



# The Tall Tree

Newsletter  
of the PALO ALTO  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION

April 2018 Volume 41, No 6

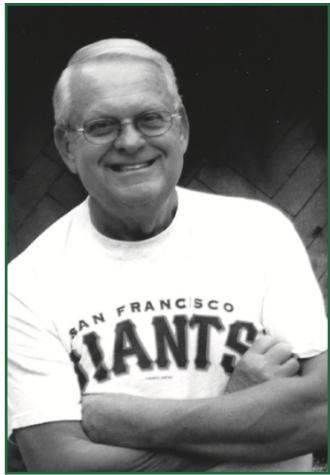


The PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
*presents*

## Paly through the Years: a talk with Bob French about Palo Alto Schools

Sunday, April 8, 2018, 2:00–4:00 pm

Lucie Stern Community Center ~ 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto



The Palo Alto Historical Association March program featured a lively, animated presentation on “Boys and Girls Schools in Palo Alto” by PAHA Board member Heather Allen Pang. PAHA continues its examination of Palo Alto schools on Sunday, April 8.

Dr. Bob French, long time PAHA member, beloved Palo Alto teacher, principal, and administrator—now retired—will share his memories and experiences over the course of his career with PAUSD.

As Paly’s unofficial historian, former Ohlone Elementary School principal, and substitute teacher, Bob will host an interactive and engaging session, which will feature audience participation. Bring your memories, anecdotes and questions!

Palo Alto High School will celebrate 100 years at its current Embarcadero Road location later this year, so now is a great time to recall and reflect on Palo Alto schools with a local treasure.

### SPEAKER:

**Bob French, PhD**  
Retired Teacher and Principal  
Palo Alto Unified Schools



Palo Alto High School celebrates its centennial at its 50 Embarcadero Road site later this year. This 1918 photo shows the school before opening, built on land offered by Stanford University for \$1 per acre. Courtesy Palo Alto High School.

# Nerds at Palo Alto High School in the early '50s

LETTER FROM  
THE PRESIDENT  
Ralph Britton

I went to Jordan Junior and Palo Alto High School at the beginning of the nuclear age, a period of remarkable technological advancement during and after WWII. Jordan had wood and metal shops, while Paly offered a tantalizing array for those interested in science and technology:

aero shop, auto shop, machine shop, and a class in radio technology. Paly provided a photo lab used both for classes and by the photographers for the yearbook and school newspaper. These classes offered vocational training. Some of us, like my friend Lewis Terman and I, were fascinated with learning how things worked and eager to actually make things.

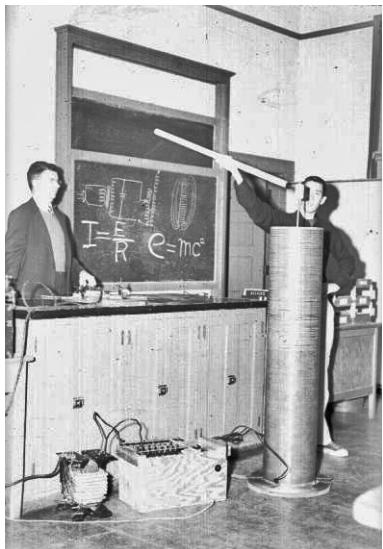
Due to wartime lack of automobile production, students drove a variety of pre-war models; Ford Model A's were common, although they often required repair. Some of us learned valuable skills in how to make them work, or modified them for more power and speed. Kids in the aero shop rebuilt a WWII Stearman Biplane trainer!

## PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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On the academic side, Palo offered "technical" classes in Chemistry and Physics, precursors of today's AP courses. Biology was the most popular science course. Students arriving for the first day of Chemistry were greeted by a statement on the blackboard: "Laboratory is a place for Labor, not Oratory." The laboratory was interesting and fun, but look out for the creative kids! Elementary Algebra and Geometry were required, but optional advanced math ended with Trigonometry—far less than current curriculum offers. Physics was the most interesting for me, probably because my dad taught high school physics in San Francisco. One of the more spectacular projects started when the teacher, Henry Martin, someone had made a few years earlier sitting in a closet. "Would Lew and I be interested in getting it to work?" he asked. We excitedly agreed. We hooked it up in my garage and the results were amazing: the energy it radiated was enough to light a fluorescent tube 20 feet away. I inveigled my mother into bringing one out to the garage; there was quite a reaction when it lit up in her hands! The neighbors mentioned that their televisions acted up that night, and we mused, "How strange—what could be causing that?" Later, we gleefully drew sparks to a large nail and had an insulated board we could stand on which resulted in our hair standing on end. Such an experiment would certainly not be permitted today!



Classmate Lewis Terman draws a spark from the high voltage output of the Tesla coil, while physics teacher Henry Martin watches from a safer distance. Lew is the son of Stanford professor and university provost, Frederick Terman. Lew went on to get a PhD in Electrical Engineering and had a distinguished career with IBM in Poughkeepsie, NY. Courtesy author.

mentioned he had a Tesla coil someone had made a few years earlier sitting in a closet. "Would Lew and I be interested in getting it to work?" he asked. We excitedly agreed. We hooked it up in my garage and the results were amazing: the energy it radiated was enough to light a fluorescent tube 20 feet away. I inveigled my mother into bringing one out to the garage; there was quite a reaction when it lit up in her hands! The neighbors mentioned that their televisions acted up that night, and we mused, "How strange—what could be causing that?" Later, we gleefully drew sparks to a large nail and had an insulated board we could stand on which resulted in our hair standing on end. Such an experiment would certainly not be permitted today!

## Cars, Telephones and Tags in 1920s Palo Alto

In the early 21st century, communication via cell phone is faster than anyone could have imagined 100 years ago, and travel by car has transformed our lives, even though sitting in traffic can make it as slow as it was on horseback. Attending Stanford University in the 1920s, my grandmother, Madeline Frick Allen, reflected on the challenges of modern life, and some of her stories are a window into those early days of technology. She wrote letters to her family in Southern California that were meant to be preserved as a diary. In these days of email, cell phones, and 24/7 communica-



Then, as now, "28 on a 20-mile zone" was enough for a ticket. The author's grandmother, Madeline Frick, related her 1926 student encounter with local law enforcement in letters home. Courtesy author.

tion, her letters to her family are a reminder of the importance of written communication (even when it would not be read for days) in maintaining families and relationships. The letters bring us into her world, or at least the part of her world she wanted her family to know about. They are as much a curated view of her life as a student as we would get from a modern student's social media posts.

My grandmother would sometimes try faster modes of communication, but she struggled with the technology. The night she got into her sorority, Theta, she tried to telephone her family in Los Angeles (article continues on page 3)

The Palo Alto Historical Association, a non-profit organization, was established in 1948 as successor to an earlier organization founded in 1913. Its main objectives are:

- Collect, organize, and preserve materials pertaining to the history and heritage of Palo Alto.
- Spread information about Palo Alto's history by means of programs, displays, and publications.
- Recognize and preserve historic sites and structures.

The Guy Miller Archives of the Palo Alto Historical Association are stored at Cubberley Community Center, K-7, Phone (650) 329-2353.

Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month (except August) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 4 pm. General meetings are held the first Sunday of each month (October–December, February–May) at the Lucie Stern Community Center at 2 pm. Meetings include speakers. The final general meeting of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all meetings.

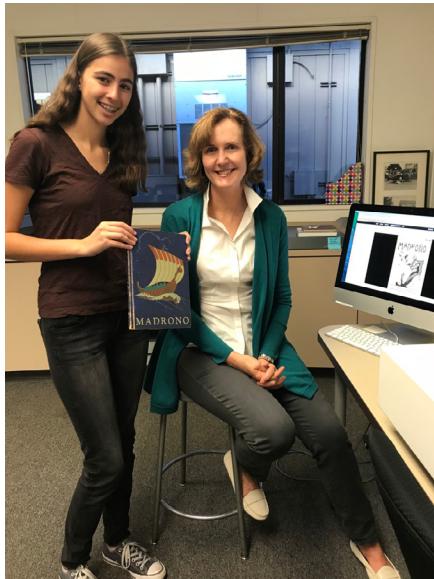
# Paly Digital Archive Accesses 125 Years of Student Voices

The new Palo Alto High School Journalism Archive preserves over 120 years of student voices by digitizing award-winning Paly publications from 1895 to present day.

Palo Alto High School librarian and former PAHA board member Rachel Kellerman demonstrates how the new online journalism archive is much more accessible with its new interface. Before the online archive was created, old journalism issues could only be found in difficult-to-access paper storage that lacked proper cataloguing and where the newspapers were becoming brittle to the point of disintegration. The presence of silverfish, the degeneration of glued bindings, and taped issues suggested moving the items to acid-free, metal storage in order to save them.

The question of accessibility was key. With help from the Paly Alumni Association and Media Arts Boosters, Kellerman was eventually able to raise funds to begin a digitization process to preserve generations of student voices for decades to come while enabling intuitive keyword search accessibility via the internet.

Kellerman and her team of student and community volunteers have been able to collect and scan about 80 percent of Paly's student journalism materials. Finding the right technical solution took time and money, and ultimately the archivists decided upon a system used by the *Stanford Daily* that provides full-text



Paly junior Charlotte Kadifa and Rachel Kellerman, the school's librarian and archivist, have been digitizing 125 years of student journalism, including Madrone yearbooks, as part of a multi-year preservation project.

search of all scanned images and texts. The goal is to have nearly 50,000 assets, or pages, archived by August 2018—the 100-year anniversary of Paly at its current campus. Palo Alto High School maintains rights to all assets.

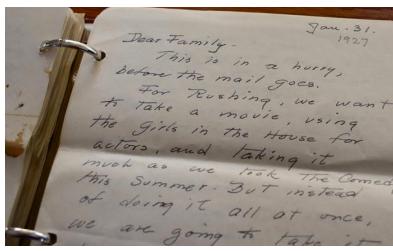
Included in the archive are the school's flagship newspaper, the *Campanile* (in continuous publication since 1918), the *Madrono* yearbook (published since 1919), and a wide range of historic publications stretching back to the school's founding in 1895. Pamphlets such as *The Sphinx, Red and Green* (named after the school's then official colors), and the *Sequanile*, a joint publication with Paly's chief sports rival Sequoia High School between 1932 and 1952, can all be found in the searchable (and browsable) online archive.

Like the publications themselves, the archive system has the benefit of student contribution, as archivists and website designers. Junior Charlotte Kadifa, a mainstay of the project, notes that the archive is an authentic, high quality and unique primary resource for students, alumni and local historians, as “[i]t shows a different voice, of what is going on in teenagers' lives on a day-to-day basis that doesn't have to do with the rest of the city.” —*This article continues with two additional pages of details and images at [pahistory.org](http://pahistory.org).*

**Dive into [palyjournalismarchive.pausd.org](http://palyjournalismarchive.pausd.org) for more!**

(continued from page 2) to share the good news, “I tried to get you on the telephone, but all the campus lines were busy, and apparently everyone was calling Los Angeles too, so I did not succeed.” (April 1925) When she really needed the news to get through, to make plans for a visit, for example, she sent a telegram and followed with a letter. Even without a full email inbox, she spent a great deal of time managing her communication.

The following year we get a glimpse into the challenges of transportation, even for a girl lucky enough to have her own car at school. In October of 1926, she wrote home with shocking news: “I was arrested for the first time the other day!” She was quick to clarify, “It was not for a very heinous offense – I was only going 28 on a 20-mile zone, on a back street of Palo Alto.” Madeline had been caught by a police force that was itself adapting to



Well-preserved and organized letters by Madeline to her family provided the primary source material for this vignette.

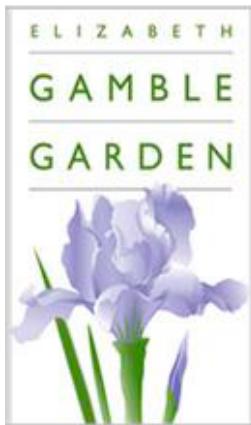
the modern age. The department had been reorganized by Howard Zink in 1924, had added more officers, and purchased the first two police cars, which made catching speeders much easier. The officer who wrote Madeline's ticket was probably wearing one of the new official Palo Alto police uniforms Zink had introduced in his first year.

Madeline tells the story of what she had to do about the ticket with some glee. “I was going to give my tag [ticket] to the Auto Club man, but I forgot all about it until the day I was to appear, so I had to go to the police court... There was an awful crowd there, all sitting around waiting to be called, and you had to go up in front of all of them and have your charge read and answer questions, and so on.” She waited about a half an hour, and then a man “told me to go up and tell the Judge I had a class, and he would hear me. I was surprised at myself when I did it without a thought, and went up boldly and demanded a hearing. I got it, too, and he fined me ten dollars, which I expected.” She writes about it as if the \$10 is not that significant to her, a reminder she came from a wealthy family. Madeline does seem to have learned her lesson, or at least she did not get caught again.

—Heather Allen Pang, PhD, PAHA Board Member

# History Jaunts

Join the PAHA Archives and other local organizations that call Cubberley Community Center their home at the **4th annual “Cubberley Community Day” on Saturday, March 24** from 11am-1pm. Fun for the whole family, the activities at this free event include karate and dance demonstrations, Cubberley artists, kids activities, food, performances, and Canopy tree planting. Located at 4000 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto.



Get ready for "**California Dreaming**," **Gamble Garden's Spring Tour**, an annual celebration of local gardens, garden design, and gardeners, **April 27-28**. Home base is Elizabeth F. Gamble Garden, 1431 Waverley St. in Palo Alto. To learn more about the gardens on the tour, the many associated activities, and to buy tickets, call (650) 329-1356 or visit the Spring Tour website [gamblegarden.org](http://gamblegarden.org).

The **Museum of the American Heritage** offers "**In the Groove: A History of Record Players**," opening on March 23 and continuing through August 19. It features "a unique collection of vintage phonographs, jukeboxes, and turntables." Located at 351 Homer Ave., in Palo Alto's "historic corridor," MOAH is free and open to the public Fri-Sun, 11-4. For more information, call (650) 321-1004 or visit [moah.org](http://moah.org).

"**Odyssey**," an exhibit by local artist Judy Gittelsohn, opens at the **Los Altos Hills Town Hall** on March 19 and continues through September 15. The exhibit is arranged in four parts that comprise a story of "rhythms, poems, colors, and tones". Gittelsohn will explain her four part composition in a "Walk and Talk Tour" on Friday, April 20, 10-noon. The Town Hall is open 8-12 and 1-5 on weekdays and is located at 26379 Fremont Road in Los Altos. For more information, call (650) 941-7222.

**SFMOMA** offers a compelling three artist exhibition, "**The Train: RFK's Last Journey**," March 17-June 10. Paul Fusco, Rein Jelle Terpstra, and Philippe Parreno represent different eras and parts of the world, but each interprets the "last train" through his own lens. Fusco's color photographs, taken from the train, capture the images of the mourners who lined its route; Terpstra's photos were taken of the train by the mourners; Parreno's film offers a re-enactment of the train, inspired by the earlier work of Fusco. SFMOMA is located at 151 3rd St., San Francisco. For information about tickets and its hours, call (415) 357-4000 or visit [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org).



A SFMOMA exhibition documents and interprets Robert F. Kennedy's funeral train journey, 50 years later. Courtesy SFMOMA.

## Follow PAHA on



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for historic Palo Alto places,  
institutions, businesses and people!

## New Members Always Welcome!

Join the community of those who are interested in Palo Alto and enjoy learning about its history—while supporting our archiving, research and publishing efforts!

Details and join online at [pahistory.org](http://pahistory.org).

## Welcome New Members!

Clark & Kathryn Akatiff  
Ross DeHovitz  
Esther Lucas  
Victor Rising



## Upcoming PAHA Programs

May 6: **PAST Historic Preservation Program**

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
June 6  
**Annual Dinner**  
featuring  
**Laura Jones**  
Stanford Archaeologist  
President, Stanford  
Historical Society

**The Heritage Program**  
for April 2018 will feature  
March 2018's program on  
"Boys and Girls Schools  
in Palo Alto"

Weds. 8 pm, Thurs. 10 am  
& Sats. 1 pm on Channel 30

DVDs available at the Guy Miller Archives, Tues. 4-8 pm, Thurs. 1-5 pm



**In Memoriam**  
Elinor Wilner

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