

THE RECORD

Burlingame's Front Door

by Joanne Garrison

Quarterly
EVENT

Walking Tour:
Up, Down, All Around

Aug. 4, 1pm

PG. 5



This Fall our train station will turn 130 years old. In many ways, the station's landmark status and its importance in our community throughout the decades can be compared to San Francisco's Ferry Building. In his recent book, *Portal*, John King (the *San Francisco Chronicle's* urban design critic) said that the purpose of San Francisco's Ferry Building, completed in 1898, was functional, but the architectural aims were grandiose. The same could be said of Burlingame's Train Station which opened four years earlier on October 10, 1894. Indeed, the men behind San Francisco's Ferry Building were some of the same ones behind the construction of Burlingame's train station.

Members of the Burlingame Country Club ("BCC"), founded in 1893, lobbied for the station, selected its location, and chose its architects. The members also insisted that the station stop be named "Burlingame" after their Club. The Southern Pacific Railroad ("SP") was involved, of course, but it contributed less than

half the cost of the station – the Country Club members picking up the bulk of the tab. As architects, the BCC selected George H. Howard (*at right*), Club member and a scion of the family who owned the property on which the station would sit, and Joachim B. Mathisen, a Norwegian immigrant who had been a draftsman in the office of A. Page Brown at the time Brown designed the California Pavilion for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Commissioned to reflect the uniqueness of California, Brown designed the temporary Chicago structure to resemble a California mission. Although some critics found the building



abhorrent (especially when contrasted with the classical white formal Beaux Arts style of the rest of the Fair's buildings) others recognized that a new



California-inspired regional style was emerging. After the Fair, the U.S.

With the new train station, the BCC had created a welcoming "front door" to their club. They were justly proud of what they had created, especially when two months after its opening the *SF Chronicle* gushed that the station was the "prettiest on the line." The importance of the new station was not just for San Francisco's upper class, however. The area always had a mixed population of economic levels, even before

the Earthquake of 1906 when more middle-class people fled to the presumed safety of Burlingame. Farmers, carpenters and stable hands were just some of the skills needed for this budding community. The four dirt lanes surrounding the station became known as the Burlingame Square.

There you

Congress gave Brown a merit award for the building.

Thus, when the BCC members sought to put their stamp on the train station that would welcome privileged guests to their new Club, it was not a surprise that Howard and Mathisen chose the new Mission Style as their theme. Both Brown and Howard were members of the BCC. In fact, Brown had recently designed the five cottages off El Camino Real that formed the nucleus of the Club. One suspects that the only reason Brown was not directly involved with the Burlingame train station was that he was too busy, having just been selected in late 1892 to design SF's Ferry Building.

The Mission Revival style, first employed by Brown at the Chicago Fair, and then by Howard and Mathisen in our train station, became a popular architectural style. More than half a century after it was built, the Burlingame Train Station was awarded both California landmark status and a listing in the National Register of Historic Places because of its architecture. It is the first permanent structure that employed all the elements of what came to be called the Mission Revival style.



Dorothy Crawford image of Burlingame Ave. Station ca. 1914

could find a blacksmith, a liquor store and a dry goods outlet. Locals came to the station to get their mail, their telegrams and to use the phone. The waiting room became an unofficial community center, hosting church and club meetings. Perhaps no other person had such a close-up personal view of the activity surrounding the station as George W. Gates, who served as stationmaster from 1895 to 1906. After his resignation as stationmaster, he and his family stayed in the community and created several businesses here. Mr. and Mrs. Gates' charming recollections of the area around the turn of the 20th century were collected in a series of interviews around the time of the City of Burlingame's 50th anniversary in 1958. (See article on page 4).

The Golden Gate and Bay bridges transformed San Francisco's Ferry Building. Instead of being seen from the water as the main portal to San Francisco it was more often viewed from the west as the anchor of Market Street. The rise in automobile use did much the same for Burlingame's Train Station. The station still sat handsomely at the end of Burlingame's main commercial strip but its importance as the portal, or front door, of Burlingame diminished through the 20th century. By mid-century the automobile had drastically reduced train ridership and had killed the streetcar altogether. The 40-line electric streetcar (that ran roughly parallel to the SP tracks since 1903) made its last run in January 1949. SP's commuter train traffic survived, no doubt in large part because the tracks also served commercial freight trains.

By the 1980s the station was in bad repair. There were gaping holes in the plaster and tiles were falling off the roof. Residents became alarmed. The station no

originally built the station, the funds came from both public and private sources. The stations' rededication ceremony in June of 1986 was nearly marred by a gruesome murder of the station's ticketing agent some months before. In March, 59-year-old George Grant was found at the station lying in a pool of blood, having



Stationmasters' children Jessie Murphy and Cliffie Gates pose in the late 1890s by the newly-planted palm tree gifted by railroad executive Julius Kruttschnitt

longer served as the portal to our community, but would Burlingame be Burlingame without its train station? Locals could no more envision a Burlingame without its iconic station than a Paris without its Eiffel Tower. *What if it ceased to survive?* Sacre bleu! A *Save our Station* group quickly formed to raise the necessary funds to repair the station. Like the coalition that

been stabbed 18 times. The community was shocked that such a murder would occur in Burlingame, let alone in their beloved train station.

By the early 2000s, the station's in-person ticketing agent had been replaced by machines located under the outside arcade. The 100-year-old waiting room of the station was closed to the public. Although there was no access to the inside, the station continued to remain a favorite stop on the Burlingame Historical Society's third-grade *Passport to History* tour of local history sites in Burlingame.

There the children took delight

in seeing the garden where the stationmaster's children played (*above*) and seeing how much the palm tree, planted in the 1890s, had grown. They learned that stationmaster George Gates used a Morse Code system of dots and dashes to send telegrams from the station. They practiced saying say "hi" in Morse Code (dot dot

dot dot - dot dot) and laughed when they heard that Mr. Gates named his two dogs "Dot" and "Dash".

With the station vacant and unoccupied in the early 2000s, the Burlingame Historical Society saw an opportunity. Around the time the City celebrated its 100th birthday in 2008, the Society entered into an agreement with CalTrain that permitted the Society to open a museum in the old waiting room. Staffed by the all-volunteer Society, it was open every first Sunday of the month for almost ten years until it was forced to close due to the 2020 Covid pandemic restrictions.

One part of the train station did "reopen" during the pandemic, however. In March of 2024, San Mateo County prosecutors charged a Caltrain executive with surreptitiously spending taxpayers' money during 2019 and 2020 on remodeling and living in the Gates' family's old two-bedroom apartment on the south side of the Burlingame train station. The fact that the executive accused purportedly was earning over \$300,000 in salary and benefits was shocking to many.

Now, after a total revamp of its exhibits, the museum is set to open once again this Fall, concurrent with rail electrification, 161 years after the steam-driven railroad started a passenger line down the SF Peninsula, and 130 years after Burlingame Railroad Station's remarkable construction.



By the time builder Edward Shaver had added the arcade to the north-end of the railroad station, around 1909, the iconic structure had already become the anchor of Burlingame Avenue, and hub of various community activities.



George and Estelle Gates (left and center) pose ca. 1895 at station window with their dogs "Dot" and "Dash".

VIEWS FROM THE TRAIN STATION

In the 1950s, around the time of the city's 50th anniversary, George and Estelle Gates gave some of their memories of living in the train station in the 1890s.

Mrs. Gates: "We had all the food we could possibly eat. We had the game [George] shot, and we bought fruit and vegetables from Mr. Guido who came by regularly with his wagon from San Mateo. And we got all the lamb chops we wanted for 15 cents, and legs of lamb—big ones—for 50 cents...We used to take walks down to the Bay for picnics and a swim and we always stopped in to say hello to the McLellans who owned a large piece of land on the south side of Burlingame Avenue where they raised flowers for the San Francisco market. I think the McLellans owned Burlingame's first automobile—a Stanley Steamer."

Mr. Gates: Around the turn of the century, Harriett Pullman Carolan, the train car heiress was "having a party. Yes, sir, a real party. She carpeted the depot, brought her guests out from San Francisco in Pullman cars . . . spent about \$75,000 decorating the depot and installing electric lights all the way up the dirt road to her home [near Sharon and Willow]...then she filled all the copper-lined horse troughs with champagne. All her guests had to do was just wander from trough to trough to dip. Ha! That was the party."

Quarterly Event:

Walking Tour 2024

Sunday, August 4th, 1pm

Join us as we explore **Burlingame's history** hiding in plain sight!

We will depart from the Burlingame Train Station at 1 pm as we walk to show historic spots right in (and near) the downtown area that you might have overlooked before! Where was the creek that flooded the train station every year? Where was the first city hall and first movie house? Our tour will be approximately one hour and will cover about one mile on flat ground. Limited shade; bring a hat and water.

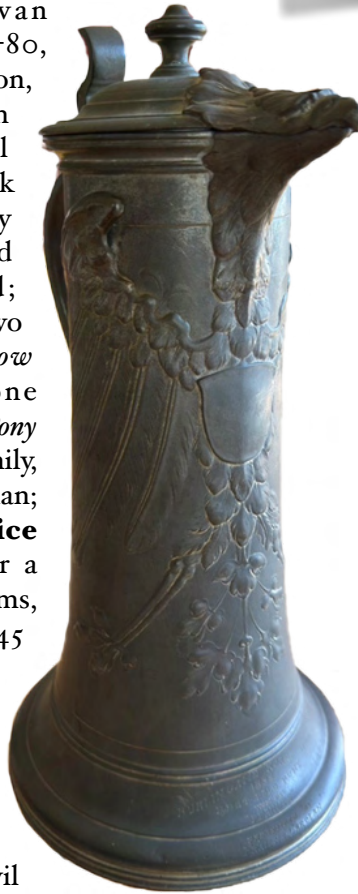


On May 24th, we celebrated at the unveiling of two history panels in various areas of Washington Park, that were funded by **Bill Walsh and Fred Hawley**, best friends and alumni of the Burlingame High School Class of 1962 (*shown at right with Joanne Garrison, Jennifer Pfaff and Cathy Baylock*). Panel content was created by the Burlingame Historical Society using images from our archives, as well as from the San Mateo County Historical Museum archives, by permission. The Burlingame Historical Society would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Burlingame Parks Dept. staff led by Parks Superintendent, Richard Holtz, as well as Parks and



Rec. Director Margaret Glomstad (*all pictured at left*) and the Parks and Rec. Commission for making the proposal and final installation possible. The first panel (*left*) near the Mangini Way entrance to BHS describes the horse breeding operation and polo fields that once occupied the BHS grounds. The other panel (*above*), located in the rose garden, tells the story of the Gunst mansion that once housed the City's recreational activities. The drab weather didn't dampen spirits; we were joined by members of the Burlingame Beautification Commission, as well as the Principal of Burlingame High School, Dr. Jen Fong.

Acquisitions: Thank you to **Lee Livingston** (back row, 2nd from left, behind **Don Ratto**, with cap) for a digital image (at right) of 5th Grade Lincoln Elementary School Cub Scouts posing at 2205 Davis Drive, in Burlingame circa 1954, after a trip to the top of San Bruno Mtn. for a visit to the KRON TV transmitters; **Donna Duffy (Dippel)** for a partially burnt letter and May 10, 1967 *Oakland Tribune* clipping belonging to her grandmother Edith E. Douglas, a multi-gallon blood donor at Peninsula Memorial Blood Bank (1791 El Camino Rl., Burlingame). The letter contained tickets to a 1967, 25th anniversary event in honor of Peninsula Memorial Blood Bank donors, volunteers and staff; it was on its way to Mrs. Douglas living on Bethel Island when the mail van jumped the divider on I-80, smashing another car head-on, and caught on fire. The van driver died; the burning mail (including the Blood Bank invite) was later salvaged by USPO officials and eventually delivered; **Anonymous donor** for two 1899 *Burlingame Horse Show* pewter trophies: The one shown here is for *Best Polo Pony* "Peanuts", of the Tobin family, presented by Francis Carolan; retired **Burlingame Police Chief Jack Van Etten** for a number of BPD-related items, including a March 6, 1945 *Burlingame Advance* newspaper copy reporting on the controversial Council appointment of C. J. Theuer to Police Chief, against the recommendations of the Civil



Service Commission, all three members of which resigned dramatically in protest; they'd recommended John J. Hartnett who'd performed better on their standardized examination tests, and a 1960s era *Sam Browne* Police Chief duty belt belonging to BPD Chief Carl Lollin who died in 2005; **Jim Shypertt** for misc. Burlingame and Hillsborough related items, including an image of Plucky's game cafe (1352 Broadway) that opened in June 2024, and for a digital photo collage with information related to current CalTrans' survey work on El Camino Real by the firm Brian Kangas Foulk (BKF), that traces its origins to the firm Jack Frost Surveyors, opening on the SF Peninsula in 1915. In the 1950s, master apprentices: Stan Kangas, Bob Foulk and Gary Wincott helped propel the firm's prominence with their work at Stanford University. The firm also surveyed Woodside's Filoli Estate in 1977 when Mrs. Roth transferred her property to the National Historic Trust; **Linda Milliken** for a sampling of 1993 newspapers reflecting the house prices, and culture and interests of the day; **Mark Lucchesi and Ray Tyler** for multiple podcast interviews and DVDs of local business owners and personalities, and **Leslie McQuaide and Samantha Galloway** for transcriptions thereof.


WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

**John Elfving, Geoffrey Nelson (History Buff),
Deborah Peri, and Andrea Pappajohn**

Many thanks to the Carl and Janet Martin Giving Fund
for their very generous donation to our General Fund.

In Memoriam: **Marci Benson** and **Rosalie McCloud**—
two longtime volunteers with our Society.





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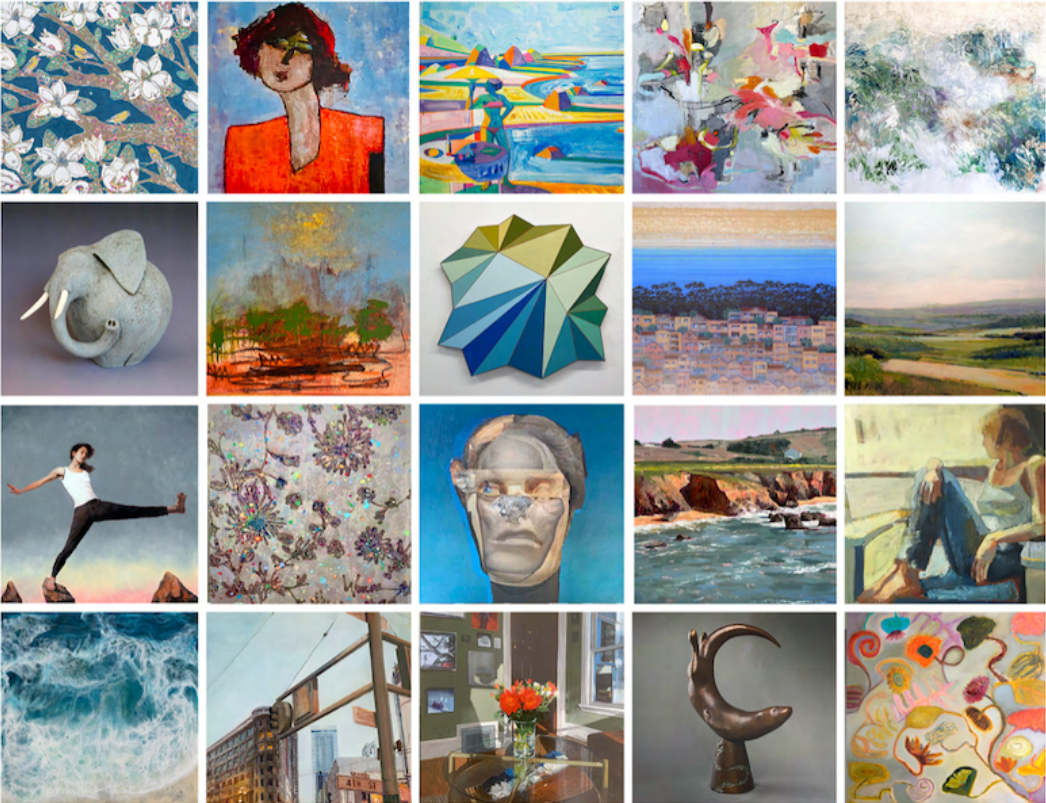
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Address Service Requested - Time Dated Material

Calendar:

Burlingame Hillsborough
History Museum 1-4 pm 1st
Sunday of the month*

*Note: Currently Closed.

We hope to open by late Fall,
please check our website!

NEXT EVENT:

Sunday, August 4, 2024 at 1pm
Victorian Days Walking Tour:

"Up, Down, All-Around"

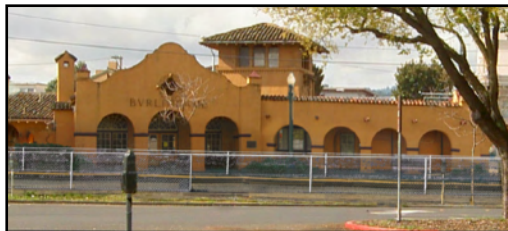
Meet at Burlingame Station

(see p. 5)

Please remember us
in your trust or will!

President's Message:

Our iconic Railroad Station has been a fixture in our town, well before Burlingame became a City. As such, it would be easy to take its presence for granted. Few realize how close it has come to destruction over its 130 year-old history. As early as the late 1920s, well into the era of the automobile, Burlingame Trustees entertained the notion of moving, and/or demolishing the building so that Burlingame Avenue could feed straight over the tracks directly to eastside Burlingame Avenue, avoiding the circuitous route around *Burlingame Square*. The building by the 1920s was in serious disrepair, so demo seemed like a good option. Thankfully, Southern Pacific Railroad Co. undertook repairs and upgrades to the interior by the early 30s; it was not the first, nor last time the station was jeopardized. In 2005-6, Caltrain proposed platform upgrades. One "upgrade" was to



eliminate South Lane. They also wanted to introduce cheap chain-link fencing (left) and standard shelters. Due to the vigilance of local activists, and then Council members Russ Cohen and Cathy Baylock, these were upgraded to ornamental fencing, Mission-Style shelters and lush landscaping we enjoy today. Our City cared enough to insist the "upgrades" were indeed improvements, rather than detriments. A few years later, it became unclear what would become of the historic station if High Speed Rail succeeded in funding their berm/ raised viaduct system, forever marring the station. The message is never to take our history for granted; it is fragile, and needs good stewardry.

-Jennifer Pfaff

Current Officers

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Cohen*

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