

Milpitas Muse

March 2012

The Milpitas Historical Society Newsletter

Volume XXXII No. 2

Another Historical Movie!

Our next Milpitas Historical Society meeting, will be held on Wednesday, March 14, at 7:00 pm, in the usual place, the Community Room (Auditorium) of the Milpitas Library.



Our speaker will be John Kimball, a history fan, Valley resident since 1950, and the presenter of two historical films to the Society last year. He will show a film about the Dust Bowl years in the 1930's and demonstrate, with other films, some words of John Steinbeck, and music of Woody Guthrie, how that era affected our own Santa Clara (now Silicon) Valley.

The public is invited, no charge. Light refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

Gala Dinner and Installation of Officers and Directors for 2012

On Thursday, February 16, the Society held its annual installation dinner at the Omega Restaurant and heard fascinating tales from keynote speaker Richard Santos, District 3 Director of the Santa Clara County Water District. Mr. Santos told about growing up in Alviso, his family history, and the family connection to Alviso, going back over a hundred years. Mr. Santos' brother, sister, and nephew and family were present for the occasion. Mr. Santos was introduced by Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese, our Installation keynote speaker last year.



Richard Santos Courtesy of Mareile Ogle

Milpitas Mayor Jose Esteves then conducted the swearing-in ceremony for the 2012 Society Officers and Board of Directors, as pictured below: From left to right, Mareile Ogle, Historian; Bill Hare, Vice-President; Mabel Matos, Membership; Catherine Pelizzari, Secretary and Publications; Kraig Bunnell, Treasurer; Joann Souza, Hospitality; Steve Munzel, Archives and Landmarks; Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Commission Liaison; and Thelma Bridges, Special Events. Watch the video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqE7V68yHWw.

Out of range of the photo above was incoming President Harriett McGuire, shown in a photo on the next page at a different event.



Courtesy of Mareile Ogle

After the keynote speech, Bill Hare presented Lifetime Membership Awards for outstanding service to the Society to Mabel Matos, Harriett McGuire, and Steve Munzel.

Our VP Bill Hare, Milpitas Artist of the Year

Grammy Award Winner and Milpitas Historical Society Vice President Bill Hare (second from right) was presented Milpitas's first Artist of the Year award at the City Council meeting on February 21 by Mayor Jose Esteves (far right).



Courtesy of Renee Lorentzen

Also shown, left to right, are Art Commission members Bill Foulk, Becky Strauss and Harriett McGuire, who is our new Milpitas Historical Society President.

Milpitas Street Name Stories: Downing Road

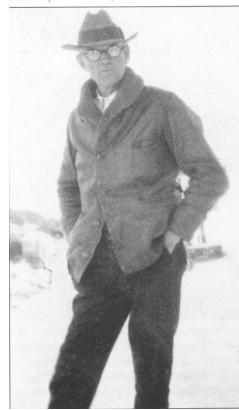
Downing Road, which branches off of Calaveras Road in the hills to the east to Milpitas, isn't really within Milpitas city limits, but it nonetheless commemorates a family and their ranch which was very important to Milpitas history.

The William F. Downing family came from Nevada in 1881 and bought land east of the Evans ranch and north of Laguna Valley, where Downing Road was later cut into Calaveras Road. The ranch was purchased from Henry Curtner and was part of Ranchos Tularcitos and Agua Caliente.

One of the first to rent land from the Downings was Joseph Silva, who came to the area in 1886 and whose family continued to farm the land half way through the 20th century.

William F. Downing's son, George Lucas Downing, (1879-1931) continued the tradition of tenant farming.

Milpitas Historical Society
160 North Main St.
Milpitas, CA 95035



George Lucas Downing



Georgia Downing

He encouraged the local Portuguese farmers, whose knowledge of farming and willingness to work he respected, to send for their relatives in the Azores Islands. He would give them a house, a barn, a cow, and a plot of land. Two thirds of their season's profit would go to the tenant farmer, and the rest would go to Mr. Downing. As many as 30 tenant families farmed the Downing land, grateful for the opportunity to come the United States.

In 1903, Airpoint School was built at the corner of Downing Road and Calaveras Road, so that children of the Downing and other nearby ranches would have a school within reasonable distance of their homes. George Lucas Downing was a long-time trustee of Airpoint School.

George Lucas Downing and his wife Georgia had three children, Jerome and Lorraine, both of whom died young, and Suzanne, who grew up to marry the younger George Abel, the son of another pioneer Milpitas settler.

Milpitas Historical Society Contact Information

You can contact the Milpitas Historical Society:

- by phone at (408) 320-9587
- by mail at 160 N. Main Street, Milpitas CA 95035
- by email at: tmhs@milpitashistory.org.

Our new web page offers general information on the Historical Society and its accomplishments:

<http://www.milpitashistory.org/historicalsociety/society.html>

First Class