

MAY 2008  
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NUMBER 7

# The Tall Tree

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

## GENERAL MEETING

Sunday, May 4 at 2:00 p.m.

Free & open to the public

Lucie Stern Community Center  
1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

## Mayfieldians Got There First

DID YOU KNOW THAT PALO ALTO contains a lost town?

Have you ever wondered why Palo Alto has two train stations and two downtowns?

This illustrated talk about the people and the place brings to life that other town, the area around California Avenue and College Terrace.

Some of our parks' namesakes count in this story: Ramos, Robles, Boulware, Peers and Weisshaar.

That town that started before Palo Alto lost its name along the way, but many street names less



**SPEAKER:** *Gail Woolley, Preservationist and Former Palo Alto Mayor*

recognizable than Hamilton or Homer come from citizens of Mayfield: Barron, Crosby, Lambert, Page Mill, Pitman, Ponce, Wallis, and Oterson.



*Alexander Peers, early Mayfield resident, 1892 (Guy Miller Archives)*



*Mayfield Post Office, 1886. Lizzie Weisshaar, Assistant Postmaster is standing; J.S. Spaulding is perched on window sill reading a newspaper (Guy Miller Archives).*



*A group with two young bicyclists pose on a Mayfield street, 1895 (Guy Miller Archives).*

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PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The board meets first Wednesdays (except August) at Lucie Stern Community Center at 4:00.

# Letters Home Spurred Immigration

MANY IMMIGRANTS WROTE HOME TO TELL FRIENDS AND RELATIVES about opportunities in America. Soon, small colonies of Germans, Swedes or other nationalities got established throughout the nation.

For a group of French immigrants, their new home was Mayfield. Whoever came first must have encouraged some to come and others to bypass larger cities. Many were from Alsace and Lorraine. Their political identity depended upon who had won the most recent war between France and Germany. Many immigrants with German surnames in Mayfield spoke French.

**FROM THE  
DESK OF THE  
HISTORIAN  
STEVE STAIGER**

As with many Europeans who came to California during the Gold Rush, these first French speakers who came to Mayfield were fleeing mid-century social unrest at home. One Alsatian family, Lambert Dornberger and his wife arrived in Santa Clara in the 1850's, then moved to Mayfield and became, with their children, prominent there. Victor served as mayor and he and his brother Albert were long-time educators in the County. A picnic grove on the family farm served as the town park for many years. A distant relative, Michael Dornberger, came in the 1880's and was the brewer at the Mayfield Brewery on Lincoln Street.

Mayfield's French speaking community grew after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. The victorious Prussians took control again, imposing German culture on Alsace-Lorraine. During a grace period after the war, officials permitted free emigration to former French citizens. Thousands settled in other parts of France. Some came to America to live in communities like Mayfield, where they found a warm welcome.

That War also brought "Peter Coutts", a wealthy French financier who began buying land near Mayfield in the mid 1870's. He was not from Alsace-Lorraine, but his investments included a railroad in Alsace-Lorraine that he lost to the victorious Germans. Facing economic and political pressures, he fled France and established a 1500-acre dairy farm on the Peninsula. He provided an economic boon to Mayfield by hiring numerous residents to build his estate and run his farm, located where Escondido Village on Stanford campus is today. Presumably he hired several local masons to build his tower out on Old Page Mill Road. When the situation in France permitted his safe return, he sold his estate to his neighbor, Leland Stanford.

French speaking people continued to find homes in Mayfield, sometimes just by moving from San Francisco, which had a large French population. In the mid 1980's, I became friends with one of our Association's board members, Lillian Kirkbride. She had moved to Mayfield as a child in the early 1920's. Sixty plus years later, she still considered herself a "Mayfieldian" and never a Palo Altan. She told me that when she arrived in Mayfield with her parents, she spoke only French, and took up speaking English only after she began to attend school in Mayfield.



*A view of Frenchman's Tower from the creek side. The tower was built by Peter Coutts around 1895 (undated photo: Guy Miller Archives, www.pahistory.org).*

## Board Nominees

THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE chaired by Tom Wyman, with Beth Bunnenberg, Gwen Barry, and Judy Leahy, reports the following:

Two board vacancies have occurred, Ruth Lacey and Michael Litfin. Matt Bowling and Douglas Graham are nominated as new board members for three year terms. Officers and other board members remain as before, see list above. Brian George and Tom Wyman's 3 year terms are to be renewed. Members at large may nominate with a petition signed by at least 10 members, submitted to Bardy Wallace, Recording Secretary at 650 327 4568 on or before Friday May 2. The membership will elect new members to the Board at the Annual Dinner.

## Our Roots, 1913 and Counting

ONE ARTICLE IN THE MAY 1981 ISSUE OF THE TALL TREE was entitled Our Roots, in which the authors wrote that forty people attended the Palo Alto Historical Association's first meeting, held at the library in 1913, the town's 25th anniversary year. Harry C. Peterson, Curator of Stanford University and later of Sutter's Fort, was elected president, Guy G. Miller, historiographer. They quickly organized a 3-day exhibit that closed with a pioneer reunion. PAHA came and went for a time, but in 1948, the organization returned for sure and set goals that remain in effect today.

Some early members were Herbert Hoover, and two Stanford officials, Chancellor Ray Lyman Wilbur and President Wallace Sterling.

## Viewing Vintage Vehicles

MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HERITAGE'S ANNUAL FUN in the Sun is admission free, August 3, 10 am to 4 pm, at Palo Alto High School, featuring cars, bikes, legos, kid activities, food, music. Check their web page for more details. On-going to August 17 is MOAH's exhibit, Bonfires and Bugs: The Art and Science of Camping, 351 Homer Avenue, 11 - 4 Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

## The Packards: Valued Partners

THIS EXHIBIT AT THE LOS ALTOS HISTORY MUSEUM, through June 22, includes special events. One will be two movies on May 28 at 7:30 PM "Memories of Lu and Dave," and "Woman of Grace." On June 18, 7 PM, Julie Packard will tell about the history of the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The Museum, at 51 S. San Antonio Road, is open Thursday through Sunday, 12 - 4:00



*The Vintage Vehicles and Family Festival is a weekend celebration of human technological achievement. In addition to vintage cars, motorcycles, farm equipment, radio control cars, LEGO displays, and dioramas are on display. (Photo: courtesy of MOAH)*



*Newlyweds Lucile and David Packard set up housekeeping in Palo Alto, 1940. (Photo: from the Los Altos History Museum, courtesy of the Packard family)*

## MEMBERSHIP

IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER, PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING the Palo Alto Historical Association. Your tax-deductible donation helps pay for our history and other programs, this newsletter, and support for our archives. We mail renewal notices in July, if you are already a member. Annual dues are: Individual \$25, Family \$40, Sustaining \$60, Business/Sponsor \$100, Life Member \$350. Members receive this newsletter in the mail.

There are two ways to join, online or by mail: Go to our web site [www.pahistory.org](http://www.pahistory.org). Click on MEMBERSHIP. On the Membership page, click on Network for Good, which processes our online donations. On their site, press the "Donate Now" button. Then, please put the word "membership" in the designation field so that we know to start a membership for you. Be sure to provide us with your name and address. If this is a gift, please also e-mail us at [PAHistoricalAssn@aol.com](mailto:PAHistoricalAssn@aol.com) with the name, address, and any e-mail address of the recipient of your gift.

Or mail a check payable to Palo Alto Historical Association to Membership, P. O. Box 193, Palo Alto, CA 94302-0193. Let us know if you require a receipt to comply with new IRS regulations on tax-deductible donations.

# Research Photos, Genealogy, Wills, More

IN ADDITION TO OFFICIAL COUNTY RECORDS, Santa Clara County Archives in San Jose has a catalogued collection of 57,000 photographs in various formats taken between 1950 and 1993 of content such as aerial shots, portraits, award ceremonies, construction of County buildings. Appointments for research made at 408 792 1895, or [Michael.griffith@rec.sccgov.org](mailto:Michael.griffith@rec.sccgov.org). Check web at [Archives@rec.sccgov.org](http://Archives@rec.sccgov.org).



## See it on Channel 30

AT THE APRIL PAHA MEETING, BRIAN GEORGE showed films and videos from 13 years of the annual Film Festival, some funny, like the woman using her kitchen tasks as exercise, some serious, like citizens asking City Council to vote for a nuclear weapons freeze. Brian videotapes the current monthly programs. (Yes, he videotaped himself.) This one will be on local TV in May, Wednesdays at 8 pm, Thursdays at noon, Saturdays at 1 pm. Also see Media Center

schedule for additional, and streaming video simultaneously on [www.communitymediacenter.net](http://www.communitymediacenter.net).

## PAHA Meetings

May 4 HISTORY OF MAYFIELD  
Gail Woolley

June 3: ANNUAL DINNER  
at the Palo Alto Sheraton  
*Hewlett, Packard, and the  
Silicon Valley Way*  
Michael S. Malone  
Pay to reserve by May 30

*Make your  
reservations  
by May 30!*

Next season of public programs  
begins in October 2008

# The Tall Tree MAY 2008

PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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NEXT MEETING:  
May 4 at 2:00 p.m.  
followed by a social hour  
and refreshments