

# Millbrae Life & Times

M I L L B R A E   H I S T O R I C A L   S O C I E T Y   N E W S L E T T E R

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## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: CHAPEL OF THE HIGHLANDS BY PAUL LARSON

56 years is a long time for any endeavor, especially in business when most struggle to survive the first 12 months. Sudden changes can happen in the business environment that can spell disaster. Remember the "dot com" companies of several years that went under, and currently many established air carriers have shut down or are struggling to survive.

Now, take a look back to 1952: The U.S. was just 7 years out of World War II, and was involved in a war across the Pacific in Korea. Back here on the Peninsula, Millbrae had just been incorporated as a city in 1948 and was growing by leaps and bounds. New construction was taking place along El Camino Real as Millbrae welcomed new business.



Chapel of the Highlands in the 1960's

One type of business that Millbrae had always needed was a mortuary. Previously, any Millbrae family who needed the services of a mortuary had to go out of town. But, on October 5, 1952, a new Funeral Chapel called the CHAPEL OF THE HIGHLANDS was christened by its founder, **Clarence Larson**. The word spread, and soon the Chapel of the Highlands gained an excellent reputation. Not only Millbrae (continued on Page 5)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT MARY VELLA TRESELER

The lazy, hazy and busy days of summer are upon us. With vacations, picnics and graduations, it's never ending. With the price of gas, it's a good idea to stick close to home.

The year began with our Installation of Officers on March 16, sworn in by

Mayor **Gina Papan**, followed by a slide presentation entitled *Child of Giants* presented by **Daniel Dixon** and his wife **Dixie**. Featured were his father, world-renowned painter **Maynard Dixon** and his mother, noted photographer **Dorothea Lange**. The event was very well attended and enjoyed.



Our next event is our annual July 4 BBQ & Family Picnic, co-sponsored with the Millbrae Lions Club. Our Vice-President and soon to be (continued on Page 2)

## VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE JOHN MUNIZ

Greetings from your new Millbrae Historical Society Vice-President **John Muniz!**

This year as Vice-President, I will be chairing the annual Millbrae Historical Society 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue, co-sponsored by the Millbrae Lions Club. Continuing the Millbrae Historical Society's fine tradition of excellence, our 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue will be more fun than ever! The 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue will be held in the David Chetcuti Community Room (450 Poplar Avenue) from

11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Friday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, with lunch being served at 12:00 noon.



Our menu will include popcorn appetizer, BBQ sirloin hamburgers with all the trimmings, potato salad, corn-on-the-cob, ice cream and cookies . . . all prepared by the experts in barbecues — the Millbrae Lions Club. We will also have entertainment, raffle prizes, beer, wine, soda and water.

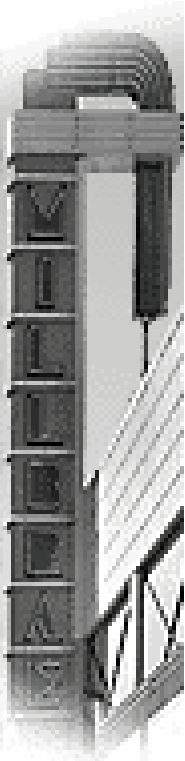


If you're up for an old-fashioned 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue, please join your friends and neighbors for a great time and community spirit.

For reservations, please see the Millbrae Historical Society 4<sup>th</sup> of July Barbecue flyer in this issue.

Thank you for your support.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

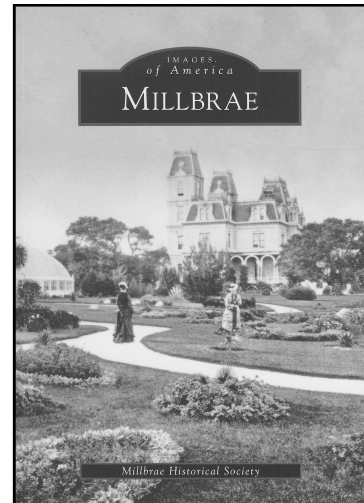


Immediate Past President of the Millbrae Lions Club **John Muniz** and his crew plan to cook a mouth-watering meal, featuring hamburgers with all the trimmings. John will also be making fresh popcorn for a crisp and tasty snack. Local entertainment, prizes and fun for all . . .

Sales of our historical book, *Images of America — Millbrae*, are doing well. Our Curator **Alma Massolo** notes that we recently received a royalty check of \$734 for the books sold in local bookstores. According to our last update in April, we have sold 929 books. Anyone interested in purchasing a book from the Millbrae Museum, please stop by any Saturday between 12 and 4p.m. Books are \$21, which includes sales tax.

Stay tuned for more information to follow on our upcoming events . . . our booth at the Millbrae Chamber of Commerce's Art & Wine Festival over the Labor Day weekend, our fall "Yard Sale", and our annual "Holiday Party" . . .

See you all on July 4<sup>th</sup>!



## CURATOR'S REPORT

ALMA MASSOLO



Through the generosity of **Evelyn Dietel**, the museum has acquired a gorgeous cut glass punch bowl that will be used at our Holiday parties and a Crosley phonograph that plays records, tapes, CDs and radio . . . a wonderful-sounding instrument! She also gave us a big load of articles to be sold at our Yard Sale sometime in the fall. Thank you Evelyn for this wealth of donations!

Another thank you to **Ernest Gee**, who gave us two lovely vases created by his father, **Alfred L. Gee**, who was a potter by trade at the

West Coast Porcelain Factory in Millbrae (located in the early 1900's at the present site of the Millbrae BART station). The vases were made in 1939. The lavender vase is a medium size and the Black vase is about 2-1/2 feet tall. Both are very elegant. Thank you Ernie for enhancing our museum with your donation!

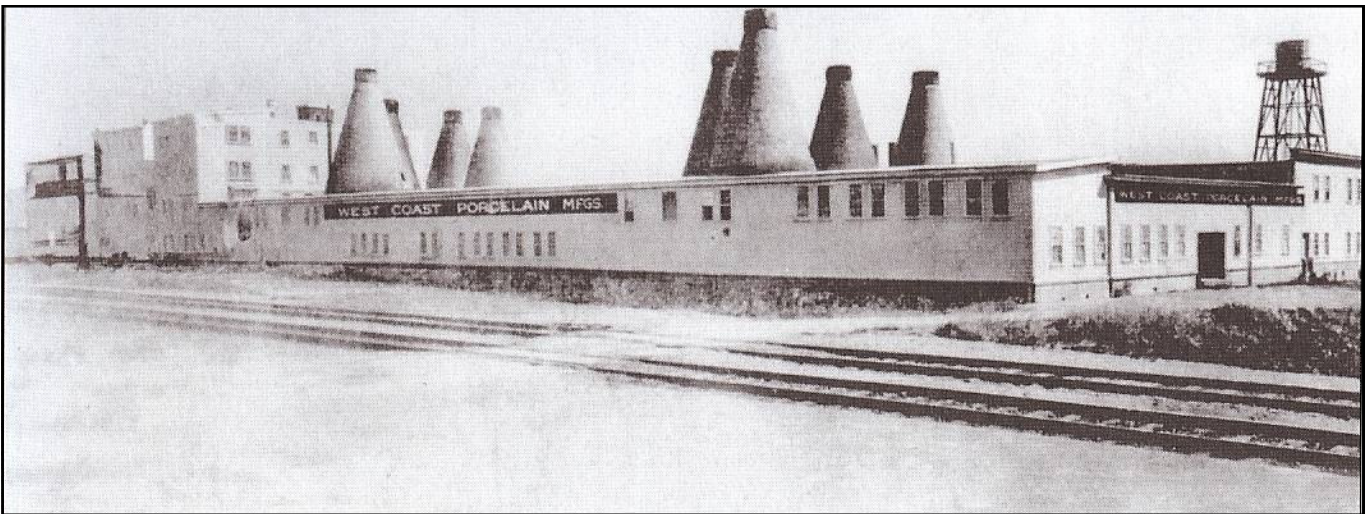
A Thank You to **Maria Esteria** and **Andrea Stariha** for the cash register that was used at the Peters and Wilson Nursery. This too is a great addition to our museum.

Two great aerial photographs of Millbrae in the 1930s were donated by **Jerry Moreland**. These are enjoyed very much by our visitors touring the museum. Thank you very much, Jerry!



We are grateful to friends of the museum who so generously offer us much-needed equipment, such as a Smith-Corona Coronet electric typewriter and a 30-cup coffee pot given by **Sue Rivas**. Thank you Sue!

On Monday June 23rd, a group of Seniors from the Three Bells Retirement Center of Pacifica will tour the museum. We are looking forward to their visit.



West Cost Porcelain Factory on Millbrae Avenue at Southern Pacific Railroad (early 1900's)

**TRAIN MUSEUM NEWS**  
ELIZABETH FURBER, EDITOR  
VERN BRUCE, REPORTER



On Friday, May 16<sup>th</sup> our Train Museum received a great donation from **Elaine Fisher**. She is the daughter of one of our benefactors, **Irene Thomford**, and of the late **William E. Thomford** of Southern Pacific Railroad fame. (Our museum lobby is also named after Mr. Thomford.) Elaine had her father's coveted Franklin Institute award, matted and framed, and then she personally drove up from southern California to present it to us! This donation consists of a medal with certificate, as well as the letter of invitation to the ceremony in 1964. Mr. Thomford, a Millbrae resident for

almost 50 years, achieved the award for deigning the well-known 'Hydra-Cushion' freight handling system for railroad cars. This award is proudly on display on the East wall of the William E. Thomford Room.

In other news, we have a new docent who hails from Saratoga. Every two weeks, **Mark Evans** drives all the way up here to Millbrae to volunteer his time as a docent at our Train Museum. We have found that he is a veritable encyclopedia of railroad and transit information.

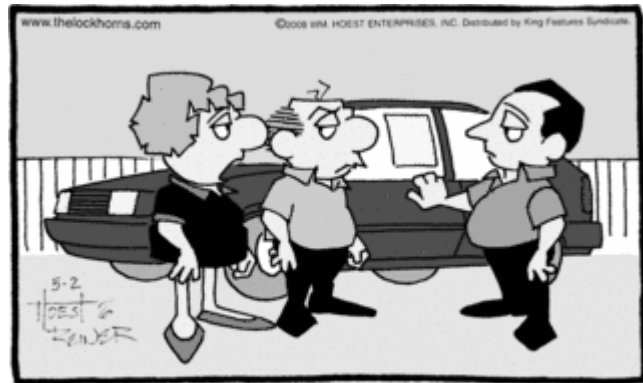
While we're on the subject of docents, we need to thank our hard-

working volunteers that enable us to keep our doors open to the public. Our Society respectfully thanks the following individuals for their efforts these last few months: **Mark Evans; Elizabeth Furber; Robert Gorran; Richard Kennedy; Gino and Gerry Micheli; Vernon Bruce** and **William Bruce**.

And Thank You to all our members for your support!



**Vern Bruce** accepting donation of Franklin Institute certificate from **Elaine Fisher**.



**WELCOME TO OUR  
NEW MEMBERS**

Larry & Anne St. Lezin  
WBS Enterprises

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: CHAPEL OF THE HIGHLANDS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

families sought the services that Clarence Larson offered, but families nearby in San Bruno and Burlingame also found that the Chapel of the Highlands provided a very caring and professional atmosphere that people could rely on when there was a death in the family.



**Clarence Larson**, who was born on his parent's farm in Little Falls, Minnesota on May 2, 1913, was much younger than his two brothers and one sister. He moved to California in 1941 and worked at Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond welding Liberty Ships during World War II. After the war he married **Mabel Silva** in 1946 and was employed by Emmerston Drug Company in San Francisco and traveled selling pharmaceuticals around the five western states. Living in Oakland, he was later employed at Tuttle Cheese Company as an executive assistant to Mr. Tuttle. One of his associates, **A.V. Scott** who was a Millbrae resident, realized Millbrae's need for a mortuary. Scott also knew that Larson was taking pre-medical courses at U.C. Berkeley and told him about

Millbrae lacking a mortuary. Larson understood the opportunity that he had, so after discussing the mortuary idea with his wife, and with Scott, it was agreed that Scott would finance the land and construction of a new mortuary in Millbrae, and Larson would enroll at the San Francisco College of Mortuary Science to gain the knowledge and credentials necessary to operate the mortuary. They found a lot available in Millbrae on the corner of El Camino Real and Millwood Drive. After touring facilities up and down the Peninsula, they came across a design that was suitable to their needs. Architectural designs were drafted, construction began, and the grand opening ceremonies commenced on October 5, 1952. Just seven years later, Larson bought Scott's interest in the Chapel of the Highlands and expanded the facilities several times. From 1952 to 2008, the Chapel of the Highlands became a landmark on El Camino Real and earned a reputation of sincere and caring help to families up and down the Peninsula.

Today, the Chapel of the Highlands has been passed down to Clarence Larson's son Paul. "My goal is to

continue on with the service that my father started in 1952, and to care for families the way I want to be cared for myself", says **Paul Larson**.

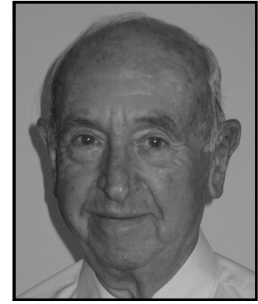
"We have an excellent reputation, and families from up and down the Peninsula have been coming back to us for years when they need our help. In the mid 90's we completely remodeled our beautiful facilities, and our up-to-date Cadillac funeral coaches and limousines are meticulously maintained. We have a fine and caring staff, and we are lucky to have them".

**Paul Larson** wants everyone to know that he and his staff are funeral care professionals and that they really do care about the families they serve. "I'm proud that we are now celebrating 56 years of service to the community. On January 18, 2007 the Chapel of the Highlands was honored as winner of the "Millbrae Business of the Year" award.

**Paul Larson** is a Trustee of the Millbrae Historical Society and the 2008-09 President of the Millbrae Lions Club.



## MUSEUM CUSTODIAN'S REPORT JACK GARDNER



Since I became the unofficial custodian of the Millbrae Museum, I have been trying to fix the appearance of the outside of the building. I have painted the back porch, which was badly weathered, and the front porch, which had been damaged by children riding skateboards and bicycles up and down the wheelchair ramp. I have also replaced wall switches and electric lights throughout the museum, and I plan to replace the screen on the back door. With guidance from Museum Curator **Alma Mas-solo**, I revamped the display case in the dining room, so as to accommodate the large red vase recently donated to the Museum by **Ernest Gee**. It is a nice addition!

The Millbrae Public Works Department staff are going to start performing some of the needed building repairs and replacements. They have already installed lights over the **Martee Thomas** historical document display, replaced a light switch in the kitchen, and removed all

of the excess paint cans and library spare parts that had been stored in the cellar. They are also planning to update the electrical outlets and relocate them higher up on the wall so that the docents and Curator don't have to get down on their hands and knees to insert plugs into the receptacles. They will also replace the missing slats on the exterior shutters. From now on, if there is something wrong with the building or an item needs replacement, we can fill out a City work request, and, depending on the availability of funds, the Public Works crew will try to accommodate our requests as soon as possible. Special thanks to **Dave** and **Craig** from the Millbrae Public Works Department for all their efforts and expertise in keeping the Museum in good shape. They do nice work!

## MHS TRUSTEE OLLIE TROST WELCH PUBLISHES MEMOIR

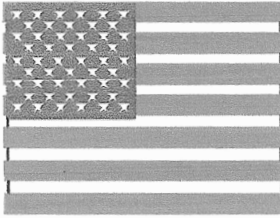
A memoir by Millbrae Historical Society Trustee Ollie Welch has been published in the March 2008 issue of *Springfield Magazine*. It is the story of her childhood growing up on a beautiful but impractical little farm in Southwest Missouri during the Great Depression. You can find a synopsis of her piece online at <http://sgfmag.com/index.html>

(*Springfield Magazine*, Volume XXIX, Number 10, March 2008 - Springfield, Missouri). If you wish to obtain a copy of the entire story, titled "Coming of Age in the Ozarks," by Ollie Mae Trost Welch, please contact Ollie at 697-6971 or send her an e-mail at [olliesbag@yahoo.com](mailto:olliesbag@yahoo.com).



To receive e-mail reminders of Millbrae Historical Society meetings and events, please send your e-mail address to Joe Teresi at [jtnia@comcast.net](mailto:jtnia@comcast.net)

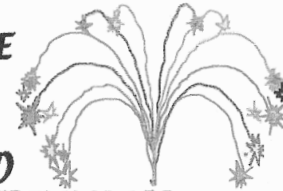
**PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL**



**FOURTH OF JULY  
BARBECUE & FAMILY PICNIC  
CO-SPONSORED BY:  
THE MILLBRAE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
& THE MILLBRAE LIONS CLUB**



**FRIDAY, JULY 4, 2008 - 11:00 AM TO 3:00 PM  
DAVID CHETCUTI COMMUNITY ROOM  
CIVIC CENTER PLAZA  
450 POPLAR AVENUE, MILLBRAE**



**(LUNCH SERVED AT 12:00 NOON)  
BARBECUED HAMBURGERS WITH ALL THE TRIMMINGS**

**ENTERTAINMENT/PRIZES - FUN FOR ALL!**



**\$12.00 ADULTS/\$5.00 CHILDREN 12 YEARS & UNDER**

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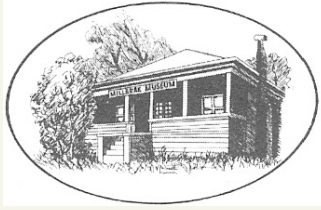
**CHECK PAYABLE TO:**

**Millbrae Historical Society  
P.O. Box 511  
Millbrae, CA. 94030  
or call: 650-697-3319**

**Number Attending** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Name (s)** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone #** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*\*DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS: FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 2008\*\*\***

WE'RE ON THE WEB AT  
WWW.MILLBRAEHS.ORG



**MILLBRAE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

Post Office Box 511  
Millbrae, CA 94030  
Phone: 650-692-5786

**MHS OFFICERS—2008**

**Mary Vella Treseler, President**  
**John Muniz, Vice-President**  
**Lois Way, Secretary**  
**Vern Bruce, Treasurer**  
**Alma Massolo, Curator & Historian**

**Joe Teresi, Newsletter Editor**

**C A L E N D A R   O F   E V E N T S**

**Friday, July 4:** Annual Fourth of July Barbecue and Family Picnic, 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, David Chetcuti Community Room, 450 Poplar Avenue.

— Co-sponsored by the Millbrae Historical Society and the Millbrae Lions Club

**Saturday - Sunday, August 30-31:** Millbrae Art & Wine Festival, Broadway Avenue, Downtown Millbrae. Support the Millbrae Chamber of Commerce and enjoy a weekend of food, music, and the arts. Please visit the Millbrae Historical Society's booth on Saturday!

**Fall 2008:** Millbrae Historical Society Yard Sale. Watch for future details on place and time. Your donations are welcome!

**Fourth Wednesdays of the Month:** Millbrae Historical Society Board Meetings, 7:00 pm, Millbrae Museum, 420 Poplar Avenue. MHS members and guests are welcome to attend.

**Millbrae Historical Society Museum Operating Hours**

**Millbrae Museum:** Saturdays, 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm

**Millbrae Train Museum:** Saturdays, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm