

THE RECORD

Crime scene. Do not cross.

by Russ Cohen

In the early 1990s, I was contemplating moving to Burlingame. I picked up the local paper and read the Police Blotter and the big crime of the day was that someone was mowing the lawn in Washington Park without permission. I thought, if that's the big crime being reported in Burlingame then that's the kind of town I want to live in!

But since then, I have learned that both Burlingame and Hillsborough, despite their bucolic settings, have had their share of notorious, infamous, complex, headline-making crime over the years.

How could we forget the kidnapping of Patty Hearst in 1974 and the countless news conferences from the front steps of her parents' home in Hillsborough? While one could argue that this was more of a national incident than a local crime, nevertheless the Patty Hearst kidnapping put Hillsborough in the spotlight.

Less remembered perhaps was the mid-1970s kidnapping for ransom of an 11-year-old boy near Hillside Drive and Alvarado as he was walking to Hoover Elementary School with a friend. The friend's good description of the boy's abductors helped to solve the crime. The Burlingame police arrested the kidnapers (two disgruntled employees

of the father's company) as they were about to receive the ransom, but not before the terrified boy was kept in a hotel room for several days.

And unfortunately, there have been other kidnappings. In September 1940, the 3-year-old son of Count and Countess Marc de Tristan was



AMUSES CHILD.

"He spotted the house, noting the habits and comings and goings of the family, and the daily walk of the child. Then he made preparations — he bought child's clothes, sweaters and sox; he filled his car with food, including six quarts of milk and three dozen oranges for the child.

snatched at gunpoint from his nurse's arms at midday at the normally tranquil Hillsborough intersection of Poett Drive and Roehampton Road. The child was related to several prominent families, including the Tobins and the Parrots (his godparents were Mrs. Charles Thieiro and Christian de Guigne III). A \$100,000 ransom was to be collected in Ukiah. The manhunt was the largest in Northern California history. After 2 ½ days, the toddler was spotted in sparsely-settled El Dorado County by mill man Cecil Wetzel who bravely tackled the kidnapper, Wilhelm Muhlenbroich. The child was returned to his El Portal Road home, unharmed.

Quarterly
EVENT

MURDER AT THE
MONUMENT

Oct. 30th 7pm

pg. 5

Twin Burlingame brothers, Leonard and Alfred Moskovitz, were inseparable until one was kidnapped in early 1953. They owned a successful real estate business in San Francisco, married in a double wedding ceremony at SF's Temple Emanu-El and lived in identical houses next door to each other in Burlingame at 1435 and 1440 Alvarado Avenue. However, the kidnapping for ransom of Leonard from their San Francisco real estate office promised to separate them for good. The ransom demand was \$300,000. After a harrowing 2 ½ days, the police broke the case; Leonard was freed and the 36-year-old twins and their families were reunited.

Burlingame was in the national news again when San Francisco Giant's slugger Barry Bonds was accused of using performance enhancing drugs, dubbed "The Clear," developed by Burlingame-based BALCO. *The SF Chronicle* broke the news in 2004, but the official investigation did not culminate until 2007. Although cheating in sports may not be a crime itself, lying to a federal grand jury is. Bonds was charged with perjury and obstruction of justice. BALCO's Victor Conti was convicted of distributing steroids and money laundering. He spent four months in prison. This scandal, the criminal convictions and the news coverage of it resulted in a new Major League Baseball policy: The first time a player fails a test for steroids, he is subject to an 81-game (about 1/2 of a regular season) suspension. For the second offense, the penalty is a 162-game (a regular season) suspension. Finally, if a third offense occurs, the player is given a lifetime ban from Major League Baseball. The reporters that covered the controversy wrote a book about the scandal called, "Game of Shadows."

A bomb caused major damage to an office building at 1868-1870 Ogden Dr. in 1974. The incident

appeared to stem from disputes between the United Farm Workers and the Western Conference of Teamsters. The building was often the scene of negotiations between the two unions. In 2021 the



Chronicle / Frederic Larson

Victor Conti being interviewed in Burlingame

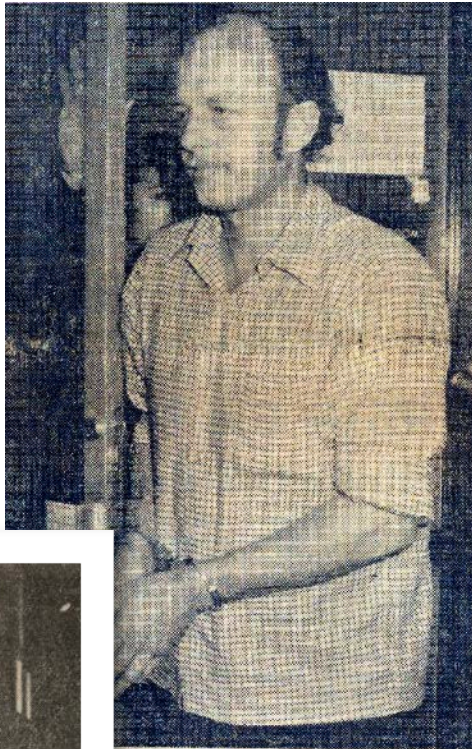
Burlingame City Council approved a plan to redevelop the property into condos.

In 1999, a Burlingame Public Library administrative assistant, Judith Gladysz, embezzled \$129,000 from the City coffers. She collected book late-fees and kept much of the proceeds over the course of four years. Gladysz was sentenced to one year in jail in 2001. She also had to pay restitution.

Sadly, Burlingame and Hillsborough crimes have also included numerous murder cases, including one kidnapping case that turned into a murder case. In the late 90s, a Hillsborough woman was abducted from her Black Mountain Road home. The next day her body was found in an abandoned and burned van in San Francisco. The kidnapper had initially contacted the victim's husband asking for \$100,000 ransom, but she died before any transfer of money occurred. It was not the kidnapper's first contact with the victim. Three months before the murder, he had cleaned her home as an employee of a cleaning service.

Then, there was the 1960s mysterious disappearance of a 30-year-old man, Fredric Menzies. Several years later his body was found buried under a concrete patio in a backyard on Channing Road. Gary Jones (*shown at right*), a long-time resident and house painter was arrested for the murder.

In February 1971, a late night holdup at the Mills Estate Pharmacy (1818 El Camino Real) resulted in the untimely death of pharmacist Aram O. Ojakian who'd allegedly been held up 9 times during his pharmaceutical career in



(Times Photo by Mike Spinelli)
SUSPECT IN COURT

Solving the puzzle of who committed the gruesome murder that occurred at our train station in 1985 will be the topic of our next quarterly (*see page 5 for details*). Cleveland Scott stabbed Caltrain ticket agent George Grant 18 times inside the historic Burlingame Train Station in 1985. The Burlingame Police solved the case. "It's kind of like an episode of 'CSI: Burlingame,'" said former Police Chief Jack Van Etten in a written statement in 2004. "As the lead detective in the case back in '86, it was my responsibility to make all the puzzle pieces fit together." Scott was released in 1994 after serving part of an 11-year sentence. In 1995, Scott killed again by shooting Eldridge Cotton at his 30th birthday party on N. Idaho Street in San Mateo.

Another case that more recently shook our community was the case of Hillsborough heiress Tiffany Li, who was accused with her then-current boyfriend of murdering Keith Green, the father of her two children, in 2016. Green and Li met on April 28 of that year at the Millbrae Pancake House to discuss custody of their children, after which Green went missing for almost two weeks. His body was found in Sonoma County on May 11 with a bullet wound through the neck. In a verdict that surprised and shocked many, the jury found Li not guilty. Her accomplice's jury was deadlocked

resulting in a mistrial. Li has since moved with her children to China.

Also, in 1985, there was an assault on two girls at

the then abandoned Carolands Chateau, the 98-room mansion in Hillsborough (*above*). A security

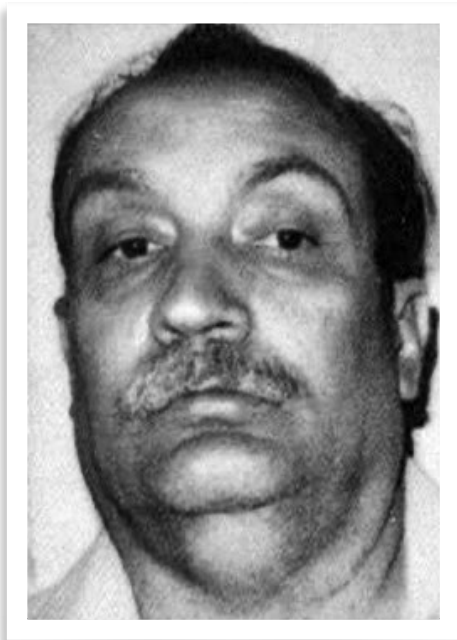


San Francisco, and twice in Burlingame. Two young men who'd fled east on foot across the railroad tracks were apprehended a day or two later, their abandoned car having been traced.

In 1978 a murder occurred on Diamond Jim's Showboat, a small ship some may remember as *The Sherman*, anchored in the Bay. Giacomo Messina was partnered in the *Diamond Jim* operation with James "Jim" Katsaras. Messina wanted out of the partnership and became involved in a dispute with Katsaras, leading to Messina pulling a shotgun and blasting Katsaras five times.



guard, David Allen Raley, gave an unsanctioned tour of the mansion to two teenage girls, Jeanne Grinsell of San Mateo and Laurie McKenna of Burlingame. Raley stabbed them both multiple times and drove them to San Jose. Grinsell crawled out of a ravine in East San Jose and flagged down a motorist. Both girls gave descriptions of their assailant which led to his arrest. Grinsell succumbed to her injuries. McKenna survived. Raley was sentenced to death.



Let's not forget about serial killer **C a r l J a b l o n s k i** (*pictured at left*) who was tried for the **b r u t a l** murder of his then-wife and mother-in-law in **t h e i r** Burlingame home in April of 1991. According to former San M a t e o C o u n t y Prosecutor Jim

Fox, the murders were the most-evil they had prosecuted. Jablonski died in San Quentin prison on death row in 2019.

Then there is the bizarre tale of mother and physician, Donna Anderson, who traveled from Minnesota, arrived at 1501 Los Montes Drive in Burlingame and proceeded to stab her son to death in 2002. According to then-BPD Cmdr. Brad Floyd, the 7" knife was purchased at a Burlingame grocery store. Anderson represented herself at her trial and was later sentenced to 37 years behind bars.

Also in 2002, Seti Scanlan and four others robbed the Wells Fargo Bank branch on Burlingame Avenue. It went wrong when Scanlon shot the bank manager as she attempted to close her office door resulting in her untimely death. The robbers got away with just

\$4000. Later during a pre-trial hearing, Scanlan surprised the judge and his own legal team and confessed to the murder. He was sentenced to 296 years in prison in 2004.



The life of " M i s s Burlingame, 1962" Noelle Russo (*shown at left*), was cut short in 1983, her body found in Sonoma County. Her killer was arrested some four decades later in 2023.

In 2017, Mia Smith, an employee at Union Bank on H o w a r d Avenue killed her boyfriend Edward Allison in the 100 block of Myrtle

Road. Smith was convicted of voluntary manslaughter and is currently serving an 11-year sentence.

Because of Burlingame's many banks, bank robberies are all too common. Petty theft, car break-ins, and porch pirates persist, as they do in many cities across the country. Although we are clearly not immune from crime, Burlingame and Hillsborough are two of the safest communities in the Bay Area. This is due in large part to the diligent work of Burlingame and Hillsborough's Finest, keeping us secure by proactive policing and connecting the dots to solve the toughest cases.

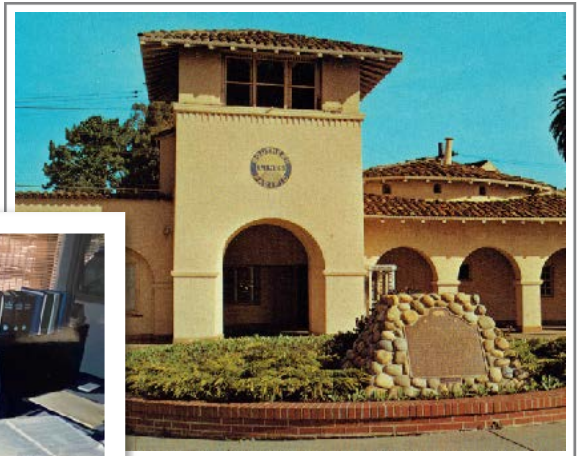
I once asked a Burlingame Police Officer when the TV show "Cops" was going to come to Burlingame. He said, "When something happens."

**Quarterly Event:
MURDER AT THE MONUMENT**

*Featuring our Guest Speaker,
Retired Burlingame Police Chief
Jack van Etten*

Weds. October 30, 2024; 7-8 pm
Lane Room
Burlingame Pubic Library

In 1986, the Burlingame Station Ticket Agent was murdered inside the historic station. Join the former Detective Sergeant as he revisits the shocking event.



A dozen years ago, the Burlingame Historical Society funded the restoration of the Old City Hall cupola in Parking Lot “J” on Park Road. It is time to get it repainted once again before winter sets in. The budget for this project is \$6,000.

The *Burlingame Parks Forever Foundation* has agreed to spearhead the effort by soliciting funds for the cupola project. Many thanks to our members Laura Hesselgren, Carole Yashuda and Katie Terrones for help in promoting this effort, and identifying a painting contractor who will do justice to the iconic ornament. The Society has donated \$1,500 to start the fundraising effort. We

encourage anyone who would like to help bring back the sheen to the historic cupola to join us.

Please direct donations to: *Burlingame Parks Forever Foundation (EIN 46-1124191); 850 Burlingame Ave., Burlingame, CA 94010. Please specify: “Old City Hall Cupola Project”.* Note: In the event excess funds are collected, these will be earmarked to beautify the cupola’s adjacent landscaping.

What is that cupola in the parking lot behind the Apple store?

In 1914 prominent architect Charles Peter Weeks (Mark Hopkins hotel, Oakland Fox Theatre, Peninsula Fox Theatre) designed a City Hall building worthy of Burlingame’s pride and ambitions.

The handsome red brick structure was located on Park Road, crowned with the dome-shaped white cupola. The late 1960s community effort to try to save the old city hall, or at least repurpose it, was led by famed Burlingame architect and City Planning Commissioner Colonel Ernest E. Norberg. Although unsuccessful in saving the building, when new City Hall was built in 1970, the community saved the cupola which marks the old building’s original location where activists saved the ornament in the wake of parking lot construction.



Acquisitions: Thank you **Marc Kaufman of the Kings Mountain Fire Brigade** for returning Burlingame Fire Department's Gamewell Co. Diaphone Horn Type "B" (circa late 1920s) back to Burlingame; it had been stored in the Brigade's Woodside attic for several decades (see diaphone photo below, and related

1931 clipping at right about the complaints it generated);

Anonymous, kindness of City Librarian **Brad McCulley** for a number of old

Burlingame prints, including a 1920s image of a woman bicycling down Lorton Avenue (above), and an excerpted article and illustration by acclaimed artist Victor Perard from the 1897 periodical *The Illustrated American* (bottom of page) entitled "Round About San Francisco with the Horse" by Helen C. Candee, about the early days of the Burlingame Country Club horses and polo; **Rich McLinden** for numerous *Then and Now* images of General Electric Baseball Field, Adrian Road, Burlingame (1960s-70s); **Mark Lucchesi and Ray Tyler** for multiple podcast interviews and DVDs of local business owners and personalities and **Leslie McQuaide** and **Samantha Wheeler** for transcriptions thereof; and **Jim Shypertt** for digital imagery related to various local people, businesses and events, including a collage of photos highlighting EuGo, a fine shoemaking shop, located at 1323 Broadway, and Bistro Arancini Wine Bar at 1219 Broadway.



Quiet Fire Siren Hunted by Chief Of Burlingame

Ear-Splitting Horn Interrupts Slumbers, Citizens Protest to Council

BURLINGAME, Jan. 24.—Fire Chief Wilkie Dessin was today on a quest for a city fire siren which would arouse his volunteer fire laddies without arousing the ire of the entire community.

Burlingame's present siren is described by irate residents as a bull-bellowing horn which not only penetrates the homes of the volunteer firemen but also awakens sleeping infants from their slumbers, makes conversation temporarily impossible and sends persons who are suffering from nervous disorders into hysterics.

To make the matter more distressing, say residents, since the establishment of fire boxes on street corners the horn blasts the alarm three times in succession instead of the usual two times.

Countless complaints have been registered with the city council.

If a fire horn is necessary, say irate residents, let it be one with softer tones.

Tests were under way this afternoon and if a more mellow horn is found by Chief Dessin the city will be asked to purchase it.

Examined Jan 25 1931



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Diane Lindgren, and Anonymous

Thank you to **Wally Mersereau** for his recent donation, and *Anonymous* for such generous support of our Association *in Memory of Nick Baylock.*

In Memoriam: Lorraine Smith, and Pat Doss

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Address Service Requested - Time Dated Material

Calendar:

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

*Note: Currently Closed.

We hope to open soon; so
 please keep checking our
 website!

NEXT EVENT:

**MURDER AT THE
 MONUMENT**

**Weds., Oct. 30th, 2024
 7 pm in the Lane Room**

**Please remember us
 in your trust or will!**



***President's
 Message:***

Our summer walking
 tour in August was very
 well attended. With all
 the commotion at the
 station platform where
 we met up, I almost
 missed

history happening before my
 eyes: A gleaming new electric
 train in test-mode, without
 passengers glided smoothly to
 a stop, and then sped off
 quietly down the line.

It does not feel that long ago
 when I'd accompany my
 father into S. F. during the
 summers to help out at his office. We'd
 sit in the impressive Burlingame Station
 waiting room for one of any number of
 early iterations of Southern Pacific's
 diesel trains. We never knew which
 version we'd be riding in; some were very



early models. The most impressive part
 of the ride was that one could instantly
 change the orientation of travel by
 flipping the back of the bench seat with
 one quick motion. This was perfect
 because I tended to become sick
 traveling backwards.

I vividly remember hearing about the
 murder at the station in
 the mid-1980s. My
 father was a big talker,
 and had befriended
 most of the ticket
 agents over the years; he
 was particularly shocked
 when it happened.

In the meanwhile,
 station agents are a thing
 of the past and technology lurches
 forward. Through it all, our iconic
 mission revival railroad station has been
 the one constant.

-Jennifer Pfaff

Current Officers

2024:

- President - Jennifer Pfaff*
- VP - Museum - Russ
 Coben*
- VP Technology and
 Education -
 Diane Condon-
 Wirgler*
- Treasurer - Mary Griffith*
- Secretary - Leslie
 McQuaide*
- Corresponding Secretary
 -Mary Packard*
- Newsletter
 -Joanne Garrison*
- Social Media-
 -Cathy Baylock*
- Membership Chair-
 Carl Martin*
- Oral Histories/ Podcasts -
 Mark Lucchesi*