



# CONTINUITY

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## PAC\*SJ's Nostalgic Movie Night

PAC\*SJ celebrated history with another Movie Night on November 19<sup>th</sup> at Le Petit Trianon. Guests were encouraged to bring a 1950's dish and wear vintage outfits. Along with the wide variety of food, silent auction tables were set up in the banquet hall. By 7:15 everyone was invited into the theatre for the showing of the historical films.

The Fruit Cocktail Club (Joe Melehan, Bill Foley, and Jim Zetterquist) was in charge of the movies and led the evening's entertainment in the theatre. Jim Zetterquist hosted the movie commentary with Bill Foley, who also edited the films. The opening credits dedicated the event to Joe Melehan's mother, Pat Perrucci Melehan, who passed away that same evening. Over many years, Pat Melehan had the singular distinction of being the daughter, the wife, and the mother of three presidents of Mayfair Packing Company. She and her family played an important role in shaping "The Valley of Hearts De-

light", making today's Santa Clara Valley the wonderful place it is today. She was much loved and will be missed by many.



*PAC\*SJ Board Members Ellen Garboske, Anne Stahr and Heather David having a good time.*

The Movie Night guests viewed films that included footage of orchards, prune picking, cutting cots and Ed Sakauye plowing his fields. Then Ed demonstrated the old Bean Spray Pump developed here in Santa Clara County beginning in 1885. The second film showed us how Louis Pellier grafted his branch of the French prune onto a local plum tree. Pierre Pellier brought the French prune cuttings from France as his brother, Louis, had requested. Next we saw firefighters from the 1960's race down the San Jose streets in their rigs and put out a fire in Willow Glen. No women were allowed in the firehouses back then. Finally, we learned how IBM developed their first computer (RAMDAC) and how their modern, San Jose facilities looked in the 1950's.

*(Continued on page 2)*

# PAC\*SJ's Nostalgic Movie Night (Cont'd)

The Fruit Cocktail Club announced that they are working with the Pioneers of Santa Clara County to create a film archive of historic footage of the Santa Clara Valley. The Pioneers have purchased state of the art equipment that will transfer 8mm, super 8mm and 16mm films to DVD. The transfer service will be offered for free in exchange for the rights to the footage. The Pioneers hope to make the footage available for educational and entertainment purposes. Who knows, your footage may be included in a future "Movie Night". If you are interested in transferring your pre-1980 movie footage of any historic event, person or place in the Santa Clara Valley, please contact Bill Foley at (408) 317-8249 or send email to [iampartacus@gmail.com](mailto:iampartacus@gmail.com). You will receive a free DVD copy of your film in exchange for the rights to share those images.

Movie Night winners of the vintage apparel went to Angela Elsey, Margaret Ma, Patt Curia (who wore her father's service uniform from the 1940s) and Sheldon Smith.

The winning recipes were awarded to Leslie Masunaga - Crab Dip, Helen Stevens - Turkey Spam Macaroni, Linda Larson Boston - No Bake Cookies, and Babara Peddy - Cranberry Fruit Cocktail Salad. Other dishes that were often mentioned as favorites were the lime salad, rhubarb pie, creamed spinach, scalloped potatoes, drunken' dogs, tomato aspic,

pineapple upside down cake, apricot upside down cake, and of course our traditional Spam Fruit Cocktail Loaf. (it looks strange but actually tastes very good). It was a great evening of nostalgic tastes, treats and movies. ☪



*Vintage apparel winners*  
*Left, PAC\*SJ Board Member Patt Curia modeling her father's army uniform from the 1940's.*



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*Vintage apparel winners*  
*Right, Angela Elsey wearing a black vintage evening dress.*

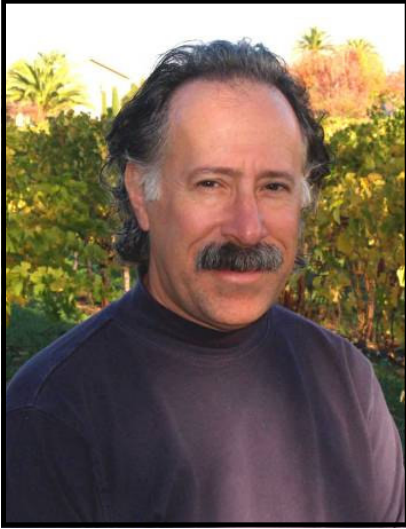
*More pictures on pages 8 & 9*



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# Interim Executive Director's Message

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*Brian Grayson*

The difficult times continue in the Silicon Valley and beyond and PAC\*SJ is no more immune from the impacts than any other organization. Each day brings challenges and the need to find new solutions. We work to find ways to achieve the goals of our mission but we need the help of our membership both financially and as volunteers.

The efforts of PAC\*SJ are more important than ever as budget cuts hit the City and in particular the Planning Department. As additional layoffs occur in the Planning Department the more impact they have on historic preservation. We would argue that historic preservation has taken more than its fair share of hits from the layoffs in the Planning Department. This most recent round of cuts saw the lead planner position for the Distinctive Neighborhood Program eliminated and the responsibilities of the Historic Preservation Officer divided amongst other non-preservation related tasks.

We are concerned that there will simply not be enough people in the department dedicated to preservation and as a result important historic structures may not receive the level of review that they should. This could translate into the loss of more buildings. We will stay vigilant in working with Planning and hope the City Council will step-up to the challenge of ensuring that our historic buildings are protected in spite of difficult economic times.

I don't know if this one slipped through as a result of the budget cuts, but if you haven't seen San Jose's newest tent then drive by the Center for the Performing Arts (CPA) and see what is being called the "Pavilion at the CPA." This unfortunate structure may serve a needed purpose but it looks more like something that is erected to process victims of a disaster. The tent appears to have been constructed without regard to the design or architecture of the CPA building and without any thought as to how the tent would blend with the character of the building and its grounds. If you have seen it you know it does not blend at all. (See pictures on page 5).

Lets hope this is a one-time aberration (two if you count the big blue tent behind the Convention Center) and not a preview of coming attractions in San Jose. At least it is not a permanent building and hopefully will be dismantled in the near future so this Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation designed CPA will no longer be marred by this canvas eyesore.

We had a very successful event in November, Movie Night 2009. The evening was highlighted by historic films that provided a glimpse back in time when agriculture ruled the Valley. Other films showed us what would be the future by documenting when IBM first arrived in what would become Silicon Valley. Another film provided a picture of life in the 1960s San Jose Fire Department and one that told the story of Louis Pellier and how he brought the French prune to the Valley. Many thanks to everyone who helped make this event a fun night for all, especially the event co-chairs, Jim Zetterquist, Joe Melehan and Bill Foley.

With the year fast coming to a close perhaps you are in a position to make some year-end donations. Since we had to cancel our major annual fundraiser this year due to the economic downturn, we have not reached our fundraising goals. We know many of you are facing tough times right now as well, but if you are able to make a donation over and above your membership commitment it would be greatly appreciated.

Whether or not you can make a monetary contribution at this time perhaps you would be able to give some of your time. We can always use people on our Committees and on our Board. See our website for more information or call the office.

I want to extend condolences on behalf of PAC\*SJ to Board Member and past president, Joe Melehan, on the recent loss of his mother, Patricia Melehan. The Melehan family has deep roots in the valley and our recent Movie Night was dedicated to her.

In closing, I would like to wish everyone the happiest of holidays as we look forward to new challenges in 2010.

**Brian Grayson**  
**Interim Executive Director**  
**PAC\*SJ**



## ON THE RADAR

### Planning Department Budget Cuts:

Joe Horwedel, Director of Planning, attended the November PAC\*SJ board meeting to tell us about the budget cuts being made in the Planning Depart-

ment. As many of you know, Sally Zarnowitz was “bumped” from the Historic Preservation Officer position during the last round of layoffs. John Davidson assumed this role. John will now split his time between Historic Preservation and Environmental review. Akoni Danielson, John’s boss, has been reassigned and Darryl Boyd will now oversee John and the Commission. Hadasa Lev, who was staffing the Distinctive Neighborhoods program lost her position in the Planning Department and will join the Environmental Services Department. Joe assured us that the program will continue in Hadasa’s absence. All in all, it’s a sign of the times, but it’s disappointing to see these positions that focused on historic preservation eliminated or reduced. PAC\*SJ has worked hard over the years to advocate for the importance of having qualified staff in areas that affect preservation.

### MLK Library:

Due to the reduction in the Redevelopment Agency’s budget, it looks like the Convention Center expansion has been put on hold, which means, for the time being, the library building will not be demolished. We hope the same holds true for Fire Station One. Most of the development world has gone into shutdown mode and there seems to be little interest from the development community to purchase this site.

### Former City Hall:

No question that this building on Mission Street is a landmark, but we’ve seen landmarks fall to the wrecking ball before. It appears that the City might be interested in trading the building to the County in exchange for monies the Redevelopment Agency owes the County.

### Mirassou Winery:

Preliminary review is under way for Summerhill Homes proposed project on the site of the former Mirassou Winery on Aborn Road. Summerhill’s application is to allow up to 150 dwelling units as well as general commercial, office, and retail on the site. There are at least two structures that are potential historic resources. We will work with Summerhill and the Historic Landmarks Commission to ensure the historic elements of the site are treated sensitively within the proposed development.

### Letcher’s Garage:

A group of PAC\*SJ representatives toured the Letcher’s Garage site with representatives from Barry Swenson Builder on a salvage-seeking mission. We’ve asked that the brick walls be dismantled and donated to the California Pioneers to be used for a patio behind their headquarters at the Paulsen House at History Park. We also asked that the rafter tails on the building next to the corner building be salvaged and donated to PAC\*SJ. In the event that History San Jose does not want the iron doors, PAC\*SJ has requested that they be donated to us.

### Closing Thoughts:

It is said that difficult economic times are good for preservation. As development slows in San Jose, it appears that that may be the case, but as City revenues decline, the City will be looking for opportunities that will generate revenue. If an historic building stands in the way of potential revenue, look out; we may be in for a rough ride. Let’s hope that the strengthened language the General Plan Update Task Force is considering regarding historic preservation will save the day.



# Federal Help for Historic Preservation

The Community Restoration and Revitalization Act (H.R. 3715 and S. 1743) was reintroduced to Congress and would make beneficial changes to the federal rehabilitation tax credit and provide a greater incentive for the reuse of historic and older buildings

Contact your Members of Congress today and ask them to be a co-sponsor of the Bill (H.R. 3715 and S. 1743) , especially if they are members of either the House Ways and Means Committee or the Senate Finance committee. If your Members of Congress are already co-sponsors, please thank them for their

support of historic preservation. The bill would also encourage building owners to achieve substantial energy savings in building rehabilitations with graduated increases in the historic tax credit based on the level of efficiency achieved. The measure is a redrafted version of the Community Restoration and Revitalization Act (H.R. 1043 and S. 584), which was introduced in the last Congress.

For more information go to

<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/rehabilitation-tax-credits/federal/proposed-amendments.html>.

## The New Look for San Jose?

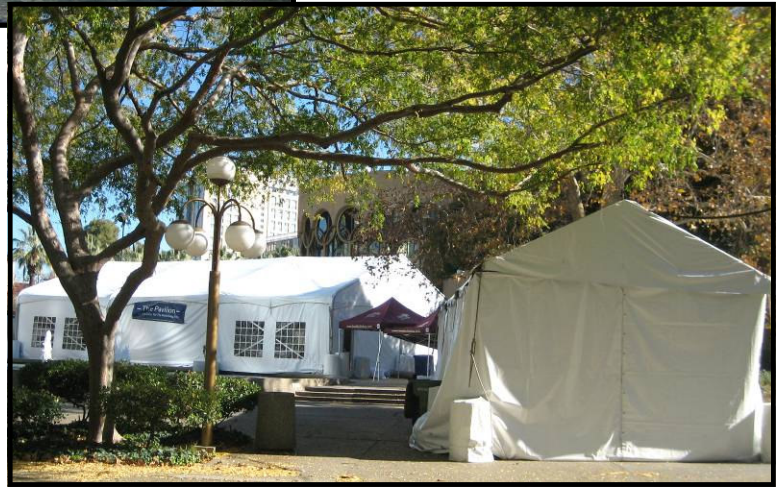


In Brian Grayson's ED Message on page 3, he asks if the tents at the Center for the Performing Arts (CPA) are a one-time aberration or a preview of coming attractions in San Jose? We hope this is not a predilection for the future.

Judge for yourself. The picture on the left is taken from Park Avenue. The tent hides most of the CPA building, that was designed by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. If they could only see it now.

On the right, the picture is taken behind the second tent. A third tent sits toward the rear entrance to the CPA, against the structure, and appears to be storage.

*(Photos: G. Frank)*



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# Mid-Century Architecture

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## San Jose's

### Mid-century Context Statement

The San Jose Modernism Historic Context Statement is now on line at [www.sanjoseca.gov/planning/historic](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/planning/historic). Click on "Mid-century Context Statement" to access the document that was compiled by Seth Bergstein and Paige Swartley of PAST Consultants, LLC. The context statement was at the request of the Preservation Action Council of San Jose, and funded by the San Jose Redevelopment Agency Strong Neighborhoods Initiative program.

The study covers buildings constructed during the 1935-1975 time frame. It explores the development of Modernist architecture in San Jose and organizes the information into a group of themes that are illustrated by property types. This is the first comprehensive study of Modernist buildings in San Jose and provides a global look at our Modernist properties.

The question of "what and why" do we preserve certain buildings becomes more challenging when we are evaluating our more recently constructed buildings. This study will assist such future decisions for San Jose.

## What The National Trust Said—

### "Modernism and the Recent Past"

"The National Trust for Historic Preservation recognizes the importance and significance of cultural resources of the post-war and modern era, and aims to enhance the public's appreciation for and understanding of mid-20th Century architecture. The National Trust hopes to unite emerging popular interest in preserving the recent past with proper preservation practices through the promotion of continued use and sensitive rehabilitation of these structures."



National Trust for  
Historic  
Preservation  
Headquarters  
in  
Washington, DC.

*In Memory of*

**Frances Fox**

**2/26/1915 - 9/16/2009**

**We are deeply saddened over the loss of a wonderful lady whose passion for local history inspired many. Her lectures, books, walking tours and enthusiasm all helped to keep our history alive.**

# PAC\*SJ Calendar 2010

- Jan. 25** Monday, PAC\*SJ Board Meeting, 6 - 8 pm , Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St., San Jose
- Feb. 22** Monday, PAC\*SJ Board Meeting, 6 - 8 pm , Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St., San Jose
- Mar. 15** Monday, PAC\*SJ Board Meeting, 6 - 8 pm , Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St., San Jose
- Apr. 19** Monday, PAC\*SJ Board Meeting, 6 - 8 pm , Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St., San Jose
- Apr. 24** Saturday, San Jose Women's Club Home Tour
- May 17** Monday, PAC\*SJ Board Meeting, 6 - 8 pm , Le Petit Trianon, 72 N. 5th St., San Jose

**Board Meeting dates are tentative—see website for confirmed dates  
Watch for details on our Annual Meeting in early 2010.**

## JIM FOX

1947-2009

Although Preservation Action Council may not have always been in agreement with Jim, he was a true preservationist and was responsible for some wonderful restoration projects in downtown San Jose. His offices in the Saratoga Capital Building were a feast for the eyes, and the Jose Theater, the De Anza Hotel and the Original Joes building are only a few of his other successful historic preservation projects.

Andre, Brian and I had an opportunity to meet with Jim earlier this year to discuss some projects he was considering. Jim was always very straightforward in telling you what he wanted, but would listen to opposing views and try to accommodate those opinions. I don't think you can ask for much more. I am sorry we won't have the opportunity to work with Jim in the future.

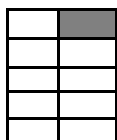
Thank you Jim, for your vision and commitment to excellence: San Jose is a better place for your having been involved.

Judi Henderson

## ADVERTISE IN CONTINUITY!

*Continuity* is distributed to over 600 San José preservationists, homeowners and decision-makers. It's a great way to get your message out to your best potential customers! For ads larger than the business card, you must supply camera-ready artwork, or PAC\*SJ can provide it at an additional charge.

**Buy ads in 6 issues and SAVE! Plus, all multiple-issue ads come with a free membership!**



### Business Card

Single issue \$50  
3 issues \$120



### 1/4 Page

Single issue \$100  
3 issues \$250



### 1/2 Page

Single issue \$200  
3 issues \$450



### Full Page

Single issue \$375  
3 issues \$700

## PAC\*SJ's Nostalgic Movie Night (Cont'd)



*Vintage apparel Honorable Mentions were far left, Margaret Ma and left, Sheldon Smith.*

*Above, PAC\*SJ Board Member Jim Zetterquist and Gabriel Ibarra sample the vintage delicacies.*



*Above, new Board Member Judy Stabile, a Movie Night guest, Bob Boschert and Board Member Helen Stevens check out the main dishes.*

*(Movie Night Photos: Joann Renk and G. Frank)*



# PAC\*SJ Movie Night Marquee

*"The Valley That Was"*

(30 minutes; KTEH production)

*San Jose Fire Dept. Recruitment, 1960's*

(5 minutes; SJ Fire Museum, KNTV)

*"Fortune in Two Trunks"*

(15 minutes Sunsweet Co., Louis Pellier and the prune)

*"The Search at San Jose"*

(15 minutes; IBM story in SJ in the 1950's)



Above, Heather David and Jim Henderson.  
Right, Lynda Sereno. Far right, Cynthia Barnes.



Above, the Usherettes from Portraits of the Past, History San Jose, from left to right, Ethel Reinegger, JoAnn Renk, Gayle Frank, Nancy Martin

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# Thank You Sponsors, Supporters, Donors & Committee!

PAC\*SJ would like to thank our generous sponsors, donors and supporters for Movie Night.

## Sponsors

Patt Curia  
Ellen Garboske  
Judi Henderson  
Erik Schoennauer  
Helen Stevens

## Supporters

Keith Watt, Le Petit Trianon

## Movie Night Committee

Co-Chairs and Movie Coordinators: Joe Melehan, Jim Zetterquist and Bill Foley

And the PAC\*SJ Board of Directors

Patt Curia, Heather David, Gayle Frank, Ellen Garboske, Judi Henderson, Julia Howlett, Andre Luthard,  
Joseph Melehan, Tina Morrill, Frank Penrose, Anne Stahr, Helen Stevens, Jim Zetterquist

Executive Director: Brian Grayson

PAC\*SJ also thanks our judges from Portraits of the Past - History San Jose  
Robb Moore, Nancy Martin, Ethel Reinegger, and JoAnn Renk.

## Donors of Auction Items

Atomic Ranch Magazine

Ballet San Jose

Fred Bennett

Byington Winery

Casa Nuesta Winery

Gary David

Hanna House

Heather David

Hotel De Anza

Gayle Frank

Don Gagliardi

Lisa's Tea Treasures, Pruneyard

Jane Luthard & Family

Rusty Lutz

Caroline Martin

Leslie Masunaga

Bonnie Montgomery

The Mountain Winery

Opera San Jose

Preston Wynne Spa, Saratoga

Ethel Reinegger

Roy's Station

San Jose Museum of Art

San Jose Stage

Marcella Sherman

Symphony Silicon Valley

St. Clement Vineyards

Terry Thompson

Top Hats Millinery

Zanotto's Downtown Market

# San Jose's Newest Landmarks

"Frank & Nellie Wolfe House #9", 643 South Sixth Street, Jason Rowan and Batsirai Mutasa, owners

"Latta House", 445 North Third Street, Courtney and Jonathan Carr, owners

"Field-Gross House", 167 South Fourteenth Street, Bernadette Drechsler, owner

"Petree House", 102 South Twelfth Street, Seamus and Jennifer Turner, owners

"Riggs House", 577 South Twelfth Street, Suzanne Rice and Neil McCarthy, owners

"Former Second Presbyterian Manse", 655 South Sixth Street, David Dudek, owner

"Cox House", 198 South Twelfth Street, Gary Rucker and Michael Howerton, owners

"Purdy House", 438 North Second Street, William and Jordan Saenz Baker, owners

The above houses, plus the earlier landmark homes, the "Tommie Smith House," at 55 N. 11th Street and the "Stern/Fischer Residence (HL01-123) at 132 Pierce Avenue, owned by James F. Cox, were approved by the Historic Landmarks Commission to enter into Mills Act contracts. The Mills Act allows owners to facilitate a property tax reassessment and partial tax relief in return for a binding agreement to rehabilitate and maintain the historical and architectural character of the property for at least a ten-year period.



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*Hats and Vintage Homes Never Go Out of Style!*



*The Neptune Society* is located in the former Cambiano art fixture shop built in 1928 by Architect Herman Krause. This Spanish-Eclectic style modest white building is dominated by the cast concrete pediment over the entryway. Inside is a small courtyard with a beautiful tile-covered fountain and tropical plants. The interior of the building is a showplace of locally produced decorative tile.

*Neptune Society of Central California*

798 South Second Street, San Jose, CA 95112 ■ 408-287-8700 or 800-225-1593



# Meet PAC\*SJ's New Board Members



## Judy Stabile

Judy has been involved in historic and preservation activities for more than 30 years and she has basic knowledge about most related areas, especially the political playing field. She served on the Historic Landmarks Commission twice, and while serving on the San Jose City Council for eight years, Judy was the liaison to the Historic Landmarks Commission. She has been involved in the preservation of a number of landmarks and was the founding director of the Peralta-Fallon complex. She believes that PAC\*SJ does important work in keeping our heritage alive for the future and making San Jose a more interesting place to live.

Judy likes to read history and mysteries. She has two children and three grandsons with whom she plays a lot of the classic board games, such as Monopoly, Clue, Risk and Sorry. She lives in the Hensley Historic District downtown, but in a contemporary condo, not a historic home. Judy has lived in San Jose for 37 years and over that time she has served on the staff or on the Boards of a number of non-profits organizations.

PAC\*SJ is delighted you have joined our Board.

## Eric Thacker

As an owner of a historic landmark, past board member of the Victorian Preservation Association, a "retired" landmarks commissioner, and a participant in the historic stakeholders process, Eric has seen the importance of preserving historic resources and how they can be damaged or lost due to poor communication among stakeholders and poor policy/implementation by city hall. He hopes his personal experiences and background will help PAC\*SJ hone a preservation strategy that would achieve preservation goals and further bolster credibility with city hall, developers, and city residents.



Eric is a long-time technology marketing professional with areas of interest in historic preservation advocacy, building community consensus, and raising awareness of San Jose's historic fabric. In his spare time, he works on his own restoration projects (house and 1962 MG), avidly follows the Sharks, and enjoys video games.

Welcome aboard Eric! The PAC\*SJ Board is so pleased to have you join us.

## Notable Quotables

**"All architecture is shelter, all great architecture is the design of space that contains, cuddles, exalts, or stimulates the persons in that space."**

-Quote by Philip Johnson (1906– 2005), who was an influential American architect. In 1930, he founded the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and later (1978), served as a trustee.

# Letcher's Legend

The northeast corner of North First and St. James Streets holds two structures that have seen a whole lot of San Jose history. Around 1900, Clarence Letcher, an early auto enthusiast and a man who liked the ladies, built his first garage at 136 South Market Street that was considered the first building designed for the automobile business in the State. Letcher was said to be involved in the design and building of the Sunset Automobile but he soon discovered that more money could be made by repairing and selling automobiles, especially after Ford came out with the assembly-line Model T. (A rare picture of the Sunset auto can be seen in the Arcadia book, *San Jose's Historic Downtown*.)



*Clarence Letcher's third garage in 1914 at 214 North First Street.*

Early on, Letcher's automobile business was so unique that the term "garage" was uncommon, so his business was known as "Letcher Manufacturing Co." and "Letcher's Automobile Depository" during the time he sold Oldsmobiles (circa 1902.) As his business grew he built a larger garage (1905-06) on the corner of North First and St. James Streets (200 North First St.) that became Letcher's Garage. Shortly after, in July, 1907, he sold the corner building to Osen & Hunter (later becoming Osen & McFarland) and immediately built his third and largest garage right next door.

According to the *Sunday Mercury and Herald* (9/27/1907), this third garage (214 North First St.) was proclaimed "to be the finest and most up-to date automobile garage in the State, if not on the entire Pacific Coast." Letcher proudly explained the innovative features of his latest garage, such as placing the "offices, receiving rooms, waiting room for the ladies and gentlemen, and night rooms for the men", upstairs in the front portion of the garage. Wolfe & McKenzie, a well-known local architectural firm, designed the reinforced concrete garage in the Mission style with one and a half stories at the front of the building and a single story in the back. The designs for the garage and the required permits were completed by the time Letcher announced his plans in September of 1907. All materials and construction would be first-class and he expected to move in for business within

sixty days. He stated: "not a stick of wood nor bolt will go into the building that is not of the best." The entire structure was supported without pillars, allowing a large, clear floor space. The garage was built with a unique expansive wood truss roof design and large steel shutters on the rear windows. The building was constructed as fire-proof as possible and all new machinery and equipment was ordered for the garage operations.

Soon Letcher became the local dealer for the luxury automobiles, Pierce Arrow, Packard, and Cadillac. His third garage was modified and enlarged by Wolfe & McKenzie in 1914 and now had a Tudor style façade. By 1916 after 13 years of selling Cadillacs, he switched to selling Chalmers. Letcher excelled at marketing and he installed "milepost" signs along roads from Los Angeles to his business in San Jose. Each sign told the traveler how many miles were needed to reach Letcher's Garage. A sign over the entrance to his garage said "The End of the Road."

Clarence Letcher was a man of action who loved hunting, cars, boats, and speed. If there was a race, he was most likely participating and often winning. He was known as a "mechanical genius" and in his younger days he drove one of the Southern Pacific's largest locomotives.

*(Continued on page 14)*

# Letcher's Legend (Cont'd)

In 1903, the San Jose Driving Association held their annual meeting at the San Jose Park driving track and Barney Oldfield, with his old racer, Bullet No. 2, was the principal drawing card. Oldfield's manager dared any and all comers to face his star on the race course. The young, speed-mad Clarence Letcher, known for his "nerve and coolness," was selected as the "logical sucker" for a race with Oldfield. As the race began, Barney Oldfield led and left Letcher and his Oldsmobile behind until engine trouble plagued Oldfield. Then, Letcher gained on Bullet No. 2, all the while chewing on his black cigar. Finally Letcher crossed the finish line first to defeat the U.S. master speed king and was greeted by an excited crowd of admirers. A black cigar was Letcher's good-luck charm in his subsequent races.



*Letcher's third garage at 214 No. First St, next door to the shop he sold.*

In August, 1904, Letcher proudly won four silver cups with his Cadillac racer at the Del Monte (near Monterey) four-day "Automobile Run and Race Meet" sponsored by the Automobile Club of California. His picture, sitting in his car, was published in two separate articles in the *Sunday Mercury* and *Herald*, once before the event and once after the races.

In March of 1905, a newspaper article describes Letcher driving his Cadillac daily at a high speed around a banked track at the Cyclers' Park. The article states: "it is a daring feat on the part of Letcher to attempt it."

A newspaper account in 1906 relates Letcher's newest acquisition, a luxurious, 38-foot gasoline launch with four tiny staterooms that was labeled the "fastest and best launch on the Bay." Proudly Letcher tried his boat out in rough weather on the bay and reached 12 miles an hour with ease. The two-cylinder engine had 18 horsepower. Five years later, in 1911, Letcher announced he was building a new power boat with 50 horsepower that would be as fast as any other

boat on the bay, at 25-27 mph. In that same year he served as Vice Commodore of the South Bay Yacht Club.

Around that time, in December of 1911, Letcher applied for a patent on an air auto jack named the "Atlas" that could raise one ton in weight.

In 1917 a newspaper article recounted that Letcher owned a ranch near Pescadero and Butano creeks. At that time a raging fire threatened his property so he placed *(Continued on page 15)*



*Letcher's second garage on the corner of North First and St. James Street. In 1907 Letcher sold the garage to Osen & Hunter (later becoming Osen & McFarland).*

## Letcher's Legend (Cont'd)

water pipe in gulches to soak the grass and trees, hoping to protect his \$10,000 worth of property including buildings, furniture, an electric generating plant, a 20,000 gallon reservoir, shop and stables. Letcher's previous homes included a "handsome residence in the Willows" that was burned to the ground due to a faulty flue in 1903, and a new home built near 13<sup>th</sup> and San Fernando Streets in 1904. 1903 must have been quite a year for Clarence Letcher, since in addition to losing his Willows home, that April he sued his first wife, Maude, for a divorce.

Clarence Letcher was a sociable person and it appears he was active in a number of social and civic organizations. He belonged to the San Jose Commercial Club that had over 700 members. The Club included influential businessmen from all over the County and one of their goals was to improve the economic growth in San Jose.

But Letcher's philandering finally caught up with him. He was having an affair with a blonde beautiful named Ann Bennett that became known to Letcher's second wife, Helen Permien Letcher. With the help of Helen's private detective, she confronted Letcher and Ann in San Francisco after he lied about going hunting. However, it was reported that discussions later that week with their lawyer friend, Louis Oneal, were successful and Mrs. Letcher seemed happy at a lunch with relatives on July 2, 1926. But something happened after lunch to trigger her rage, though no one knew or admitted what it was. Helen left the Letcher apartment in the Vendome Hotel, went to the Letcher Garage, argued with her husband in the doorway of the garage, drew out a gun from her purse and shot him three times. Then she turned the gun on herself and died at the scene. Letcher was taken to the hospital and died the next day. Clarence and Helen Letcher were buried together at Oak Hill Cemetery but when Clarence's will was read, his wishes for cremation with his ashes spread on Mt. Hamilton were fulfilled. Mrs. Letcher was re-buried in Oakland next to her mother. The couple had been married for about 22 years. Now, it was the end of the road for Clarence Letcher.

As an interesting sidebar, seven years later in 1933, George Truman "Skimp" Letcher, Clarence Letcher's son, was operating the Letcher Garage after his father's death. When Brook Hart was kidnapped, "Skimp" was part of the San Jose's Sheriff's plan to detract the outraged public crowd and whisk the two jailed prisoners up to San Francisco for their (Continued on page 16)



*Letcher's garages today. Top, Letcher's third and largest garage at 214 North First Street. Above, next door on the corner of North First and St. James Streets was Letcher's second garage that was sold to Osen & Hunter in 1907. Later, this building served as the Four Wheel Brake Garage until it was transformed into the Oasis Night Club, which closed in 1996.*

# Letcher's Legend (Cont'd)

protection from the angry mob.

Sadly, San Jose will lose the Letcher Garage structures to make way for 12-story and 18-story condominiums, even though the 100 year old buildings are "contributing structures" to San Jose's historic St. James Park District. The garage buildings are being sacrificed in order to save the noteworthy First Church of Christ Scientist that sits directly behind the garages and faces St. James Street. All three structures have been allowed to deteriorate and are in terrible condition. The corner garage (the former Oasis Club) has been modified to a great extent. But one look at the old back walls of both garages, with the original brick and steel shutters, takes us back to an earlier time. Wouldn't it be a fantastic tourist attraction to restore at least one of the garages for a display of antique automobiles while crediting Letcher with his automotive innovations? ☞



Gayle Frank



*Top, back wall of Letcher's second garage on the No. First & St. James Streets. Note the steel shutters. Above, back wall of Letcher's third garage at 214 North First street, right next door.*

*(Photos on pages 15 & 16: G. Frank)*

*Right, a Letcher ad from the San Jose Mercury, The Evening News, on 9/27/1911*

*Sources: San Jose Mercury Archives*

1912 Cadillac, Fully Equipped, \$2050

Demonstration Car Here--It's a Beauty  
Equipped With New Starting Device  
Starts From the Seat

**Letcher's Garage**  
214-224 North First Street  
AGENT FOR SANTA CLARA AND SAN MATEO COUNTIES



# HISTORIC PACKARD SHOWROOM RESTORED

Historic preservationists were out in force to view the recently restored Spanish baroque building at 865 The Alameda. Biggs, Cardoso and Associates held an open house to let us view the results of their magnificent remodel of this fine structure.

Originally a beautiful showroom for elegant Packard automobiles, the building had been stripped of its decorative elements and “modernized,” as were so many others after World War II.

When Col and Cerruti opened their new Packard dealership in November 1929, the Mercury Herald lauded the building as: “the last word in



attractive business design and permanent construction. It is a semi-Spanish type...” Nowhere does the article mention that the architects were Wolfe and Higgins, one of the city’s most prolific architectural firms. Records indicate that the building was financed by Charlie Bigley, San Jose’s political boss, whose early financial success came from dealings with autos, taxis and ambulances.

Restored are the concrete sculptural friezes above the showroom windows. Moulds for these were recreated through comparisons with early photographs. The tile on the façade has been replaced, and the distinctive arched entryway has been uncovered after being hidden for years under ivy. The spacious area in the back of the building has been laid out for offices. Large windows and a giant skylight add to the openness.

*(Continued on page 18)*

*Top, photo of the beautifully restored building at  
865 The Alameda.*

*(Photo: G. Frank)*


*Left, ribbon cutting at the open house. Council Member Pierluigi  
Oliverio, Larry Clark and Mark Cardoso help cut the ribbon.*

*(Photo: Heather David)*



# HISTORIC PACKARD SHOWROOM RESTORED (Cont'd)

To add to the festivity, one could view several classic Packards that were on display in front of the building. A large, black luxury sedan was a further reminder of the grace and beauty that existed during the early years of the 20th century.

If you haven't done so, take a look at that stretch of the Alameda that runs from the Arena west. It has been markedly improved, and the Biggs and Cardosa offices certainly add to the overall attractiveness of the neighborhood.   
Jack Douglas, SAH



Clockwise from top left, replaced tile. Top right, entrance door and archway. (Photos: G. Frank) Above right, a beautifully restored Packard on exhibit. Above left, Jack Douglas and Tom Layton at the celebration. (Photos: Heather David)

# Exploring Our San Jose Landmarks

Here are the next three San Jose Landmarks from the City list. Check previous *Continuity* issues for descriptions of landmarks #1-24 at [www.preservation.org](http://www.preservation.org).

## HL83-25: Gates Maybeck Residence, 62 So. 13th St.

Dr Howard Gates (1867-1914) was one of the most influential doctors in San Jose. He and his wife, Amelia Levenson, also an MD, had a thriving practice at their Gates Sanitarium at Eleventh and East Santa Clara Streets. Later, Gates was hired as superintendent of the County Hospital and oversaw the reconstruction of the Hospital after the 1906 earthquake. In 1904 the Gates hired Bernard Maybeck to design and build their custom house on So. 13<sup>th</sup> Street. The house is actually three stories; the lower level is partly underground, with a kitchen, dining room and servant's room. Circular stairs lead to the living room on the second level and bedrooms are up on the third floor. There are many windows and skylights designed to allow natural light to infuse the house. The exterior has an extended roof, a dramatic arch at the second level and elaborate balconies at major windows.

Bernard Maybeck (1862-1957) was one of the early architects that created California's first original architecture, referred to as First Bay Tradition, a revolutionary philosophy of incorporating nature-based ideas into architecture. He became a professor of engineering drawing at UC Berkeley and mentored many California architects such as Julia Morgan and

William Wurster. Maybeck's two most significant landmarks in the Bay Area are the Palace of Fine Arts (San Francisco, 1914) and the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Berkeley (1910). The Gates house is the only structure designed by Bernard Maybeck in San Jose and is representative of his interest in European styles of architecture (flavors of Italian and Swiss designs) as opposed to his numerous natural redwood structures identified with the First Bay Tradition.



*Gates Maybeck home today*

Source: *Historical Footnotes of Santa Clara Valley* by Jack Douglas



*Gates/Maybeck house in 1995*

## HS84-26: Alameda ROW (District)

The Alameda originally linked the Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe to Mission Santa Clara de Asis and was built in the late 1700s by Native American neophytes from the Mission. Along the road, rows of willow trees were planted by the Mission workers in the winter of 1799-1800. The Alameda became part of El Camino Real that connected the South Bay to San Francisco. Tolls were charged for access until the county bought The Alameda in 1868 and returned the road to free passage again. Past transportation down this road included Car-lines powered by horses, steam or electric power. By the early 1900's The Alameda was incorporated into the City of San Jose.

The historic Alameda runs from Race Street to Highway 17 and some of its beautiful mansions (Continued on page 20)

# Exploring Our San Jose Landmarks (Cont'd)

remain today, often used as professional and business offices. By 1983 the Historic Landmarks Commission was concerned over incompatible development and the demolition of the historic structures on The Alameda. In order to conserve "the visual and historic character of The Alameda" the City Council declared it a Historic Landmark, initiated re-zoning and established design criteria for planned development.

The roadway includes historic residences of various architectural styles, two churches (Westminster Presbyterian Church and First Church of Christ Scientist), a theatre (Towne), and retail buildings. However, there are many modern structures along the way. Other significant items of historic interest along The Alameda include the Hester Park Gates, Light Standards, fireplugs, a plaque on the canning site at West Taylor Street, the underpass at Hester Street, and many beautiful, old trees. The original Willows were replaced in 1887.



Source: San Jose Historic Landmark Nomination Form No. 17, Submitted by San Jose Landmarks Commission, 1983



Top, *The Alameda in early days.* (Photo: [www.businessimagegroup.com](http://www.businessimagegroup.com))

Above, *The Hester Park Gates.*



Above, *retail shops on The Alameda.*

Right, *Westminster Presbyterian Church.*

Far right, *the Towne Theatre.*

(Other Photos & Text: G. Frank)



# Exploring Our San Jose Landmarks (Cont'd)

## HS84-27: Bank of Italy, 8-14 So. First Street

This 13-story building was San Jose's first skyscraper at 283 feet tall and was constructed in 1927 during the downtown building boom. H. A. Minton was the architect for this Italian Renaissance style, steel framed structure sheathed in brick and terra cotta. The bank was featured in *Architect and Engineering Record of California* as one of the first earthquake-proof constructions in the area. Over 100 concrete piles support the reinforced concrete walls and floors. A terra cotta classic tower sits on top with a tile roof holding a copper lantern and a bronze flag pole. Many older citizens can remember the green light beacon shining at night. The first floor interior consists of marble from France, Belgium and Tennessee in beautiful designs. French marble is prevalent on the upper floors. Bronze fixtures, finished in gold leaf, and additional gold leaf ornamentation decorate the first floor.

A. P. (Amadeo Peter) Giannini (1870 – 1949) was born in San Jose but moved to San Francisco with his family as a young man. He founded the Bank of Italy in San Francisco in 1904

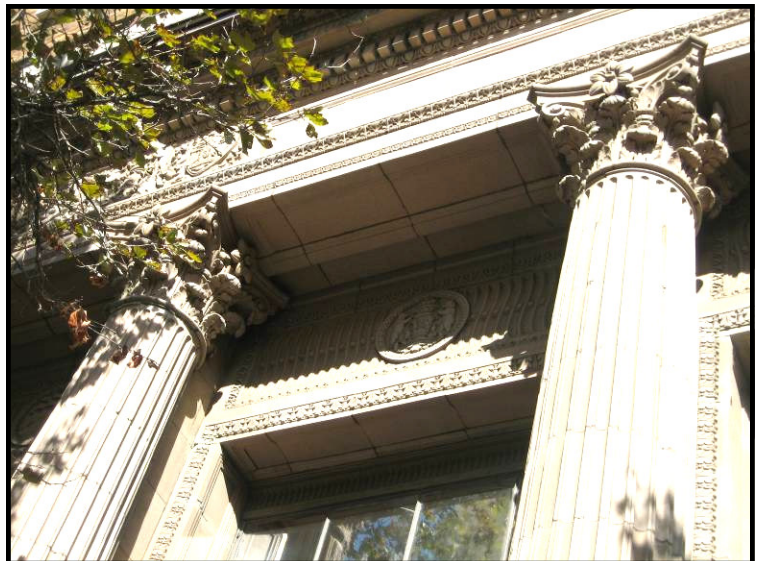
and established his first out-of-town bank in San Jose in 1909. In 1930 the Bank of Italy became the Bank of America. Giannini is credited as the inventor of many modern banking practices such as loans to farmers, immigrants, and the middle class, and school children's savings accounts. He loaned money for such projects as Walt Disney's first full-length animated movie (*Snow White*), construction of the Golden Gate Bridge, Henry Kaiser's projects to support World War II, and he gave capital to help form the Hewlett-Packard company.



*Amadeo Peter (A. P.) Giannini*

Time magazine named him one of the "Builders and Titans of the Twentieth Century."

Sources: 1) San Jose Historic Landmark Nomination Form No. 27, Submitted by Bonnie Bamburg, 1984  
2) [www.apgiannini.com](http://www.apgiannini.com)



**Top, Bank of America (Bank of Italy) Building, view from East Santa Clara Street. Above, close up of window treatment with ornamentation, fluted columns and capitals.**

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# Preservation Action Council of San Jose

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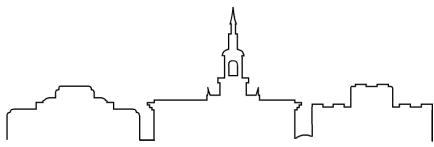
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The Preservation Action Council of San José (PAC\*SJ) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to preserving San José's architectural heritage through education, advocacy and events.

We believe that historic preservation is **good for our quality of life, good for business, and good for the environment.** We aim to integrate a strong commitment to historic preservation into the land use and development decisions of the City of San José that affect historic resources, as well as into the private decisions of property owners and developers. We try to bring owners and developers together to create historically sensitive projects that make economic sense.

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