

# Moments in Time

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2015

## 40 YEARS OF PRESERVATION, PERSPIRATION AND FUN

Over the years, this newsletter has reported on virtually every aspect of Sausalito's past, except for one subject: ourselves. As the Historical Society reaches the end of our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, this seems like a good time to recall how the organization came into being, and to recognize some of the dedicated individuals who made it happen.

Jack Tracy was the man who started it all – almost accidentally. In 1974 the state requested a city-wide inventory of what Sausalito officials felt was historically important – mostly buildings. Tracy, the fourth-generation Californian who was then in an electrical-appliance business with his brother, got involved in that project.

According to a 1983 San Francisco Examiner profile, when the city moved its offices into the abandoned Central School in 1975, Tracy was asked to put together a historical display of whatever he could round up from various groups and individuals.

"The whole affair was supposed to be short and routine," reported the paper. "About 150 people, some band music and speech-making, and a brief glimpse at Tracy's overnight collection of the town's past, and the party would be over." However, the collection turned out to be much more complete and significant than anyone had imagined.

"We scrounged everything we could find in Sausalito," Tracy recalled. "People had never seen so much of Sausalito's history at once. Hour after hour, the mayor would ask us to remain another hour.

"The people walked through the historical exhibit and then they went home and started calling other people.

"We'd opened in the morning and didn't close until 6 o'clock that night. The people had never seen such a collection. That's what started it all."

A short time later then-Mayor Evert Heynneman offered Tracy the top floor of City Hall. Tracy, who was about to retire, decided to form the Historical Society and started soliciting memberships. Heynneman later succeeded Tracy as head of the Society. The first new member was Edward

Couderc, a moving company man. Couderc also owned the Ice House, which was located on Caledonia Street at the time.

Tracy also recalled his first contribution to the SHS archives. "A boy, Richard Fray, came up to me and said, 'I think I have something you'd like,' and asked if I wanted it. It was an old rusted fishing spear the boy had found, and it remains on display and is recorded as the museum's first gift."

(In fact, the spear is displayed in a glass case at the Ice House, which the SHS eventually acquired for \$1).



Jack Tracy was honored as Grand Marshall of the 1989 Fourth of July Parade.

Photo courtesy of Sausalito Historical Society

Tracy was quickly joined by other volunteers as the little museum launched itself. By April, 1975, a full-on membership drive was announced in the MarinScope: "The need for a Sausalito Historical Society is more pressing today, when large and impersonal forces are working to obliterate our heritage, than in any previous period. A Society is being currently proposed that will be available to all former and present residents of Sausalito. Participation is the primary requisite for membership. The aims of the Society will be to recover, house and maintain what is left of

Sausalito's rich past. Several hundred historical items have already been pledged for display and maintenance by the Society -- Indian artifacts, maps, letters and photographs. Sufficient furniture and office equipment have been donated to launch the organization in its new headquarters on the top floor of the Civic Center.

"Member dues will be used to meet the expenses of preserving the Society's historical collection and to cover operational costs."

One of the earliest members was Liz Robinson, who soon became the Society's official archivist.

In an oral history recorded with one-time SHS board member Dorothy Gibson, Liz recalls meeting Tracy when he visited her and her husband, Babe Lamerdin, who was donating some photos of the fabled schooner Zaca.

“Jack was so enthusiastic and talked with such passion, Babe and I decided to help, so I started going down on Saturdays, accessioning teetering piles of fabulous photographs, documents, artifacts, newspapers. He’d worked out a very simple system based on a night course he’d taken on archival management and had some basic rules about how to do this. He approached it methodically, but it was about 100 years’ worth of work. When I saw what needed to be done, I just became a regular at the Society.

“Jack was there all day every day. People had heard about the project and would drop in to talk and he was so interested in what they had to say. He had so much in his head, it was like a computer filing system where bits of information just clicked into place and he made connections and was fitting together all the parts of what people were telling him.

“Jack was kind of ruffled looking, wore a white t-shirt with dark hair sort of flopped over his face. He smoked constantly and his desk was always heaped with cigarette butts which wasn’t good sense for a historical collection. He had the order of things in his head, but there was lots of stuff that needed attention.

“He was always very welcoming when people came in and put them at ease so they wanted to talk and they’d have a little show and tell and he’d make some sort of connection. There was always a lot of activity and people coming in with wonderful stories.”

The first board meeting of the Sausalito Historical Society was held on October 1, 1975 in the Society’s new quarters on the top floor of City Hall. According to the hand-written minutes of that meeting, Director Jack Tracy was joined by board members Vera Clouette and Phil Frank, plus Marjorie and Ben Pulsifer. Fritz Warren was absent. Membership had already reached 80 individuals.

Acknowledging that the City had given the room next door for historical displays, the Board decided to open it with a Victorian theme.

Other projects underway included a Bicentennial poster contest, indexing back copies of the Sausalito News (now searchable on the Web), staffing the rooms for public hours on Saturdays, and scheduling a General Membership Meeting on Oct. 20.

The first Society newsletter, “Sausalito Historical Summer,” was published in the summer of 1978. Editor Tim Rosaire reported that membership had steadily climbed to 300. Promising that “Future issues will feature articles on how Sausalito was established, who its first settlers were and how they lived,” Rosaire solicited member input: “Interesting

anecdotes out of the city’s past will be told (know any?) and questions will be posed to the readers on historical puzzles the Society is trying to solve.”

In May, 1979 the Society was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) public benefit non-profit.

Tracy’s seminal history, “Moments in Time,” was first published in 1983. “It really sounds like Jack,” recalls Liz Robinson. “He dictated the book and then worked with Wayne

and Linda Bonnett [of Windgate Press] to edit it and clarify things. I helped with copy editing and fact checking.” A second edition was printed a year after he passed away in 1992. The richly illustrated hard-cover volume is still available at the Ice House.

In 1991, the Society helped develop the permanent Marinship exhibit at the Bay Model, displaying photographs,

paintings, film clips and actual artifacts from the WWII shipyard which dominated life in Sausalito from 1942-46. Spearheading that project were Susan Frank, Liz Robinson and Cindy Roby, working with Daphne Derven of the Bay Model Visitors Center.

Under the leadership of Phil Frank, the Ice House was moved from Caledonia St. to 780 Bridgeway and opened in 1999 as the Society’s downtown historic exhibit and visitor center. Today the Ice House serves 29,000 visitors a year.

These are just a few of the Historical Society’s accomplishments over the past four decades. With the continued support of members and the community at large, you can expect many more to come.



## SHS ORAL INTERVIEWS NOW ONLINE

The Society has submitted some of our oral interviews to the California AudioVisual Preservation Project (CAVPP), and they were accepted to be posted online at the Internet Archive. Go to <https://archive.org/index.php> and type Sausalito Historical Society in the search box. You will find oral interviews for: Myron Spaulding, Joe Tate, Charlie Merrill, Earl Dunphy, Robin Sweeny, Dorothy Cousins, Serge Truback, Dorothy Gibson, Walter Kuhlman, Phil Frank, Amy Belser, and others. We hope to submit more interviews and perhaps some videotapes in the future.



*What began as a re-created Victorian room now houses the SHS Exhibition Room at City Hall.*

*Photo courtesy of Sausalito Historical Society*

## THANKS TO PREMIUM LEVEL MEMBERS

All Historical Society members receive this newsletter, advance notice of events, plus membership discounts for events and research services, for just \$15 a year. Those who upgrade to the **Sponsor/Business** level also receive membership rates for their guests for events. **Patrons** additionally receive 2 free tickets to an event of their choice, while **Benefactors** are entitled to 2 free tickets to all events for the year. Thanks to the following members for their extra measures of support:

### **Sponsor/Business** (\$100/year)

Betty Acton  
Diane Alper  
Sara Jane Anderson  
Herbert & Sisi Damner  
Jim & Cathy DeLano  
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### **Patron** (\$250/year)

Pam & Robert Abendroth  
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Barbara Ford  
Diane Parish & Paul Gelbrud  
Jim Meyer

Dana Whitson

### **Benefactor** (\$500/year)

Mary Foust  
Patricia & Tom Theodores  
Roxanne Sheridan

Memberships may be renewed or upgraded at [www.sausalitohistoricalociety.com/membership](http://www.sausalitohistoricalociety.com/membership).



*SHS President Jerry Taylor greets author Laura Ackley at Campbell Hall.  
Photo by Steefnie Wicks*

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I look back on the past few months in the Society, our schedule has kept us hopping. The other articles and photographs will give you glimpses at some of our events, but to me, the quantity and breadth of our activities astonishes (and exhausts) me.

Larry Moyer shared his reminiscences of his former boat-mate, Shel Silverstein in the Sausalito Library, accompanied by some “home” movies, and videos of Silverstein performing. We moved the party upstairs to open our current exhibit, about Shel. A couple of weeks later, my life-long friends Don Jen, and his uncle and aunt Nate and Theo Lee, spoke about Willie and the Marin Fruit Company at the Society’s annual meeting. It wasn’t long before we held a joint fund-raiser with the Educational Tall Ship Society and gained some insights climbing through the being-built *Matthew Turner*. (If you missed this, check out [www.educationaltallship.org](http://www.educationaltallship.org).) Then we helped introduce Betsy Stroman’s beautiful book about Jean Varda, with an art show, reception and book signing, at the Bay Model. We had a unit in the IDESST Espirito Santo Festa parade. The Society participated in Galilee Harbor’s Maritime Days, and we celebrated Robin Sweeny’s birthday. We worked with the three classes of 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders, helping them learn about the Marinship and Marin City, and then presented achievement awards to the students in their classrooms.

Members of the Society board and key volunteers put in many hours to make these events successful. At these events, as your president, I often receive an undeserved spotlight, to deliver a few introductory comments on behalf of us all.

But there was one event in which I was fully immersed: the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade. The Sausalito Lions Club built a replica of Palace of Fine Arts, constructed in 1915 for the Panama Pacific International Exposition. The Cal Alumni Band celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fair by playing Sousa’s Pathfinder of Panama, which the man himself directed at the PPIE. And a couple of dozen Society members wore period costumes to commemorate the history of our Sausalito elephants and fountain. I love all three of these groups, and I am so proud of how this came together.

The “Next Big Thing”, as they say in advertising, is the resumption of development of the Ice House Plaza. We’ll have more to tell you soon.

—Jerry Taylor

## PPIE – TECHNOLOGY OF YESTERYEAR

The Historical Society celebrated the closing of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 with a presentation by Laura Ackley, author of an illustrated history of the fair entitled “San Francisco’s Jewel City,” on December 7. Laura, who also marched in Sausalito’s July 4 parade with the Cal Alumni Band, focused on technological marvels at the Exposition, such as the giant typewriter, the Ford assembly plant, and the telephone. Campbell Hall at Christ Episcopal Church was decorated with photos of an entry in the last parade, which featured a replica of the PPIE’s Palace of Fine Arts.

Besides that venerable Marina District landmark, the elephant statues and fountain in Vina del Mar Plaza are among the last vestiges of the century-old PPIE.

## MOVIE STARS ON THE VAN DAMME

Long-time waterfront resident T.J. Nelsen has written a very personal memoir of Sausalito's Gate 6 community, entitled "Houseboats, Drugs, Government and the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate." The book is a must read for anyone interested in the colorful and controversial history of the early houseboat community.

Nelsen discovered the Sausalito waterfront in the early 60s, and soon moved to Don Arques' property at Waldo Point harbor, where he worked at various odd jobs. In 1969 he was offered control of the Harbor, where Arques and the houseboat owners were under threat of abatement by Marin County. Until that time, he writes, "no one was in charge or responsible for the property as a whole and what went on was as close to anarchy as anything I've ever seen."

The book also contains some wonderful historic vignettes, such as T.J.'s recollection of celebrity visitors to the ferryboat Charles Van Damme, which served as a restaurant, nightclub and community center until it was declared uninhabitable and bulldozed in the 80s. Here's a sample:

*Two of the visitors who were entertained on the Van Damme for a short time were Rip Torn and Geraldine Page, whom I've always admired for their talent as actors. He was working on a "Lincoln project." Rip came to me one day for an opinion on a very large, heavily built ship-bowed wooden freight barge berthed near the south end of the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge. Arques's tenant wanted him to invest money in it in order to build a gigantic houseboat to be put at Waldo Point. The barge was very interesting, being one of many unusual vessels produced in the '40s to aid in the war effort. As a potential houseboat, though, it drew too much water to either get to or leave Waldo Point, an un-dredged tidal zone, or as commonly called, a mudflat, except on extreme high tides. In addition, the legal problems they would have had with government alone would probably have required Rip to spend all his money on attorney's fees, because Rip Torn was collectable. His hosts on the Van Damme — Arques's "tenants"—had apparently forgotten to check the draft of the barge or mention the legal problems. Rip and Geraldine left shortly thereafter, having become disillusioned, perhaps, with the artistic environment.*

In the introduction to his book, T.J. notes: "The information presented here is not the result of research, interviews, or a scholarly analysis of data, and I do not suggest it is balanced, complete, or fair to all those involved. It is simply about what I experienced and the way I saw it." The book goes on to detail all sides of the free-spirited community: the liberty, the squalor, the creativity, the drugs, the camaraderie and the violence that were all part of day-to-day life in the post-Haight Ashbury/summer of love era. T.J. casts his critical eye on various sides of the controversy, including the protestors, Marin County bureaucrats, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, law enforcement, and the media (the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate).

"Houseboats, Drugs, Government and the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate" is a must read for anyone interested in the colorful and controversial history of the early houseboat community. It's available at the Ice House, Book Depot, Amazon.com and other online booksellers.

-- Larry Clinton

## HAVE YOU SEEN OUR WEBSITE LATELY?

Our site, [www.sausalitohistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sausalitohistoricalsociety.org), may look the same, but it has changed! We've made many improvements, which we invite you to explore.

The site is more user friendly, with an easy-to-operate search function.

Check out our Virtual Exhibit on the boatyards of Sausalito, dating back to 1775 when the vessel San Carlos, captained by Lieutenant Don Juan Manuel de Ayala, entered the Golden Gate by sea. The exhibit includes photographs and information from the SHS archives and uses software that pulls images and data from our database.

You'll find a calendar of upcoming historical events and a collection of our weekly MarinScope historical columns.

There are links to other Bay Area activities of interest, searchable back issues of journals such as the Sausalito News, plus our Secret History spots on Radio Sausalito.



Rip Torn between visits to the Van Damme.  
Photo from FanPix.net

Learn more about our ongoing Schools Program, and how you can help introduce local third graders to Sausalito's colorful past. Get reacquainted with our Ice House visitors' center and historic display, and our Marinship exhibit at the Bay Model.

You can even order books and other Sausalito merchandise

through the website, **pay for your membership or make a donation to support one of our many projects and programs. All on line via a secure transaction!**

If you've got questions or comments, you can contact us through the site, as well.

### CELEBRATING SAUSALITO'S RICH ARTISTIC HERITAGE

With funding assistance from the Sausalito Art Festival Foundation, the Ice House is teaming up with Sausalito artists to introduce visitors to our deep artistic roots. We have started selling an expanded selection of note cards and postcards with images from Sausalito painters and photographers. We have also teamed up with the Sausalito Artists Association to offer tours of art studios in the ICB Building and other locations. Flyers about these tours are available at the Ice House, 780 Bridgeway. We are also exploring possibilities for additional locally designed art in our gift shop and art demonstrations in the planned Ice House Plaza.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

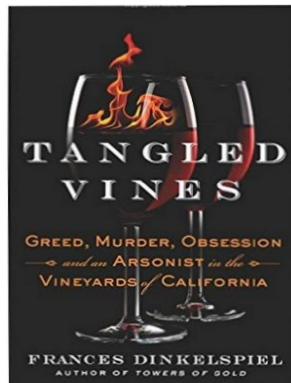
### ALE EKSTROM AND THE ANCHOR-OUTS 1/15

This year's Sausalito Public Library documentary series begins with two films about the Richardson's Bay anchor-out community. *Ale Ekstrom's Boat House* is a 2013 short made for KQED News by Noam Eshel and Sam Harnett. The film is a moving tribute to the live-aboard who was the community's longest resident until he passed away in 2015.

*The Anchor-Outs of Richardson's Bay* is a documentary by Tracey Ruiz. Though made over twenty-five years ago, the film reminds us that the more things have changed on the anchorage over the years, the more they stay the same. Eshel, Harnett and Ruiz will be on hand to answer questions after the screenings, and there will be time for members of the audience to share reflections on Ale and the anchor-out community. This program is co-sponsored by the Sausalito Historical Society.

### BOOK READING MARCH 24: TANGLED VINES

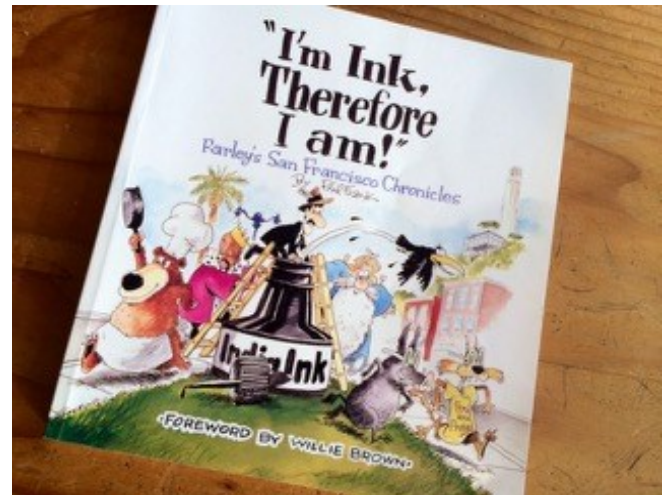
On Thursday evening, March 24, author Frances Dinkelspiel will be discuss her new book "Tangled Vines: Greed, Murder, Obsession and an Arsonist in the Vineyards of California." It tells the story of the massive 2005 fire in a Vallejo wine warehouse that destroyed 4.5 million bottles of California's finest wine worth more than \$250 million and the subsequent arson conviction of former Sausalito resident Mark Anderson. Watch for more details on this special event.



### WHERE'S WALDO 2/25

Take a fascinating audio-visual tour through Sausalito's history from the earliest railroad days through World War II with Larry Clinton and SHS member Mike Moyle, Thursday February 25 at noon. Rediscover significant parts of the community that no longer exist, including the Northwestern Pacific railroad line, Pine Point (dynamited during World War II), the American Distilling Company (destroyed by fire in the 1960s), and the Waldo community (supplanted by the housing project for Marinship workers).

Sponsored by the Anne T. Kent California Room and the Civic Center Library, this presentation will be given at Civic Center Room 427, San Rafael. Requests for accommodations may be made by calling (415) 473-3220 (voice/TTY) or emailing [library@marincounty.org](mailto:library@marincounty.org) at least four work days in advance of the event.



### I'm Ink, Therefore I Am... the Wit and Gentle Humor of Phil Frank

Join us for a fun-filled evening on January 30 as we explore the work of Sausalito cartoonist, writer and historian Phil Frank whose lively wit and playful political commentary kept us laughing at the antics of local politicians and notorious Sausalitans.

Expect a few surprises as the evening program takes a look at Phil's political cartoons about Sausalito, film clips of Phil discussing his work, and on-stage interviews with some of Phil's friends and colleagues.

This special public event is co-sponsored by the Sausalito Woman's Club, the Sausalito Historical Society and the Sausalito Public Library. There is no charge for the event, but donations will be accepted. Any proceeds benefit the Sausalito Historical Society and Sausalito Public Library. No-host bar and small bites from the "SWC Farley Bar." Doors open at 6:30 pm with the program starting at 7pm Sausalito Woman's Club, 120 Central Avenue, Sausalito



Electric commuter trains first appeared in Sausalito.  
Photo from SHS collection

FREE EXHIBITS

The Society staffs and manages the **Ice House** Visitor Center and Museum featuring a permanent display of local history. There is also a gift area featuring works by local artists and a selection of gift items relating to Sausalito and its history. The Ice House is open from 11:30am-4pm on Tuesday through Sunday, and is located at 780 Bridgeway (across from Casa Madrona).

The Historical Society's **Exhibit Room and Phil Frank History and Research Room** are located on the top floor of City Hall. You will encounter an exclusive exhibit of the writings, drawings and music of one-time Sausalitan Shel Silverstein, plus an opportunity to do research through our archives. The Exhibit and Research Rooms are open from 10am-1pm on Wednesdays and Saturdays, or by appointment. Dedicated docents are available to assist and guide your research.

Step back to a dramatic time in Sausalito by touring the historic World War II **Marinship Exhibit at the Bay Model**. This display of photographs, paintings and actual artifacts from the WWII ships and yard was developed by the staff of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the SHS. The Marinship Exhibit is open from 9am-4pm on Tuesday through Saturday and is located in the Bay Model Visitors Center at 2100 Bridgeway.

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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