



Milpitas Muse

March 2020

The Milpitas Historical Society Newsletter

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March 11 Meeting: The Roots of “the Valley of Heart’s Delight”

The next meeting of the Milpitas Historical Society will be held at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, March 11, in the Multipurpose Room (Auditorium) of the Milpitas Library, 160 North Main Street.

The speaker for the evening’s presentation, Thomas Shepherd, is related to and has stories about two of the best known agricultural families in the Santa Clara Valley: the Pellier fruit growers and the Mirassou wine grapes growers. In the early 1850s, Louis Pellier, (1817–72) a San Jose orchardist, successfully imported young prune trees and the techniques for growing them from France. The prune, a species of plum most suited for drying, was brought over, by request, by Louis’ brother Pierre Pellier in a trunk. Once established, it became a classic of the fruit industry.

The Mirassou Winery was founded in 1854 by Louis Pellier and his brother Pierre (1823–94) also in the South Bay area, and for many years was an icon of the agricultural heritage of the Santa Clara Valley. In 1881 Pierre Mirassou (1856–89) married Pierre Pellier's daughter Henriette (1860–1937); that family was responsible for the well-known Mirassou wine of this area.



Santa Clara Valley photo mid-20th century

Until the 1960s, the Santa Clara Valley was the largest fruit-producing and packing region in the world, with 39 canneries. Prunes were a major crop; the valley was producing the majority of prunes in California by 1900 and shipping them internationally.

The overwhelming beauty of the plum and other fruit tree blossoms in the spring were what earned this area the name, “The Valley of Heart’s Delight.”

Our meetings are free and all are welcome. Hope you can join us then.

Milpitas Historical Society Board Meetings

The Society’s March Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 3.at 2:00 pm in Group Study Room A at the Milpitas Library. Members are always welcome.

Our Society’s Contact Information

You can contact the Milpitas Historical Society:

- by mail at 160 N. Main Street, Milpitas CA 95035
- by email at tmhs@milpitashistoricalsociety.org

Here’s the new website for the Milpitas Historical Society: <http://milpitashistoricalsociety.org>, with information about the society and upcoming events.

The traditional Milpitas history web page is here: <http://www.milpitashistory.org/home/index.html>

Milpitas Historical Society’s 2020 Board and Officers Installation Dinner

The Milpitas Historical Society held its annual dinner to celebrate the installation of its new officers and board of directors on Thursday evening, February 20, at the Summitpointe Golf Club Restaurant.

Board President Bill Hare welcomed our unusually distinguished group of guests: Milpitas Mayor Richard Tran; California State Assemblyman Kansan Chu and his wife Daisy; District 3 Santa Clara Valley Water District Director Richard Santos; Milpitas Unified School District Board President Hon Lien; Milpitas Unified School District Board Member Kelly Yip-Chuan; Commissioner Bill Chuan of the Milpitas Planning Commission; Alternate Commissioner of the Economic Development & Trade Commission Juliette Gomez; John Agg, Chair, Milpitas Art Commission; and our special guests of honor from Oregon, Gregory Nokes, author and event speaker, and his wife Candise.



Mayor Richard Tran, far right, after administering the oath of office to the officers and board of directors of the Society



Attendees watch Gregory Nokes' presentation on Peter Burnett

The 2020 board members include (left to right): Landmarks Director Steve Munzel, Secretary Irma Munzel, Treasurer and Educational Outreach Programs Director Joe Ehardt, Vice President and Newsletter Editor Catherine Pelizzari, Hospitality Director Mary Ann Udoutch, Historian Joanne Souza, Membership Director Dan Cosper, Publicity and Public Relations Director Harriett McGuire, and President Bill Hare, with Milpitas Mayor Richard Tran to the right.

In the course of a brief regular business meeting, President Bill Hare presented an Honorary Service Award (with lifetime membership) to Catherine Pelizzari for producing the newsletter and recruiting speakers for the meetings for the past decade; California Assembly member Kansen Chu also presented her with a Certificate of Recognition for her services.

After the dinner, journalist, historian, and author Gregory Nokes talked about the subject of his latest book, *The Troubled Life of Peter Burnett*. Peter Hardeman Burnett was born in Tennessee in 1807, raised in rural Missouri, and was self-educated in law and government. In 1843 he joined the westward movement to move his family to Oregon, where he farmed for a while and was elected Oregon's provisional legislature between 1844 and 1848. In 1848, he rushed to California, along with so many others, for gold, and he made a little money. Then he made more selling land for John Sutter. In 1849, he was elected California's first Governor, even though California did not officially become a state until 1850. In 1851, he resigned, frustrated by legislative opposition to his views, including horribly racist ones.

Burnett held a surprising number of short-term positions after that, including serving briefly as a justice in the California Supreme Court between 1857 and 1858, and as a member of the Sacramento City Council, as well as becoming a San Jose-based lawyer, and then the president of the Pacific Bank of San Francisco. He died in 1895 at the age of 87 in San Francisco.



Presenter Gregory Nokes consults his book



Kansen Chu, Catherine Pelizzari, and Bill Hare

Dinner photos courtesy of Mylène Stolpe Charismatic Photography ©2020

**Milpitas Historical Society
160 North Main St.
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