



# CONTINUITY

Newsletter of the Preservation Action Council of San José

Volume 5, Number 3, May/June 1994

## Living History Days Return June 25 and 26

The San José Historical Museum will host its 11th annual Living History Days on June 25 and 26, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Historical Museum is located at the south end of Kelley Park, at Alma and Senter roads in San José.

The 14-acre historic museum town will come alive with the assistance of costumed participants. If they wish, attendees are welcome to come in period costume.

Events at Living History Days include artisan demonstrations, agricultural exhibits, trolley car rides, children's hands-on activities, antique cars, multi-cultural displays, dancing, and an old-fashioned parade.

Numerous activities have been planned for children. Games, such as tug-of-war, marbles, and sack races, show children that even Grandma and Grandpa had fun as children before the advent of video games. Children will also be able to churn butter, use an old-fashioned apple peeler, make bubbles, grind coffee, and take turns cranking the ice cream machine. Crafts for children to make and take home include marble bags, hobby horses, spoon dolls, Victorian lettered book-marks, and herbal tussie-mussies.

Demonstrations and exhibits to be

featured are model railroads; quilting; antique bicycles and cars; basket making; fire engines; lace making; wild west exhibits; spinning; woodcarvers; and gas engines and tractors.

O'Brien's Candy and Ice Cream Shop will be open during Living History Days, and a variety of foods will be available on the museum grounds.

Admission to Living History Days will be: adults, \$6; seniors \$5; youth, \$4; and 0-3, free.



*Paul Bernal spoke at the May 13 dedication ceremony to commemorate San José's history and those who have contributed to our culture. The Park Avenue bridge over the Guadalupe River is now decorated with sculptures and flags which pay tribute to the Muwekma/Ohlone Tribe, the Spanish Empire, the Mexican Federal Republic, the State of California, and the United States.*

Anyone interested in assisting at the PACSJ booth during Living History Days should call Ellen Garboske at 408/446-5474.

## Consultant Issues River Street Report

*April Halberstadt*

We have finally received the consultant's report on the future of the River Street neighborhood! The report looks at each structure, analyzes which ones can be saved, and makes some recommendations. It will now be up to PACSJ and the community to make some critical decisions. Does San José have the political will to save this neighborhood? Does the community understand the importance of preserving its past? And what role will PACSJ play in this process?

Meetings to form a response to this report, and to plan PACSJ's strategy to support preservation of the 43 structures in this historic neighborhood, are being scheduled. **PACSJ members and friends are urged to join the River Street Task Force. We have a very limited time to save this fine neighborhood from demolition.** Call Karita Hummer at 408/971-0940 or April Halberstadt at 408/293-2860 for additional information.

### Also in This Issue

Co-President's Column ... 2  
Watchdog Report ... 7  
Calendar ... 8



*Ellen Garboske and  
Craig Mineweaser, AIA*  
**Preservation and History are Alive  
and Well in San José** – This  
spring is shaping up to be one of  
great excitement for all who  
support preservation of historic  
structures. New works of art in  
public places and educational  
events depicting the history of the  
San José area, added to completion  
of several very important  
restoration projects, bring hope  
that history is finally being  
recognized as important to the  
vitality of our community.

A series of events celebrating the  
opening of the 1797 Peralta Adobe  
and the 1855 Fallon House were  
well attended by enthusiastic  
crowds. After many years of  
standing as an empty adobe, largely  
ignored by both the City and the  
public, the Peralta has been  
restored and authentically  
furnished to depict the Spanish and  
Mexican eras. The Fallon House  
fairly glows, with elegant Victorian  
furnishings, warm woodwork, and  
beautiful wall coverings. Visitors  
are greeted with a feeling of  
welcome in the impressive home,  
typical of the early American  
period. If you haven't visited these  
two restored structures, do so soon.  
And be sure to visit the on-site gift  
shop, The City Store.

Damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta  
earthquake, the 1866 Santa Clara  
County Courthouse restoration  
project is complete, and this  
venerable building is back in use.  
Rededication ceremonies were held  
May 11, 128 years after the original

dedication. We are so fortunate to  
have some staunch preservationists  
in the area.

The Park Avenue bridge over the  
Guadalupe River is now graced by  
beautiful sculptures. Coyotes on  
the bridge railings, an eagle on a  
pedestal, and hummingbirds atop  
the four flagpoles pay tribute to  
the Muwekma Ohlone period. Flags  
from the Spanish, Mexican/  
Californio, California, and  
American periods complete this  
impressive gateway to historic San  
José.

In the middle of all this activity,  
PACJSJ presented a tour and open  
house of San José's historic  
Japantown. Although the weather  
didn't cooperate, the event was  
pronounced a success by visitors  
and participants. Visitors were  
impressed with the tour guidebook  
and the warm welcome they  
received from the Japanese  
community. It was a rewarding  
day! Many thanks to all our  
members and friends for all their  
hard work. Educational events  
such as this are so important in  
promoting preservation awareness  
to the public.

Over the three-day Memorial Day  
weekend, the San José Historical  
Museum hosted a Civil War re-  
enactment, with the spotlight on  
San José.

We are proud to be a part of all  
these preservation and history-  
related activities. But let's not get  
complacent! There are many archi-  
tecturally and historically important  
structures in San José which are  
endangered by the threat of  
development or neglect. PACSJ  
has four projects which require  
immediate attention:

- River Street homes – See article  
on page 1.

- Costa Hall – This interesting  
and ornate building at 19 S. Third  
Street is scheduled to be demo-  
lished to create a surface parking  
lot. The second floor of this  
historic building contains a lodge  
hall important to the early  
Portuguese community of San José.  
Efforts are underway to halt this  
"parking lot" project and to clarify  
required review processes with the  
City of San José. Costa Hall is a  
contributing structure within the  
Downtown Historic District, which  
is listed on the National Register  
of Historic Places.

- Fox California Theatre – Efforts  
are on-going to keep this project  
on track. PACSJ supports the  
efforts of Councilwoman Margie  
Fernandes regarding this issue.  
The Adhoc Coalition of Friends of  
the Fox California (of which we are  
a participant) continues to work on  
a concept to raise funds through a  
public/private partnership to  
restore this theatre.

- Schellar house – See Watchdog  
article on page 7. **Update:** The  
City Council agenda for June 14,  
1994, included a request for  
approval to relocate the Schellar  
House to Vine Street for use by  
the Center of Employment  
Training (CET). Results were not  
known at press time.

If you're willing to donate some  
time, call our office (408/947-8025)  
leave your name and number, and  
you will be contacted.

In addition to the above, the First  
Church of Christ, Scientist, task  
force will be re-activating in the  
near future. There are also several  
*(Continued on page 3)*

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## Historic Courthouse Opens Doors Again

Linda Larson Boston

For the fourth time in its 128 year history, the Santa Clara County Courthouse, which faces St. James Square, was officially dedicated in a ceremony on May 11. This time the October 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquake had prompted the closing of this largely unreinforced brick building.

Since the Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, no federal funds could have been spent if the county had chosen to tear down the building. But by saving the historic structure, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds became available to help cover the costs of retrofitting the courthouse into a useful building. Insurance money and Santa Clara County contributed to the total \$12.4 million budget.

The terms "under budget" and "early" are rarely heard in connection with public projects, but this was the case with the courthouse. The Santa Clara County's Board of Supervisors selected a unique method to achieve the goal of retrofitting and rehabilitating the courthouse. They hired the project team of the Steinberg Group, architects, and Toeniskoetter and Breeding, Inc./Dinwiddie Construction Co., construction managers.

Because the endeavor was so complex, the project team, in turn, hired contractors who specialized in particular aspects, such as fire protection, roof tiles, painting, and plumbing. This work plan enabled the county to maintain control while seeing to it that the selected experts had the freedom to make

creative suggestions to often unorthodox problems.

Structural reinforcement was accomplished by installing over 5,000,000 tons of concrete and 40 tons of steel *within* the original walls. Although the "new" courthouse features modern innovations, such as structural reinforcement and bullet proof judges' benches, the Santa Clara County Courthouse has retained its elegant historic fabric.

While some historians were disappointed that the building was not returned to its original elegance, common economic sense dictated that the dome, which had been destroyed in a 1931 fire, not be replaced. The final result is a structurally sound building which has been tastefully restored to its 1932 grandeur.

Other agencies are now studying the process by which the county achieved this herculean task within a reasonable budget. And Santa Clara County's first structure built specifically as a courthouse can serve as an example of practical historic rehabilitation. It reminds us of the foresight of our ancestors to choose the design of Levi Goodrich, the first professionally trained architect to work in California.

## Co-Presidents' Report

*(Continued from page 3)*

other on-going projects, such as the Bernal ranch and the Guadalupe Gardens. We also would like to liaison with the many new neighborhood associations which are being formed in San José. We hope each of you will get involved, and we trust our efforts will contribute to many more exciting preservation project successes in the future.

## Preservation and Environmental Review Process to be Discussed

Michael Bethke

"Historic Preservation and the Environmental Review Process" will be the subject of the June 29 meeting of the Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP). Co-sponsored by the Heritage Council of Santa Clara County, the event's speakers are Paul Bernal, Deputy District Attorney and Chairman, Santa Clara County Heritage Commission; and Kathryn Berry, Deputy County Counsel.

Many city planners and environmental consultants understand the environmental review processes as it relates to the impacts of projects upon flora, fauna, transportation systems, and so forth. But many of these same issues also must be addressed when a given project impacts a site of historical or cultural significance.

Come join the AEP at their monthly luncheon meeting for this opportunity to hear two prominent local attorneys address this very issue, and relate some interesting case studies.

Afterwards, a tour of the newly-refurbished Peralta Adobe and Historic Fallon House will be provided.

The event will be held at Hamburger Mary's, 170 W. St. John Street, San José, and costs \$10 per person. Attendance is limited to 40, and RSVPs should be directed to Michael Bethke at 408/723-9333.

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## Japantown Open House Held

*Karita Hummer*

After hoping and praying for more rain all spring, the rainstorm just before the open house on May 7 gave me a real case of the jitters. After an all night heavy rainstorm and a still rainy early morning, fears of "a real rain-out" got still worse. By mid-morning, though, the sun broke through just in time for us to set up for the day. All the work of a really superb team who had planned the event would not be in vain.

I felt relief as I thought of the great work of so many:

- **Dr. Ishikawa**, who educated us about the history of the area, and who shared his recollections with us throughout our preparations and on the day of the event. We all came away with a profound sense of how special a person he is and what a wonderful treasure trove he has of anecdotes and memories of historical events in Japantown, that he so generously shares with our community.

- Our co-chair, **Connie Shaw**, Director of the Japantown Business Association, who managed so many details in the day-to-day operations of the open house. She worked with all the gracious owners of the buildings in the tour, the restaurant owners who so generously donated food for the reception, and the numerous organizations who participated in the day. These included the Japanese American Resource Center, the Japanese American Citizens League, and the Buddhist Church Betsuin.



*The exterior of the Nishimua Butcher shop was viewed at the open house. Located at 647 N. Sixth Street, it may have originally been part of the "Heinlerville" Chinatown. The architectural style is typical of Chinese vernacular architecture.*

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- **The Japantown Business Association** members' preparations are appreciated, especially the design and construction of such great signs for marking each of the buildings in the tour.

- **Angela Edwards**, who took charge of our publicity productions and publications with outstanding and astounding vigor, dedication, creativity, and thoroughness, produced a marvelous historical and architectural guide to Japantown. (The guide is now on sale at the San José Historical Museum giftshops.) The aesthetic quality of the brochure and program was really great!

- **The building owners**, who so graciously opened their buildings for the tour, and the **restaurant owners** who prepared tons of food for the reception.

- **The Japanese American Citizens League (JCL)** for all their

preparations for the reception at the Issei Memorial Building, and the **Japanese American Resource Center (JARC)** for all their work in putting an exhibit together for the reception.

- **Jennifer Hwang**, who provided top rate media publicity, ensuring the best coverage of any of our events thus far. All of this in the midst of moving and taking on a new job! It was really a professional undertaking.

- **Betty Antrim**, who having just completed co-chairing the February Tea Dance so ably, became a resource consultant for the aesthetic aspects of the open house. She then went on to coordinate a very special component of our open house, an exhibit of photographs and artwork, featuring local photographers and artwork from the collection of the San José Okayama Sister City Program.

- **Betsy Mathieson** for carrying so many functions throughout the planning and the day, working on publicity details, editing scripts, ticket sales, docent training, and a host of other duties.

- **Ellen Garboske**, for her super job of recruiting, placing, and coordinating the training of the docents for the day ... and we ended up with a real army of enthusiasts, all of whom committed not only to blocks of time on the day of the open house, but also spent extra time for their training.

- **Leslie Masunaga**, for the exhibit she prepared on old Chinatown in the Heinlerville part of Japantown.

*(Continued on page 5)*

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## Japantown Exhibits Enjoyed by Visitors

*(Continued from page 4)*

• **Jimi Yamaichi** and **Megan Dwyer**, for their terrific seismic retrofit display and Jimi's interesting tour of the Buddhist Church Betsuin.

• **Gabriel Ibarra**, for his lovely photographic work for our productions and exhibit, and **Scott Hinrichs** for all his efforts in shooting photographs for the event.

• **John Frolli**, who got our Preservation Action Council brochures designed and produced in time for the event and for all his efforts on aesthetics of the day and work on signage and the art exhibit.

Though I continued to scan the sky throughout the day, and while indeed our hoped-for crowds did seem dampened by the unpredictability of the weather, the whole



*The historic Ideal Laundry Company (Nishioka Brothers' Fish Market) at 665 North Sixth Street is one of Japantown's few brick buildings. Since the 1929 structure is unreinforced masonry, laws regarding earthquake safety guidelines may make demolition inevitable.*

day was a real treat. All who participated seemed quite charmed by the event.

The wonderful and poignant exhibit at the Issei Memorial Building was a great introduction to the JARC historical collection, a great invitation to return again and again. The reception by JCL was a feast of foods from many local restaurants. The music by Hori Hashimoto and Akebono Shamisen was quite lovely. It wafted down to the veranda of the Issei Memorial, surrounded by lovely gardens which are worth a trip just in themselves. The hosts from JARC and JCL couldn't have been more gracious, and the tour visitors could not have been better welcomed (or fed!).

And on and on throughout the tour: the beauty of the Buddhist Temple, the wonderful shops loaded with unique items, the surprises of the grocery shops. And the really special buildings, such as Wings; George's gas station; the Nishioka Brothers Fish Market building, and the charm of the shop itself; Works Gallery, a wonderful old agricultural building (the area abounds in them – anyone for live-work space?); the exceptionally designed (by Tanaka) modern building of Makahara and Hinoki; and the great exhibit (of exceptional photography and the beautiful pottery from Okayama) at Works Gallery, among many other sites, all combined to give participants that day a great appreciation of the breadth and depth and complexity of the area known in our community as Nihonmachi or Japantown. For some, it was a return to a place they know and love; for others, it was an introduction to an area they are likely to visit time and again.

Thank you everyone who worked so hard to make it all happen and to make it possible for us to have memories we will all cherish.

## Lightston Alley Echoes with History

*Ellen Garboske*

Downtown San José bustles with activity today, but I doubt if many people think about Lightston Alley as part of that rebirth, or even know where it is. In 1847 Lightston Alley was at the heart of the San José business district, and many of the city's most important historic events centered around this small street.

Franz Lichtenstein was born in Bavaria in 1821. He was a soap maker and Chandler by trade and immigrated to the United States in the 1840s. Lichtenstein spent a brief period in Oregon; then in 1846 he ended up in San José, where he spent the remainder of his life. He arrived in San José in the company of James W. Marshall, who later discovered gold at Sutter's Creek. Despite this association, Lichtenstein never appeared to be struck with gold fever, choosing to remain in San José where he very quickly became a respected businessman and land owner. Upon arrival in San José, records of the time show Franz as Frank Lightstone, and soon this was shortened even more to Frank Lightston.

Lightston and his partner, Charles Weber, established one of the first general stores in the city of San José. Their store was in an adobe building at the corner of what is now Santa Clara Street and

*(Continued on page 6)*

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## Historic Lightston Alley Has Much to Tell

*(Continued from page 5)*

Lightston Alley. When the pueblo was surveyed in 1847, Lightston Street (later changed to Lightston Alley) was shown as a one-block street running from Santa Clara Street south to El Dorado (the current Post Street), between Market and First Streets. It is one of the few city streets which has remained the same length since that early survey.

Lightston became one of San José's most prominent early citizens. He owned large portions of downtown San José, including the block bounded by Market, Santa Clara, First, and El Dorado streets. He became the city's first treasurer after San José was incorporated in March of 1850, and was elected to the City Council in 1854. Lightston had married Juana Soto in 1849, and the couple raised five sons and three daughters, all born in that spacious adobe which housed the general store!

When California became part of the United States, Frank Lightston was among the group of 19 prominent citizens who raised \$34,000 to acquire the adobe structure which housed the first legislature. There were still no hotels in San José during the period the city served as capital of California. Legislators, emigrants, strangers, and visitors alike could either sleep in the open air or pay as high as \$50 per month for a spot on the second-story floor of Lightston and Weber's store or other similar structures within the city. When the state capital was moved after only two years, the statehouse building was used as the

Santa Clara County Courthouse. The statehouse was destroyed by fire in 1853, and court business was moved temporarily to Frank Lightston's adobe building on Lightston Alley. At one time part of Frank's adobe was also used as a jail cell.

San José's volunteer fire company, Hook and Ladder No. 1, was formed in 1854, with Frank Lightston listed as a member. To house this new company, Lightston offered to lease a lot on Lightston Alley to the city for 25 cents per annum, provided the city would build a firehouse on the lot within one year. The city complied, two more fire companies joined Hook and Ladder No. 1 at that location, and the San José Fire Department was created. By 1869 overcrowding forced two of the fire companies, including Hook and Ladder No. 1, to move to other locations. The 1870 San José City Directory lists Torrent Engine Company still on Lightston Street. The firehouse stood for many years as a prominent San José landmark.

The 1870 City Directory lists the following businesses on Lightston Alley: one blacksmith, one produce store, one wagonmaker, one painter, two boot and shoemakers, one tailor, the Torrent Engine Company, and Deputy Sheriff Frank Lightston. Traveler's Rest, a small adobe boarding house, was tucked in between Lightston's store on the north and the firehouse on the south.

Just prior to California statehood, the Santa Clara Valley was the scene of war preparations, and a company of 31 men was quartered in an adobe building on Lightston Alley. Records do not make it clear which adobe building was

used for this purpose. But add that use to all the others and you have the nucleus of a very busy one-block street. Over the years there were the sounds of hammer and anvil, fire alarms, legislators standing on the corner discussing new laws (most of which still exist), Lightston's eight children and their friends playing and chasing after fire equipment, Lightston himself moving a new supply of merchandise into his store, or Deputy Lightston bringing in the latest town drunk or criminal.

Today there are no buildings with an address on Lightston Alley. None of the original buildings remain. No entrance doors face this street, just blank walls of buildings facing other streets. Most people know it only as a shortcut to get from here to there. But walk this short street, stand on the sidewalk and close your eyes. There! Did you hear that? The horses with creaking harnesses, the ring of iron on iron, the shouts of men manning the fire apparatus, the cries of children at play, voices discussing the latest law enacted, clanging of jail cell doors, shouted orders from the military commander – the sounds of history, all in one short block.

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### REMINDER

**Don't forget to check the calendar on page 8 for the location of meetings and events. PACSJ board meetings will be conducted at historic places of interest when conditions permit. So take this unique opportunity to see buildings not often open to the public.**

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## Watchdog Report

*April Halberstadt*

The Watchdog Committee of Preservation Action Council of San José keeps an eye on historic buildings that may be threatened by rehabilitation, demolition, or neglect. Every PACSJ member is an informal member of this committee, bringing items to the attention of the coordinator, April Halberstadt. Sometimes immediate emergency action is required, but sometimes we just keep watch.

Watchdogs have growled to protect **Costa Hall**, known to some oldtime downtowners as the Underground Records building. The Redevelopment Agency wants another parking lot and attempted to bypass the usual hearing proceedings. Costa Hall is listed on the National Register and is included as one of the structures that contributes to San José's Historic Commercial District. An appeal to the demolition permit has been filed. PACSJ, the Historic Landmarks Commission, and the State Historic Preservation Office in Sacramento are now watching to ensure that the appropriate hearing procedures are followed.

The **Schellar House** on the San José State University campus ... is it saved, or is it gone? The meetings and memos on this one continue to go back and forth between the City and the University. The City has made extraordinary efforts and contributions in staff time and money, offering to relocate and rehabilitate the house. The

University persists in its plans to clear the site for parking and has published a request for bids to demolish the property.

You may remember that the City made some generous offers to the University regarding this house several years ago, only to find the University making a deal with developer Matt Hurley. After more than two years, Mr. Hurley was unable to move the house and has now backed away from the relocation deal after pocketing thousands of taxpayer dollars for "asbestos removal." The interior and exterior were left in deplorable condition as a result of the asbestos work.



The Preservation Action Council of San José is a non-profit membership organization providing information to property owners and education to the public, and promoting programs and policies for historic preservation and compatible new architectural design.

Watchdogs continue to meet with San José Unified School District officials to find alternative uses for the **Hoover School** site. Efforts on behalf of the site have dragged on for several years, due in great measure to the personnel changes in the superintendent's office. Rumors say that a developer may be waiting in the wings, hoping to gut the building and use it for condominiums. Neighbors remember that we have been down this road once or twice before. Preservationists note that developer Matt Hurley also sits on the San José Unified School District Board and has been very active in "site planning" for the district.

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## Calendar

### June

- 20 (Monday) Open board of directors meeting at the home of Betsy and Scott Mathieson, 197 S. Thirteenth St. at San Antonio, San José, 7 p.m.
- 25 and 26 (Saturday & Sunday) Living History Days, San José Historical Museum, south end of Kelley Park, Alma and Senter roads, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day.
- 29 (Wednesday) "Historic Preservation and the Environmental Review Process," Association of Environmental Professionals monthly meeting, co-sponsored by Heritage Council of Santa Clara County, Hamburger Mary's, 170 W. St. John Street, San José, 11:30 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. Reservations to Michael Bethke 408/723-9333.

### July

- 5 (Tuesday) Executive board meeting at our office, 40 N. First St., San José, 7 p.m.
- 18 (Monday) Open board of directors meeting at Mother Olsen's, 72 N. Fifth St., San José, 7 p.m.

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