



# The Tall Tree Newsletter

of the PALO ALTO  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION

Since 1913

June 2025 Volume 48, No 6

In cooperation with



CITY OF  
PALO  
ALTO

Palo Alto Historical Association presents

# Night at the Museum

Wednesday, June 4, 2025 5:00 – 7:30 pm

The Roth Building ~ 300 Homer Avenue Palo Alto



The newly renovated Roth Building at night

**Come celebrate with us at this year's PAHA Annual Event "Night at the Museum" where you can make a little history of your own!**

As our guests, you'll be some of the first to tour and explore the newly renovated Roth Building, home of the long-awaited Palo Alto Museum. The Roth Building, originally designed by renowned architect Birge Clark, was constructed in 1932 as home for the Palo Alto Clinic. The Clinic was founded by Dr. Russell V.A. Lee and was one of the first innovative cooperative group medical practices in the United States. Controversial at the time as it was considered socialized medicine.

The recently completed, \$14 million transformation of the Roth Building for the Palo Alto Museum is a milestone worth celebrating! The Palo Alto Museum, scheduled to open to the public in Spring 2026, is set to be a cornerstone of cultural preservation and community engagement. Interactive exhibits will showcase Palo Alto's rich history and its impact on global innovation. Hands-on activities will engage visitors of all ages in immersive historical experiences. Public spaces including meeting rooms, a classroom and a cafe will foster community interaction in a place whose culture

of innovation will inspire generations to come. The Palo Alto Museum will also be the permanent home of the Guy Miller Archives.

Central to the Museum's mission is creating a sense of pride and possibility. We hope you come and enjoy this unique opportunity to have your voice echo throughout the walls of this blank canvas and imagine your own Palo Alto history that you would like to see in this breathtaking space.



Rich Green

Rich Green, Board President of the Palo Alto Museum, Vice President of PAHA and recent winner of the Tall Tree Outstanding Citizen Volunteer will be sharing his enthusiasm and excitement as our honorary speaker.

Please RSVP at <https://makealittlehistory.eventbrite.com>

Many thanks to the Thoits Family for generously sponsoring PAHA's Annual Event.

# Visit Local Alviso!

By Bo Crane (1950-2024), Former PAHA Board Member

## 2025 PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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El Dorado Street in Alviso with Vahl's Restaurant in the distance

The Bay Area has several smaller communities that seem to have been bypassed by the present. These include: Sunol, Port Costa, and Niles, but the oldest and closest to Palo Alto is Alviso. The port of Alviso was mapped in 1849 to serve San Jose which had been chosen as California's first capital that year. Only nine miles from the Mitchell Park Library in Palo Alto, Alviso is well situated for a weekend drive into a portal of the past that began in the 1849 gold rush era.



A brick ruin of a vacant warehouse built in 1860, Alviso

Leaving Highway 237 for Gold Street into Alviso, you soon cross the Guadalupe River. The first left takes you to El Dorado Street where on the right you'll find a spectacular brick ruin of a vacant warehouse built in 1860. The warehouse burned in 2021 but fenced off next door is the owner's 1851 house. On the corner of El Dorado and North Taylor Streets is Vahl's Restaurant which opened in 1941. It's as old as it looks and remains a legendary spot.

The town's largest business was once the Bayside Canning Company. Fenced off and in decay, the plant fronts Hope Street. Fading murals drawn on the building's stucco face tell the history of the cannery and the port. Tomas Foon Chew took over the business from his father in 1906 and established the country's third largest

cannery. His story can be found in Robin Chapman's book, *Historic Bay Area Visionaries*. Historical plaques abound through the half dozen original streets

Not many original structures of Alviso remain. A restored Italianate style building, originally built in 1887, is at 970 Elizabeth Street. This building is next to the railroad tracks diagonally from where the town's depot was located. The building has since been converted into a residence.

The Victorian style building on Catherine and Gold Streets was originally built in 1860, rebuilt in 1950. Next door at 1044 Catherine Street is a house built in 1890 as a boarding house. The house across the street on the corner of El Dorado Street was built in 1902. These were the years when Palo Alto's Professorville homes were constructed under different circumstances.



Bayside Canning Company, Alviso

Busy Alviso was a chartered city in 1852—a year before Mayfield's sleepy stage stop called Uncle Jim's Cabin was built in 1853. That same year the steamboat Jenny Lind blew up in the early morning on its way from Alviso to San Francisco, killing several dozen people. A plaque at the Alviso marina tells the tragic story.

*The Palo Alto Historical Association, a 501(c)(3) charitable 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.*

*PAHA Board meetings are conducted using Zoom at 5 pm the first Wednesday of each month (except August).*

*Public programs are held at 2 pm on the first Sunday of October, December, February, March, and May at the Palo Alto Art Center, 1313 Newell Road. Programs include speakers. The final program of the year is held in June and includes a dinner and a program. The public is welcome at all programs.*

# Kenneth Patchen the Pacifist Rebel Poet

By Jon Kinyon, PAHA Board Member

Kenneth Patchen (December 13, 1911 – January 8, 1972) was a poet, novelist, artist, performer, pacifist, and visionary who, in the words of biographer Larry Smith, was the "Rebel Poet of America." Originally from Ohio, Patchen spent his later years in Palo Alto.

His romance with writing began at age twelve when he started keeping a diary and reading the works of famous writers. His first published work was in his Ohio high school newspaper. After attending Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College for one year, and then the University of Wisconsin, he grew bored of his studies and began to wander around the US. He continued his writing, and in 1934, he married Miriam Oikemus.

During the Great Depression, Kenneth and his wife Miriam traveled between Greenwich Village, New York City and North Beach, San Francisco, as Kenneth began to establish himself as a writer while struggling to make ends meet. In 1946, Henry Miller wrote an essay on Patchen, "Patchen: Man of Anger and Light," which characterized him as a true original who was like a genre of his own, not accepted by the literary establishment. Miller compared him to the likes of William Blake, Lautreamont, Picasso, Bosch, and John the Revelator.

## *Let Us Have Madness*

*Let us have madness openly.*

*O men Of my generation.*

*Let us follow*

*The footsteps of this slaughtered age:*

*See it trail across Time's dim land*

*Into the closed house of eternity*

*With the noise that dying has,*

*With the face that dead things wear—*

*nor ever say*

*We wanted more; we looked to find*

*An open door, an utter deed of love,*

*Transforming day's evil darkness;*

*but We found extended hell and fog Upon the earth,*

*and within the head*

*A rotting bog of lean huge graves.*

©1958



Kenneth Patchen at home in North Beach, San Francisco, 1952

Following World War II, the Patchens settled in Connecticut, but then after becoming close friends with the poet Kenneth Rexroth, they relocated to San Francisco in 1951. Patchen entered a vibrant "San Francisco Renaissance" literary scene in North Beach, which was established years before the arrival of the beats, and included his friend Kenneth Rexroth, along with Philip Lamantia and William Everson, among others.

Patchen's work directly influenced the up-and-coming beat poets, including Lawrence Ferlinghetti (who would publish some of Patchen's work on his City Lights imprint), Michael McClure, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Peter Orlovsky. As early as the late 1940s, Patchen was performing his poetry to jazz accompaniment, and he inspired Bay Area poets to do likewise. Years later, writer Richard Brautigan and rock star Jim Morrison credited the man for his influence on them.

## *Sure There Is Food...*

*The trick is to get truth and lies*

*To sound just the same*

*That way you've got it made*

*Everybody is mad after while*

*Then you can come up with a world*

*Where madness is the normal thing*

*Of course those who rig it that way*

*End up mad themselves*

*But—who's to know the difference?*

*This world's the best example I know.*

©1946

(CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE)

## Kenneth Patchen the Pacifist Rebel Poet (Continued from Page 3)

One of Kenneth Patchen's later innovations was what he called the "painting-and-poem form," which combined his untrained but impactful visual artistic skills with words to create hybrid works of surprisingly powerful impact. He created these celebrated painted poems partly out of necessity due to chronic pain and sometimes debilitating health issues.

While working on a friend's car in 1937, the vehicle fell on top of him, severely damaging his spine. He never fully recovered and over the years, his condition was worsened by botched surgeries.

By 1957, Patchen was a semi-invalid, spending most of his final 12 years a recluse, with his beloved wife Miriam (to whom he dedicated every one of his 40 books), in their Palo Alto home at 2340 Sierra Court.

The only creative outlet he had during these bedridden years was his painted poems. He completed 151 of them using a variety of materials like Japanese paper, tempera, and watercolors. Patchen also produced over a thousand "painted books," special copies of his books with original paintings on the covers.

After Kenneth's passing in 1972, Miriam was as an advocate for her husband's poetry and became an activist for peace - holding weekly demonstrations against war (for 15 years) in Palo Alto.

Laurent B. Frantz, a civil rights activist and constitutional scholar, became her companion until he died on September 20, 1998. In 1998, Miriam was the subject of an award-winning short documentary film by Kim Roberts titled *Miriam Is Not Amused*.

She passed in March 2000 in her Palo Alto home, apparently while reading a peace pamphlet.



One of the 151 painted poems by Kenneth Patchen



Miriam Patchen and Laurent B. Frantz protest for peace on the corner of Embarcadero Road and El Camino Real, 1998 (San Francisco Chronicle. Photo: Michael Macor)

### Welcome Our New Members!

Tom Hogg  
Margaret Lane  
Yvonne Petersen  
Samantha Rohman  
Sukhdev Sidhu

### Upcoming Program Dates

- Oct 5 • Dec 7 • Feb 1
- Mar 1 • May 3

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held in person on the first Sunday of the months we present programs. Check our website at [www.pahistory.org](http://www.pahistory.org) for program information.

### Previous PAHA Program

If you missed the May 4th program, *The 29th Centennial Plaque & Historic Preservation Awards*, you can find it and other recent PAHA program videos on Vimeo by following this link: <https://vimeo.com/1082651220>

### In Memoriam:

Urban Cumming (Feb 2024)  
Judy Sadoff



The Tall Tree is published six times a year by the PALO ALTO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



Jon Kinyon, *Lead Editor & Design*  
Luana Staiger, Melissa Verber, *Editors*  
Copy Factory, *Printing*

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