



Since 1971



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Letter from the Editor

As always I am honored to welcome you to this quarter's *Gate Post*. Our valued members have been reaching out to the community sharing their love of local history. This month we participated in the Allied Arts Guild's Open House, an annual



event we have enjoyed being a part of and look forward to next year. Our table was busy with interested citizens, not only stopping by sharing stories of Menlo, but happy to learn that Menlo Park has a Historical Association. At this year's Block Party on Santa Cruz Avenue, we greeted lots of new faces and old friends. We discussed our upcoming events with each visitor and encouraged them to renew

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The Life and Times of Dennis Martin



(Dennis Martin Creek, Old La Honda Road, San Mateo County, California)

by Bo Crane

Bo Crane, member of the Menlo Park Historical Association, has written the book *The Life and Times of Dennis Martin*. Copies of the book may be purchased either through our website (www.sites.google.com/site/mphistorical) or at the MPHA office located on the lower level of the Menlo Park Library. Should you wish to purchase from the website, on the left hand side you will see the link "Store."

Dennis Martin, an Irish immigrant, died as a broke old man in San Francisco and was laid to rest in an unmarked grave in his own abandoned cemetery miles west of the Menlo Park depot. His estranged daughters refused to attend his burial.

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Letter from the Editor *Cont'd. from page 1*
memberships or join. For library visitors, **Ester Bugna** developed a detailed display case of contributions by multiple artists from Menlo Park. You should stop by and take a look at the creative achievements of our residents.

A true success of our outreach is enlightening neighbors of our existence, thereby increasing our value to the community. We welcome you to join us as we inform others at local events and grow in number. As we seek private and public investment for upcoming projects, ask yourself if everyone you know is aware of our active association. Feel free to share our newsletter with them, as its focus on the artistic achievements of locals, then and now, and a mystery surrounding the Stanford Family are guaranteed to thrill! 🍷

—Your neighbor, *Lucy Spaziano*



Welcome

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Richard Dunn
Tatiana Elliston
Vladimir Ermakoff
Jim Gerber
Mary Beth Hambly
Kristina Lemons
Joanna Martin
Susan Santos
Alan VanEss 🍷

Life and Times of Dennis Martin

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His times spanned the Irish immigration to the New World, the Westward movement from the Missouri River to across the snowy Sierra, armed power struggles between Alta California factions, the Bear Flag revolt, the Gold Rush, the Railroad Big Four and the Silver Bonanza Kings, the demise of Searsville and Mayfield along with the growth of Menlo Park, Woodside, Redwood City, Portola Valley, Palo Alto and Stanford University, as well as the beginnings of Atherton, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Los Altos Hills and San Francisco.

“Bo Crane has written the definitive study of the most pervasive American pioneer of the mid-peninsula area. Arriving as a young man in Mexican territory with the first wagon train to cross the Sierra Nevada, Dennis Martin acquired land, built a home, sawmills and a church, but eventually lost all and died a pauper. Crane provides the details based on his extensive research and personal exploration. It’s a story you will enjoy reading and a book you will treasure as a reference.” 🍷

— *Jym Clendenin,*
Menlo Park Historical
Association President

Successful Tours Through Holy Cross Cemetery

Thank you **Michael Svanevik** for your willingness to conduct two tours of the Holy Cross Cemetery. Because of the overwhelming response by local citizens wanting to attend the initial tour on May 23, Michael conducted a second tour on May 30th. The cemetery dates back to the 1860’s. To keep our audience engaged, Michael shared the history of the “pioneers” of Menlo Park who made our fair town what it is today, as well as stories to keep the audience laughing with tales that probably won’t go down in history. As one person said, “I never knew that quiet Menlo had another side.” (*The Gate Post*, dated January–March 2015, has an article on the September 2014 tour.) Again, thanks goes out to Michael who definitely kept us all entertained. And thank you for the peak attendance and show of support for our local history! 🍷



The *Still* Mysterious Death of Jane Stanford

By Julie Cain

When Jane Stanford, co-founder of Leland Stanford Junior University, died in Hawaii on February 28, 1905, the world was shocked when the authorities notified university officials and her family of her passing due to strychnine poisoning. Stricken by overwhelming tetanic spasms after retiring for the night at the luxurious Moana Hotel at Oahu, the 78-year-old woman declared to the responding physician, Francis Humphris, that she had been poisoned for a second time. She told him an incredible tale of being poisoned once before by drinking bottled water that had been laced with commercial-grade strychnine on the previous January 14th. This initial occurrence had taken place in her bedroom at her mansion atop Nob Hill in San Francisco just before she retired for the evening. A subsequent and hushed private investigation concluded that one of the house servants had played a malicious prank, likely the result of petty jealousies that existed among the household staff. Six weeks later a still-troubled Mrs. Stanford was traveling with a companion and a maid to Japan, with a stop in Hawaii to break the long journey. Dr. Humphris called another doctor to bring a stomach pump but it was too late; his patient stopped breathing a few minutes before it arrived.

Dr. Humphris immediately notified Deputy Sheriff William Rawlins of Jane Stanford's death and set the wheels in motion for a mystery that has not yet been solved. Was Jane Stanford poisoned? Had another attempted "prank" gone too far? Had she, in fact, been murdered? If she had been murdered, why?



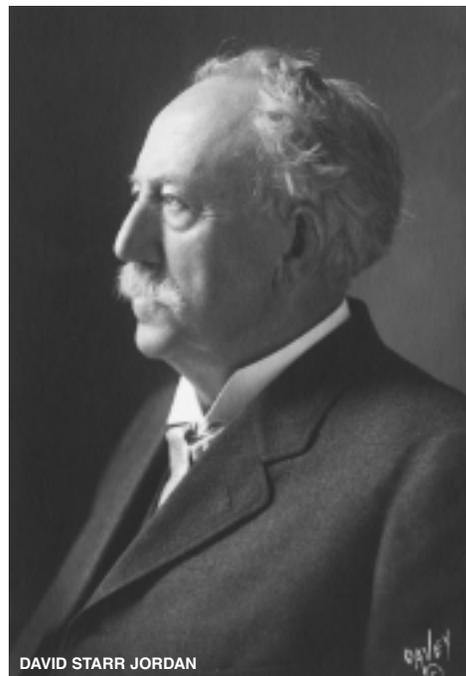
Could it have been an accidental overdose? Could it have been suicide? Was it death by natural causes, misdiagnosed by the attending physician due to the patient's claim of being poisoned?

Two divergent verdicts emerged in the weeks after Jane Stanford's death. Dr. Humphris and the Coroner's Jury in Hawaii claimed that she had been murdered, killed by an overdose of medicinal-grade strychnine that had been deliberately administered in a dose of bicarbonate of soda, and augmented by her also taking a cascara capsule that also contained medicinal-grade strychnine that evening. University officials, particularly President David Starr Jordan, and her surviving family members insisted just as vehemently that she had died of natural causes. The news filled the headlines of American newspapers for four weeks but an investigation led by the San Francisco Police Depart-

ment did not result in an arrest. Despite some people, such as university Board of Trustee George Crothers, questioning both verdicts for some time afterwards, the publicity slowly died down. A few articles about Mrs. Stanford's death were printed over the succeeding decades, but the public was largely unaware of the mysterious circumstances surrounding her demise.

Dr. Robert Cutler became intrigued with the story and started researching it from a medical perspective. He wrote a book, *The Mysterious Death of Jane Stanford*, published shortly before his own passing in 2003. He exposed the incredible lengths that Jordan had gone to after traveling to Hawaii to escort the Mother of the University's body home to discredit Dr. Humphris. However, Cutler stopped just short of accusing Jordan of being responsible for Jane Stanford's murder, not having any evidence to make

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The *Still Mysterious Death...* continued from page 3

such a charge. He did intimate that Jane Stanford was considering firing Jordan; the two had disagreed over several aspects of how best to run the university for many years. Cutler also did not believe that Bertha Berner, long-time companion to Jane Stanford and with her employer both in San Francisco and in Hawaii when the two events occurred, was responsible. He could not find any motivation for her wanting to kill her long-time employer; she had worked for Jane Stanford for over twenty years.

I researched Jane Stanford's death several years ago and I found the "death by natural causes" conclusion highly questionable. Looking at Bertha Berner as the culprit seemed logical for the many reasons. She had quit her job once or twice over the years and had been lured back by an ever-increasing salary. She had tried to take a vacation, only to be called back to service by a lonely and demanding employer. Miss Berner's own mother was ill when she and Mrs. Stanford left for Japan, and perhaps Miss Berner felt an overwhelming need to return to her ailing parent as soon as possible. Miss Berner was in Jane Stanford's will, set to inherit \$15,000 (although she claimed ignorance of this fact). A Palo Alto druggist claimed Miss Berner and Mrs. Stanford had bought a new bottle of bicarbonate of soda from his shop just before they left for Japan and he swore he had not added any medicinal-grade strychnine to the soda. Most importantly, Miss Berner's story about what happened the night Mrs. Stanford died changed repeatedly; she gave out three different versions of what had happened to the



Coroner's Jury, to the press after Jordan and Board Trustee Timothy Hopkins reached Hawaii, and yet again when she wrote Mrs. Stanford's biography in 1934. However, despite this circumstantial evidence, I still have my doubts about Miss Berner's guilt. I find it impossible to believe she felt trapped in a situation that only murder would free her from.

No doubt some small portion of this reluctance to find Miss Berner as the culprit also stems from not wanting to accept that Jane Stanford died a horrible painful death at the hand of someone she trusted, much less someone who comforted her as she was literally dying. So many people reacted to the news of Mrs. Stanford's death at the time with the words, "I just can't believe it." In her defense, Miss Berner remained in her on-campus home until her death in 1946, well-respected by the small and close-knit campus community. I find it impossible to believe that either the university officials or her family would willingly harbor a suspected murderess in their midst for any reason. George Crothers, who knew Miss Berner personally, did not believe she was guilty and he made repeated yet vain requests for additional investigation into Mrs. Stanford's death. Short of coming across Miss

Berner's written confession, I just don't buy it.

That said, I also don't know who might have killed Jane Stanford, accidentally or on purpose. Was it the same person who poisoned her drinking water back in January? I always thought Elizabeth Richmond, one of Mrs. Stanford's maids and clearly no friend of Miss Berner's, was a likely suspect of the January 14th incident. Did Miss Richmond try it again or was it the act of an inspired copycat? I don't believe Jane Stanford died of natural causes because the Coroner's Jury found medicinal-grade strychnine had been added to her bottle of bicarbonate of soda. Her open trunks stood in readiness for several days before her small party left for Hawaii; anyone with access to the house could have slipped that poisoned bottle into one of the trunks, or bribed a servant to do it. The whole notion of someone wanting to kill Mrs. Stanford remains ludicrous but something happened in Hawaii—something possibly rooted in the January 14th incident—to cause her death and the evidence points to a less-than-natural cause. It is still a mystery today.

Julie Cain, Program Coordinator for Heritage Services, is a historian. Julie led the effort to restore Stanford's historic Arizona Garden and has a particular interest in landscape and garden history. She has worked at Stanford for nearly 30 years and has a deep interest in the history of California and of Stanford University. 🌿

Photos courtesy of Stanford University Archives

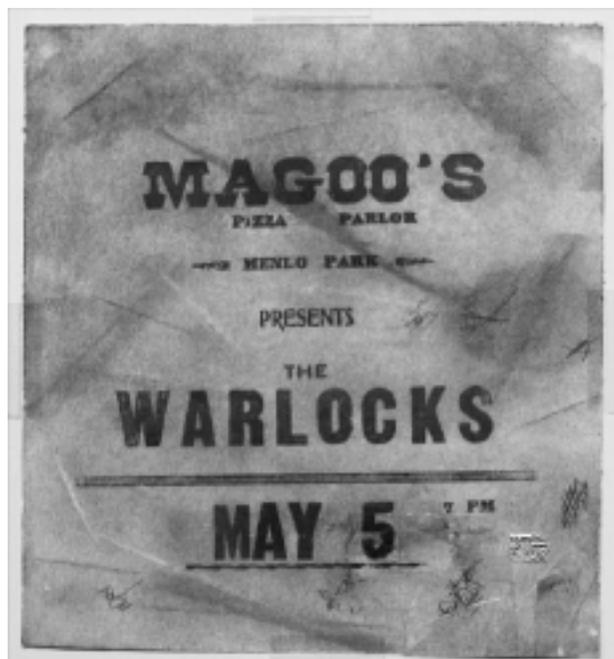
Traces of the Early Dead

Menlo Park has been and still remains a hotbed for creativity. From the birth of high tech to the incubation of the well-acclaimed rock band, **The Grateful Dead**. “The Dead” provide the greatest and longest contribution of any local Menlo Park band, performing over 6,000 shows across the world and continuing to play for fifty years.

The band had gigs at Magoo’s Pizza Parlor on Santa Cruz Avenue downtown, now Harvest Furniture; a vintage flyer is pictured here. They hung out at Kepler’s, when it was located at 825 El Camino. They also were regulars at the Applewood Inn and Guitars Unlimited.

In the early 1960s, Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter lived and practiced their music in a large rambling house at 2100 Santa Cruz Avenue known as the Chateau, pictured below. The house was demolished around 2008.

Bob Weir, an Atherton native, was still living at his parents’ home when he joined the group. His experience as the band’s rhythm guitarist, vocalist and writer has been released via Netflix and titled, “The Long Strange Trip of Bob Weir.” At the end of June they brought their 50th Anniversary Show back to the area, performing two sold-out shows at Levi Stadium. 🍷



Menlo Park Plaque No. 40

By Jym Clendenin

A sculpture by Redwood City resident, James Stoval, sits at the Civic Center in front of the Police Department entrance. Stoval’s expressive mother and child is accompanied by a separate brass plaque with the wording:

MOTHER WITH CHILD
BY JAMES STOVAL
FUNDED BY
THE BOHANNON FOUNDATION
AND
CITY OF MENLO PARK ©1985

Stoval has another piece near the Civic Center dedicated to Raoul Wallenburg, the Swedish businessman and humanitarian who saved more than 100,000 Jews during World War II, entitled, “*Raoul Where Are You?*” 🍷



Since 1971

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Join those who care about Menlo Park and enjoy learning about its history. Dues help financially in preserving the archives, publication of the newsletter, and supporting our staff and other activities.

Annual Membership:

- Residential \$ 20.00
- Business 100.00
- Lifetime 200.00

Make check payable to MPHA at the above address.

TIME DATED MATERIAL Or Current Resident

Reminder...

At this time we would like to remind our loyal past members who may have forgotten to send in their memberships to please continue to give us your support and discover the pleasure of helping to preserve the heritage of Menlo Park.

Thank you to the following members who renewed for 2015

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Patricia Amodeo</i> | <i>Robert Goodwin</i> |
| <i>George Andrews</i> | <i>Barbara Hardie</i> |
| <i>Jym Clendenin</i> | <i>Barry Lee Johnson</i> |
| <i>Marion Compston</i> | <i>Clyde King, Sr.</i> |
| <i>Bo Crane</i> | <i>Lorraine Lawrence</i> |
| <i>Diane Ellsworth</i> | <i>Elena Reese</i> |
| <i>Dr. Jo English</i> | <i>Gil Workman</i> 🍷 |

The British Bankers Club

A quick update on the BBC Building at 1090 El Camino Real

The British Bankers Club is being rehabilitated by restaurateurs who started *Repasado* in Palo Alto. The downtown building was designed by prominent architect Birge Clark, ca. 1924, and is indicative of the Colonial Revival style. Its colonial characteristics of engaged columns, dentiled cornice and roofline balustrade eclectically combine with artistically significant stained glass, redwood finishes and lighting fixtures.

Thank You!

Stanford Park Nannies and Union Bank
for your contributions and dedication
to our local heritage.