

# THE TATTLE

## JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY GUILD OF DALY CITY - COLMA

**GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT MARK**

We all enjoyed the Guild's annual birthday celebration in January and there was a great turnout despite competition with football playoffs. Stan Gustavson was a great speaker and folks are still praising his lecture about the origins of the former Spring Valley Water Company. The Board expresses its gratitude to the membership for an overwhelming vote of confidence through the adoption of proposed changes to our bylaws. As we know you'll agree, bylaws should be revisited every few years to make sure that the bible of the organization best reflects its mission and works toward strengthening it and adding to its cohesion. We believe that now we are on firmer ground going forward.

As of this writing, we have 339 fans on our Facebook page. To give some contrast, the San Mateo County History Museum page has 338 fans. Of course, everything is relative, relatively speaking. However, that's not too bad for the Guild when compared to the largest history organization in San Mateo County. Also of interest are many of the folks whom we have either 'met' or reconnected with through our Facebook page. I'm sure that you'll recognize the last names of Ernie Marchbank and Michael Doelger--descendants of their famous namesakes. They have complimented us on all of the photographs, documents, and histories that we have been able to share. I recently met Marnie Mendoza on our Facebook page, the great-great-granddaughter of pioneer John Christen of the Christen ranch and dairy, which once occupied the present-day Serramonte Shopping Center. In fact, she has given the Guild copies of wonderful vintage photos and documents. [Please see Dana Smith's article on the history of the Christen family and Dairy on page 2.] I definitely don't want to omit Lance Ramirez, a former Daly City native and Westmoor alum who maintains the "(THE ORIGINAL) you're from DALY CITY if....." Facebook page. Lance does an outstanding job of scanning and sharing historic images. In fact, he recently spent an afternoon at the

Cont'd pg.2

## HISTORY EVENING

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19<sup>TH</sup> 7 PM

### ROB KEIL

*Presents his documentary film*

### LITTLE BOXES

***The Architecture of a Classic  
Midcentury Suburb***



**101 Lake Merced Blvd. Daly City  
Doelger Center Café**

Join us for a fascinating journey through Daly City's historic Westlake district. The documentary profiles the life of Westlake developer Henry Doelger and the architecture and innovative planning and building techniques of this ground-breaking post World War II suburb. Keil has been researching and documenting the development of Westlake since 2002. In 2006 he published a book titled "Little Boxes" and then decided that the best way to tell the iconic suburb's story was to make a documentary film about the history of the neighborhood and its builder. After years in the making, we congratulate him on the completion of this historic film.

*REFRESHMENTS – FREE ADMITTANCE*

museum so that he could further promote the Guild and share with the world much of what we have in the archives. We definitely encourage you to visit his site on Facebook and join the group to receive regular updates. Again, by way of comparison, Lance's Facebook page has 2,900 members and growing!

It was with heavy heart that so many of us said goodbye to Joe's of Westlake in January. By now most of you know that after 57 years in business, the iconic dining institution was sold to the operators of the Original Joe's franchise. Unofficially what we have heard is that plans might include a second story for banquets and a vast remodel of the interior. If this turns out to be correct then we will definitely try to secure any artifacts which might not be returning to a new Joe's. Our mission includes preserving the history of the local community, and to that end while we couldn't possibly give a home to the grand aquariums that graced the Cascade Room or a booth from the Garden Room, we could find a spot for the 'Cascade Room' sign or other similar artifacts--again only with the understanding that they would not be returning to the restaurant. Of course, our greatest hope is that as many vintage photos, decor, and memorabilia return to their namesake as possible.

## HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

**4th Annual San Francisco History Expo March 1-2**  
Over 50 exhibitors from San Francisco historical groups will share artifacts, photographs, maps, and displays at the Old Mint, 88 5<sup>th</sup> Street @ Mission. Admission: \$5, but no one turned away for lack of funds. Exit at Powell St. BART, main Mint entrance on 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Colma Historical Association – March 22, Annual Fundraising Tea** noon to 1:30 PM, Colma Community Center, 1520 Hillside Blvd. For information call : 650-757-1676. **April 29, Quarterly Meeting** at 6:30 PM, Colma Historical Association, 1500 Hillside Blvd., Colma.

**San Mateo County History Museum**, 2200 Broadway Redwood City – Courthouse Docket Programs, free with Museum entrance: **Saturday, March 29<sup>th</sup>**, 2-3 PM "Notable Women in San Mateo County History" in honor of Women's History Month. The event will feature costumes from the "Millie" Collection of Vintage Clothing. **Saturday, April 5<sup>th</sup>**, 1:00 - 2:00 PM author Jeanne Farr McDonnell discusses, "The Joy of Research: When Suddenly You Get It From People, Books, Files, and Objects" using her experience in writing the biography, "Juana Briones of Nineteenth-Century California." Admission is free at the History Museum on the **first Friday of every month!**

## Free Cypress Lawn Lectures and Walking Tours:

Information: 650.550-8810 or send an email to [lenipanopio@cypresslawn.com](mailto:lenipanopio@cypresslawn.com)

**Sunday Lectures:** 2nd Floor, Administration Building, 1370 El Camino Real, Colma, 2 PM - 4 PM. **March 16<sup>th</sup>**, Michael Svanevik lectures on "Women Prime Movers at Rest at Cypress Lawn." **April 20<sup>th</sup>**, Francine Brevetti lectures on "Turning Memories into History."

**Saturday Walking Tours**, starting at 1:30 PM: **April 12<sup>th</sup>** docent Terry Hamburg leads the tour "Splendor in the Glass" (meet at Reception Center), and **April 26<sup>th</sup>** docent Steven Brown leads the tour "An Afternoon of Horticultural Delights" (meet at Noble Chapel located on Cypress Lawn's East Gardens).



Former Christen Dairy, photo provided by Marnie Mendoza.

## CHRISTEN DAIRY - by Dana Smith

John Christen immigrated to San Francisco from Switzerland in 1868. He first opened a dairy business in an area known as Cow Hollow. The Christen family home was built in the 1890s at 1427 Valencia Street with an adjoining two-story dairy depot at the back of the lot. The home still stands in the Orange Alley Stables and Lofts Historic District. John Christen's great-great-granddaughter Marnie Mendoza reports that the Christen Dairy sign can still be seen, although it is now obscured by an auto repair business. The 1900 Census indicates the Christen household included John and wife Marguerite, born in Switzerland, their seven California-born children, servants and stable and dairy drivers. When cows were no longer allowed in San Francisco, Christen moved his dairy pastures in 1891 down the Peninsula to lands first settled by Irish pioneer Patrick Brooks in 1852.

Cont'd pg. 3



Photo provided by Mamie Mendoza

Christen started with 160 acres, eventually adding parcels until the dairy occupied nearly 1,000 acres in what eventually became the Daly City areas of Serramonte and Westlake. The historic Christen ranch was a vast area of rolling hills and pasture land dotted with eucalyptus trees and deep gorges located north of Westborough, between Junipero Serra Blvd. to the east and Skyline Blvd. to the west. The ranch buildings could be seen from the entrance on Skyline and were historical landmarks for many years.

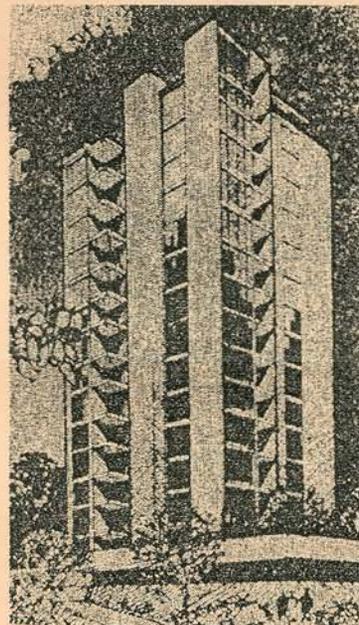
When John Christen died in 1913 at age 61, his son Harry continued to run the dairy as neighboring areas gave way to suburban development in the years following World War II. The dairy closed and was sold in the early 1960s for \$10 million to a new corporation Suburban Realty Company, a joint venture of Standard Building Company and the Crocker Land Company of San Francisco. Carl Gellert of the Standard Building Company became President, and William Morton, General Manager of the Crocker Land Company, became the Executive Vice President. When the dairy closed, there were only 300 cows left on the site where 5,000 cows once grazed.

At first Daly City was not interested in annexing the former Christen Dairy lands. There had been major opposition to initial plans to annex rural areas such as the Callan lands. Daly City residents collected signatures to qualify a referendum where voters rejected the Callan Park annexation in 1960. South San Francisco eventually annexed the subdivision. Lack of a land use plan and public sentiment against the Callan annexation were reasons for an initial lack of interest in adding the former Christen Dairy lands to Daly City. However, when South San Francisco included the Christen Dairy in their master plan, Daly City sentiment changed and the property was annexed in late 1963 with no protest and few public comments. Edmund Cavagnaro from

Irvington Street in the Crocker commented that 12 to 15 acres should be set aside for recreation and a city auditorium should be built somewhere on the site. Mayor Joe Verducci cited statistics at the time showing that 60% of Daly City money was being spent outside the city. The planned Serramonte Shopping Center would bring much needed sales tax revenues.

In January of 1964 the Abdo S. Allen Co. of Oakland, demolition experts, used an Army tank to aid in the destruction of the Christen Dairy. This successful publicity stunt was reported widely in the media. Land design contracts were awarded to Wilsey Ham and Blair, a prominent design firm from Millbrae involved in development of Foster City. Planner George Gatter, engineer Jack Van Zandt and architect Gilman Hoskins

were key planners for what was initially imagined as an ambitious \$200 million project for high density apartments and commercial use and a relatively small area for single family homes. The news clippings below found in the History Guild Archives show early plans for a row of 15-story high-rise apartments along Skyline Boulevard.



News clippings from the Daly City Record, 1963

This may be a surprise to the residents of Serramonte and the Skyline areas now known for their single-family suburban homes. Needless to say, the Skyline towers

Cont'd pg. 4

were only in the imagination of planners and were never built. Construction of the new Junipero Serra freeway and Hickey Boulevard were part of the development.

## DONATIONS AND GUILD NEWS

Thanks to Ron Ross for donations of high school yearbooks and vintage menus, Vaughn Jones for donation of the book "Reflections on Mary's Help Hospital and Seton Medical Center 1893-1985" by Marie M. Mahoney, Richard and Michael Rocchetta and Mark Weinberger for business memorabilia and Marnie Mendoza for photos and documents from the Christen family and dairy. In addition to his Guild duties, our president Mark Weinberger has been a volunteer archaeologist helping to restore El Polin Spring--site of one of the oldest adobes in San Francisco where Mexican-American pioneer Juana Briones once had her home. Along with finding remains of the foundation, Mark helped to unearth cobblestone culverts that were constructed as a Works Progress Administration project during the New Deal. Recently, Mark has been helping to restore Mountain Lake in the Presidio. In the 18th century Captain Juan Bautista de Anza camped here when his exploratory expedition arrived to establish a Spanish presidio on the peninsula in 1776. Plans are underway for improvements at Mussel Rock Open Space Preserve and the Guild has volunteered our expertise and archives for historical interpretive signs at the site.

## THE GUILD REMEMBERS LORRAINE GARIBALDI AND ELEANOR SMYTH

Lorraine Garibaldi, 88, of Colma passed away in Daly City on January 10<sup>th</sup>. Ray and Lorraine celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary this past October. Eleanor Emilie Smyth, 96, passed away on January 30<sup>th</sup>. Born and raised in Colma, she graduated from Jefferson high school in 1934. Both Lorraine and Eleanor were longtime History Guild members. Our condolences go out to their family and friends.

## MUSSEL ROCK – THEN & NOW, WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BRING?

by Dana Smith

Mussel Rock is located near the boundaries of two of the largest Mexican ranchos in Northern California, Buri Buri and San Pedro. By 1800 a tribe of local Ohlone Indians were living at Mission Dolores in San Francisco and no longer occupied their traditional seasonal village of Ompuroma above Mussel Rock. In 1853 the American courts ended land grants and opened the area around Mussel Rock for homesteading. John Gardner, an immigrant Irish farmer escaping the Irish potato famine of 1850, took title to the site of the old Ohlone village. By 1888 Gardner had moved his farm east of the coastal hills to the warmer area known as Sand Hills and

Michael Comerford acquired the site for a plant nursery. Comerford grew eucalyptus and cypress trees from 1874 until the 1906 earthquake and fire buried the nursery in a massive landslide. Mussel Rock was then acquired by rancher John MacReady.

In 1874 Richard Tobin, one of the founders of Hibernia Bank in San Francisco, built a tunnel through the headlands at Mussel Rock for a road for carriage rides on the coast to his vacation home in Pedro Valley. The tunnel was used three times before severe storms caused its collapse. Later the tunnel was suspected of being a hiding place for coastal rum-runners during prohibition.

Adolph Unger and G. Barstow purchased the Mussel Rock site as a right-of-way for the Ocean Shore Railroad in 1906 and cut 150 vertical feet through the bluff above Mussel Rock through part of the old Ohlone village. The soil and rock removed was used to fill over the rift valley and stream. The Ocean Shore Railroad never used this approach and the Mussel Rock Station was built further south. The Ocean Shore Railroad went bankrupt in 1921 and in 1926 Captain Robert Dollar of the Dollar Steamship Lines built a radio station to communicate with the company's shipping line where the Ohlone village once stood. The property was appropriated by the State, the radio station known as "Dollaradio" was dismantled, and in 1936 construction began for the Ocean Shore Highway (also known as Route 1 and the Cabrillo Highway), utilizing the old railroad bed.

A bar and restaurant known as Jak's Place at Mussel Rock operated above Mussel Rock from the late 1930s to 1943 when wartime restrictions on car headlights reduced business. During WWII U.S. Army concrete bunkers known as "Camp Windy" and "Camp Foggy" were built for coastal observation on top of the landslide created by the 1906 earthquake.

In 1956 Daly City bought the Mussel Rock site from John MacReady after plans for alternative city dump sites in Linda Mar and South San Francisco were unsuccessful. In 1957 an earthquake closed a half-mile stretch of the Coast Highway just north of Mussel Rock and Aladeno Sereni and five partners of the Daly City Scavenger Company were awarded a lease to the Mussel Rock site despite geologic and seismic problems. In the late 1960s Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35) was rerouted and the two natural lakes which lay just north of the prehistoric village site were filled. This eliminated the fresh water stream that flowed into the Mussel Rock rift valley. The twelve human remains that were exposed by bulldozers at the lakes were sent to the museum at UC Berkeley. No archaeological excavations were made at the lakes. For 20 years Daly City Scavenger graded roads into the rift valley and filled it with garbage.

Cont'd pg. 5

In 1976 a plan to create a city park at Mussel Rock was abandoned when the cost was estimated at \$250,000. In 1977 the Coastal Commission approved a joint project planned by Daly City and Daly City Scavenger for the building of a garbage transfer station. Although the Mussel Rock site was long suspected to be the location of a prehistoric Native American village, there was no official recognition until the Calif. Dept. of Transportation discovered indications of the Ohlone village while surveying the old Highway area in June of 1977. Daly City Scavenger hired archeologists to do a voluntary excavation of the site that became known as SMA-72 for recovery artifacts during a two month period before the building of the garbage transfer station. In that limited time they were unable to preserve significant portions of the site that consisted of a midden that was much larger and deeper than expected. The archaeological report tells of the destruction of the village site while frantic archeologists continued to pick up artifacts as they dodged bulldozers and earthmovers. Objects from the SMA-72 excavations now reside in the Daly City History Museum.

The 29-acre dump carved into a slope of sand and silt over the San Andreas earthquake fault suffered from continual erosion and began seeping waste. In 1978 the state Water Resources Control Board and the California Coastal Commission ordered the dump closed due to ocean pollution. The water board required Daly City to buy the dump site from Daly City Scavenger Company as a condition of the dump's closure and pay annually for monitoring and maintenance to comply with state standards. In 1979 plans were envisioned but never realized to use a portion of a grant from the Gellert foundations to place an exhibit at the former site of the Native American village and a recreation of the structures. In 1980 the Coastal Conservancy and City of Daly City spent \$30,000 constructing a path and stairs leading from the west end of the parking lot overlook to the top of the sea wall at Mussel Rock. The Golden Gate National Recreation Area declined offers by Daly City from 1982-1984 to include more than 131 acres in and around Mussel Rock in the national park boundaries.

In 1997 the Daly City Council gave exclusive rights to San Carlos-based White Oak Golf to develop a 9-hole golf course and driving range on the Mussel Rock site, but plans did not materialize. The Mussel Rock Open Space Preserve remains an undeveloped parkland to this day, popular with hikers, dog walkers, parasail enthusiasts, and geologists. In February of 2014 a public meeting was held for public input for planned improvements to the preserve.



## POTATO FORTS...

If you are like me, you have always loved the story of how Robert Thornton and the early pioneers in the area built a potato fort and armed with a four pound brass canon and 75 Kentucky long rifles prepared to defend themselves from a land seizure by intruders from the nearby Laguna Merced Rancho. [The story ends with the settlers taking the conflict to the U.S. Supreme Court, where Thorton, a blacksmith, won the case for the settlers in 1865.] You may have also wondered as I have how much protection potatoes might offer in an armed conflict. In an article in the *Daly City Record* written for Daly City's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I found the answer. "A formidable fortification was set up at Thornton's 160 acre ranch by piling the walls of a big barn high with sacks of potatoes and holes cut in the walls for firing ports." Ok, that's sounds more like it... and it's still a remarkable story!



The first movie theater, the Grandview Theatre, opened in Daly City in 1915. It was called a nickelodeon because five cents was charged for tickets. It was located across the street from our museum where the new bus shelter/Centennial Plaza stands today. Notice the horse (with feedbag) and buggy and streetcar on its way down Mission Street. Next door is Pocket's Saloon (still standing today as the Aikido studio) and the Victorian building on the corner was Knowles Hall with the pointed cupola on the roof. It was sold to the Masons, burned down in 1935, and replaced by the Masonic Hall you see today. Charlie Chaplin and Theda Barra, shown above, were popular in silent movies of the day.



## THE HISTORY GUILD OF DALY CITY/COLMA

### DALY CITY HISTORY MUSEUM

6351 Mission Street, Daly City, CA 94014

650/757-7177

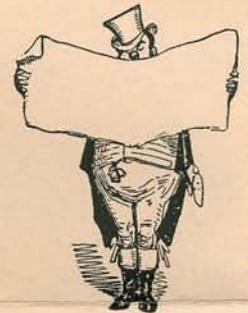
Current Hours: Tuesdays and Saturdays from noon to 3 p.m.



Please visit us on Facebook at "Daly City History Museum"

[www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org](http://www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org)

### FIRST CLASS MAIL



The report for the recent planning meeting on Mussel Rock improvements can be found online at:

[www.dalycity.org/Assets/Departments/Public+Works/pdf/MR\\_MtgPres\\_021214.pdf](http://www.dalycity.org/Assets/Departments/Public+Works/pdf/MR_MtgPres_021214.pdf)

#### GUILD OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

**Mark Weinberger, President** 650/757-7177  
president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org

**Richard Rocchetta, Vice-President**  
**Dana Smith, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President/Museum Director**  
**Judith Christensen, Treasurer**  
**Algis Ratnikas, Secretary**

**Directors: Michael Rocchetta, Marcus Gonzalez**

Ken Gillespie (1924-2011), President-Emeritus  
Bunny Gillespie, Secretary-Emerita  
Elinor Charleston, Hospitality Chair

*Board meetings are held as necessary and are open to the membership. Please contact Mark for further information.*

History Guild of Daly City/Colma is a  
501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization  
Memberships begin at \$25 per year.

**Museum Special Exhibit:**  
***A WALK THROUGH TIME,***  
**a timeline of 12,000 years of local history!**