



Milpitas Muse

May 2012

The Milpitas Historical Society Newsletter

Volume XXXII No. 4

The Once-Mysterious Mountain

The next Milpitas Historical Society meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 9, at 7:00 pm in the Community Room (auditorium) of the Milpitas Library.

The topic of the meeting will be Mt. Umunhum, the second highest peak you see looking south in the direction of Santa Cruz. The history of Mt. Umunhum and its current status will be presented by Basim Jaber, a life-long South Bay native and free lance photographer.



Mt Umunhum Radar Station with receivers in the 1960's

Mr. Jaber has researched the history and geography of Mt. Umunhum and the Almaden Air Force Station since 2006. In 1957 the Air Force opened a radar station on the second highest peak in the Santa Cruz Mountains. There were 120 service members and their families living there at one time. In 1980 the Air Force closed down the facility, leaving a deserted ghost town that slowly deteriorated. In 2009 Congress approved the site for clean-up after 50 years of being off limits to the public. Once the site is cleared, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District plans to open it to the public with hiking trails and vista views.

Mr. Jaber's unprecedented photo documentary work of the entire site has proved to be invaluable to preserving the history and memories of Almaden Air Force Station.

The public is invited to attend, meet Mr. Jaber and learn the history of this fascinating place.

Historical Society Members Honored



Milpitas Historical Society Board Members Harriett McGuire, President, and Mabel Mattos, Membership (shown above), both long-time residents and socially active participants in Milpitas community life, were honored as nominees for the Milpitas 2012 Citizen of the Year at the Knights of Columbus St. John the Baptist Parish-sponsored event on Saturday, April 14, which awarded the Citizen of the Year title to attorney and city commissioner Rajeev Madnawat.

Milpitas City Museum to Open

The City Council has approved the concept of locating a community museum in the new park on Main Street. The Laguna School has been offered to the city as a museum in the park. The Milpitas Historical Society has agreed to supply the museum with artifacts for display and has started fundraising. The Society is asking for a donation of \$10 or more from each of its members for the museum fund. You can send your museum donation to:

Milpitas Community Museum Fund
c/o Milpitas Historical Society
160 N. Main St.
Milpitas, CA 95035

Milpitas School Name Stories: William Burnett Elementary School

William Burnett was a Milpitas pioneer rancher who impressed all who knew him with his responsibility, honesty, courtesy, hard work, and not the least for his skilled horsemanship.

Known all his life as “Billy,” Burnett was born in 1848 in Missouri. When he was 11 years old, he started out with his family—parents, two sisters, and grandmother—in a covered wagon across the plains on the Old Oregon Trail.

The family spent two years crossing the country and then coming south from Oregon to central California. Shortly before they reached their destination in Santa Clara County, tragedy struck the family when Billy’s father became ill and died in Stockton, leaving Billy, at age 13, as the man of the family. The family went on to Mountain View and lived there for the next several years.



William Burnett Elementary School

Then in 1867, when Billy was 19, he and his mother purchased 170 acres from Marshall Pomeroy (who later became one of the first teachers in Milpitas schools) for \$2500. This property is east of the current Evans Road. They had a small vineyard and almond orchard there, but Billy’s main focus was raising cattle. He grazed many cattle back in the hills behind the present Calaveras

Reservoir in a valley known as Arroyo Hondo, and partnered with other ranchers to run even more cattle.

He remained a bachelor throughout his life. In Milpitas he lived with his mother and younger sisters. His sister Fanny later became the first woman to work at the State Capitol in Sacramento. And his sister Annie’s daughter Grace married into the pioneer Evans family.

After many years of ranching, he and his mother sold their land in two sections, one in 1894 to “Whiskers” Rodriguez, and the other, a few years later, to the Evans brothers (one of whom was married to his niece). Billy moved to San Jose, and soon after that to Palo Alto. He continued raising cattle in the Calaveras country in various partnerships until his death in 1931 at 83. He was always known as Billy or Uncle Billy, and was as respected as an elder for his kindness and honesty as he had been in his youth.

William Burnett Elementary School was dedicated in 1963 and has won high ratings for the quality of the education it provides its students

In case you were wondering: Although they had the same last name, William Burnett was not related to Peter Hardeman Burnett, who was the first Governor of California when it was admitted to the Union in 1850. Governor Burnett had a street in Alviso named for him (he lived there 1850-1854) before moving to San Jose. That street’s name was changed to Taylor Street in the 1970’s as the streets were merged.

Milpitas Historical Society Videos to See

The Historical Society now has a YouTube Channel called "MilpitasHistory." Check out the four videos about our town's history available for viewing:

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>

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160 North Main St.
Milpitas, CA 95035

First Class