaide
 Alex Veech

ANNUAL ELECTIONS: Sunday February 13th at 1:45pm**Proposed Executive Board Slate - 2022-23**

The Nominating Committee has proposed the following slate of executive officers, that was approved at the November Board meeting:
 President - **Jen Pfaff**; VP Museum - **Russ Cohen**; VP Technology and Educational Tours - **Diane Condon-Wirgler**; Treasurer - **Mary Griffith**; Secretary - **Leslie McQuaide**. *Nominations for all positions will also be taken from the floor at our Annual Meeting on Feb. 13th at 1:45, or in writing by mail to our PO Box 144, Burlingame, CA 94011, prior to Friday, February 4th, 2022.*

Membership renewals for 2022 are due.**Please use the enclosed envelope:**

Senior/Student \$30, Individual \$50, History Buff \$100, Charles Seabiscuit Howard \$500, Anson Burlingame \$1000. Life memberships are no longer offered, but existing Life Memberships will be honored. Life Members are always welcome to donate:)

Welcome NEW MEMBERS:

Howard Wettan
 Greg Ippolito

In Memoriam:

Joe Tanzi



Vintage neon at 1000 Oak Grove



Burlingame Historical Society
P.O. Box 144
Burlingame, Ca 94011
www.burlingamehistory.org
650-340-9960

Address Service Requested - Time Dated Material

Calendar:

**Burlingame Hillsborough
History Museum-**

***Note:** Due to Covid-19 safe distancing limitations, our museum is currently closed, but is being updated. Please check our website for updates.

**Richard Griffith presents:
"Tales from Auto Row"**

Sunday, Feb. 13, 2022

**1:45 Board Elections, 2pm
program**

Lions Hall, 990 Burlingame Ave.

see pg. 5

*Please remember us
in your trust or will!*

President's Message - Best Wishes from Jennifer Pfaff in 2022

We hope you enjoy the bit of color we've included in this Annual newsletter to help bring you some joy this season.

Thank you to all for the kind notes, and expressions of appreciation for our work, and of course, the generous donations that you've sent us over the past year.

I am eternally grateful to our Board for our accomplishments in 2021. To our loyal group of Archive volunteers in particular, we owe a debt of gratitude for all their help keeping up with the artifacts we've received during the pandemic. Thank you to **Linda Easton** and **Lee Ebbert** for sorting and indexing thousands of vintage mls listings 1970s-1990s; to **Linda Field** for her patience (and calmness) while cataloguing so much backlog that it can be overwhelming, to **Ron Bulatoff** for reaching the middle of the "R" drawer in the card catalogue drawers—quite a milestone that he seems to effortlessly

accomplish while moving data from a physical card to the Past Perfect digital catalogue where it is becoming "searchable"; to filers **Donna Lema-Cerna** and **Linda Pebet** who regularly file items ranging from small scraps of newsprint to beautifully printed glossy ads (and everything in between) so that our Archives will remain useful and relevant into the future. To **Mary Packard** for her particularly lovely correspondence notes to our donors and new members. A special thanks to member **Ray Tyler** for his ongoing, invaluable help with videography; and to member **Rob Adams** for sifting through more than 50 reel-to-reel tapes from the Schlage Lock Co., (*whose founders lived in Burlingame*), a handful of which contain very interesting early information from the lock company's Visitacion Valley years. These will be donated to the S.F. History Room in the Main Public Library.

Current Officers 2021:

President - Jennifer Pfaff

*VP - Museum - Russ
Cohen*

*VP Technology and
Education -*

Diane Condon-Wirgler

Treasurer and Newsletter

- Joanne Garrison

Secretary - Mary Griffith

Corresponding Secretary

-Mary Packard

Social Media-

-Cathy Baylock

Membership Co-Chairs-

Carl Martin

and

Leslie McQuaide