

Petaluma Museum Association

Petaluma Historical Library & Museum

Preserving the Unique History of Petaluma and Providing
Educational and Cultural Services to the Community

Quarterly Newsletter
Digital Edition



Petaluma's first public high school on D Street

Summer/Fall 2023

Volume 33, Issue 3

On the Cover

Celebrans Centum Quinguginta Annos

by Terry Park



D Street School

A Petaluma enterprise is celebrating its sesquicentennial this year, and it all began on a neighborhood D Street lot.

Most teenagers worked before the turn of the century, and until 1873 those who attended public school studied along with elementary students in Petaluma's B Street School. That year, the school board purchased the bankrupt private academy that Professor Edward S Lippitt had established in 1867 on D Street. The board named Petaluma's first public high school the D Street School. The building continued in service after a new high school opened on Fair Street in 1915. The three-story building eventually was reduced to one story to temporarily house a primary school while other primary schools were being built. Americo Tomasini bought the vacant building in 1928 and razed it to make way for his Brainerd Jones-designed brick home.

Please join the Petaluma Museum Association and the Petaluma Historical Library and Museum in celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Petaluma High School with an exhibit that will open at the museum on Thursday, Sept. 14.

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The Petaluma Museum Association
Newsletter is published quarterly
and distributed to its members.

Thank you to all the contributors and
special thanks to Carl Molesworth, copy
editor. If you would like to contribute any
news or items of interest
to our newsletter,
email mary@petalumamuseum.com

Deadline is Oct 1, 2023

**Petaluma Museum Association
20 Fourth St.
Petaluma, CA 94952**

A Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Hello! Let me begin by saying how pleased I am to write to you today as the new Executive Director of the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum.

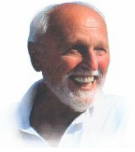
As some of you know, I decided to make Petaluma my home more than 10 years ago, beguiled by the city's unique historic character and taken by the way in which Petaluma's past remains a vibrant part of modern life. But my enchantment with history dates back even further. Museums were my "happy place" as a child, a passion that inspired my academic interests in art history and museum studies and set me off on a 25+ year career path of museum and nonprofit leadership and service, including a year as a member of this museum's Board of Directors!

I am honored to now be included among the caretakers of Petaluma's rich cultural legacy and—along with the Petaluma Museum Association Board of Directors, our dedicated staff and volunteers, and our partners at the City of Petaluma—I am excited to build off the Museum's esteemed standing as the historical heart of Petaluma. We're working to make *your* Museum a more vibrant civic space where the past is present—a hub for all Petalumans to explore and ask questions of our history, to learn new things about our city and ourselves, and to promote dialogue about how we will shape our shared future. And, importantly, we will work harder to share the histories of *all* Petalumans, shining a brighter light on the experiences of communities that, too often, have been diminished. As always, we will engage with the past through thought-provoking exhibitions, make available to all the services of our top-notch research library, and create memorable moments for visitors of all ages through special programs, educational opportunities, and fun and informative walking tours.

As I learn more about the treasured Museum building and its past 45 years as the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum, one thing is clear: All that we have achieved and all that we will achieve is firmly rooted in the partnerships we have formed in our community. I thank you, our members, for your continued support and for your warm welcomes during my first three months at the Museum! It has been wonderful to see so many of you enjoying our summer exhibition, *Celebrating 50 years Of American Graffiti*, searching for "Waldo" with your kids and grandkids, or following our marvelous Petalumans of Yesteryear on a tour of historic downtown Petaluma. You are an integral part of what makes the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum a thriving and vibrant institution. I look forward to connecting with each of you and hearing about what makes this museum your "happy place." Please stop in and say hello!

Warm regards,

Stacey Atchley
Executive Director



Petaluma History & Commentary

by Skip Sommer, Historian

1930 ... AS THE GREAT DEPRESSION DEEPENED

THE STOCK MARKET crash of 1929 drastically affected the entire world. By the end of 1930, the average income in America had dropped by 36 percent. Nationally, farm prices dropped to just 65 percent of what they had been 20 years prior. In some areas, the price of eggs had bottomed out at 5 cents a dozen. But in Petaluma, they were still 29 cents in the Piggly Wiggly store at 151 Main St., and bread was 9 cents a loaf. It was all to become even worse, as a terrible drought was sweeping into the southern states.

The U.S. population was 123 million in 1930 (about a third of what it is now), and Petaluma's was 8,238, having grown just 1,912 over the previous 10 years. Fewer than 20 percent of U.S. farms had a tractor, and fewer than 13 percent had electricity. Nationally, 34 percent of households had telephones, and that was pretty much true here as well. However, during the month of April 1930, 3,319,000 baby chicks had been sent out from Petaluma via RR Express, breaking all records. Petaluma was trying to sustain.

Things weren't ALL bad in 1930, the first Mickey



Pedroni Delicatessen ca 1930

Mouse cartoon, as well as the first Lone Ranger and Blondie comic strips, appeared that year. The Hostess Food Company invented The Twinkie, and the Birdseye Corporation developed something called "frozen food" in March 1930. In the world of air travel, the first-ever stewardess took off on a flight from San Francisco to Cheyenne Wyo., starting a national trend. Some big names of the year were: Babe Ruth, Mary Pickford,

Bobby Jones, Al Capone, Noel Coward, Ethel Mermen, Cole Porter, Fred Astaire, Bob Hope, Lou Gehrig and Albert Einstein.

In world news, Mahatma Gandhi had begun his struggle to make India independent from Great Britain, and that campaign was to get very bloody before he was finished. Iraq

also became independent of Great Britain that year (93 years ago, and it's still a mess). In Germany, the Nazi Party had gotten control over the Reichstag, and a man named Adolph Hitler was making a lot of noise, muchly facilitated by the Great Depression.

In other news of 1930, the Vatican had just approved something called "The Rhythm Method" amid much controversy. The tallest structure in the world,

The Chrysler Building at 1,046 feet, opened its doors in New York. Perhaps it wasn't coincidental that New York City installed the first traffic signals in our nation that year, too.

And talk about Depression bargains: Here in Petaluma, one could purchase: "5 Ac., close to town. 4 rm. House. Well. Garage.





Women pose with large frying pan

\$2,650. Phone 14.” (But did it have electricity?) Or this: At 137 Keller you could rent a “2 Rm. Furnished Apt. \$3.50/Wk.” And, at our Murphy Chevrolet dealership (424 Main St.), you could pick up a used “1929 Ford Cabriolet with excellent upholstery. \$495 bucks.”

On May 15, 1930, National “EGG WEEK” officially closed with an elaborate stunt created by our ever-flamboyant Petaluma promo guy, Bert Kerrigan, who cooked up a giant omelet in San Francisco and presented it to the city’s mayor, James Rolph. Said creation was embellished by 15 Petaluma girls in chicken costumes dancing their “Chicken Dance” (Ho, Boy)! The omelet consisted of 15,000 eggs and was cooked in a huge frying pan made by our Vogensen Co. Moving pictures of it were made by Paramount Studios with Petaluma officials present. It was left unsaid what Mayor Rolf did with his humongous gift. Also that May, The Al Barnes 5 Ring

Circus was playing here With, what they called, “The Greatest Array of Dumb Animal Talent Ever Assembled!!”



One must remember that in 1930, in addition to the Great Depression and the impending Dust Bowl there was also prohibition! To temporarily rid yourself of all these woes, you could go to the movies and catch Gary Cooper in “Only the Brave” at the Rialto, Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald in “The Hope Parade” at The Californian (now the Phoenix), or “Ken Maynard and his Wonder Horse” at the Mystic. These were ‘Talkies’ ... but not yet colorized.



Silk Mill 1930

Republican President Herbert Hoover was blamed for all this trouble. He would be swept out of office in 1932 by Democrat Franklin Roosevelt, who promised to put the nation back on track, get rid of Prohibition, create jobs, control crime, provide school lunches, create Social Security for all, make taxes more fair, and all in all, perform many sparkling miracles....and, by golly, he actually DID do all of that. (Whew!)

Volunteer Spotlight



Carl Molesworth

Carl was born in 1947 and grew up in Frederick, Maryland. He served in the U.S. Air Force as a radar operator from 1968 to 1972, with duty assignments in Maine, Iceland and western Washington. After that he earned a BA in English with a minor in history from the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Carl worked as journalist for newspapers and magazines throughout the Pacific Northwest for nearly 40 years before retiring in 2015. He also has been researching and writing about World War II flight operations for nearly four decades. His 15 non-fiction books, many of which focus on the air war in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations, include the latest, *Flying Tiger Ace*, which was published in 2020 by Osprey Publishing. He lives in Petaluma, CA, with his artist wife, Kris, and their two dogs. His daughter, Claire, and her family, live in Bolinas, CA.

Carl started volunteering at the museum shortly after moving here last year. He had been active in the historical museum in his former community and enjoyed it. He remarked, *"It's been a great way to learn about my new community, and I've met a lot of nice people in the process."* He volunteers one morning a week in the research library and puts in additional hours in his office at home. His jobs include helping to organize research materials in the library and answering research requests from members of the community. In addition, he completed a research project last year to compile the history of airfields in the Petaluma area since the beginning of powered flight. Carl also serves as copy editor for the museum's newsletter. He says: *"Doing this work has been like taking a speed course in Petaluma history, though I still have a lot more to learn."*



Elyse Singleton

Elyse has been volunteering at the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum for the last two months, primarily working on a deed catalogue/digitization project. She is a cultural anthropologist with a particular interest in designing exhibits and restoring/conserving decorative arts. She previously worked in healthcare consulting and recently made the decision to return to her passion interests. She is a California native and has lived in the bay area for 16 years, the last three in Santa Rosa. She also sings in a choir.

Elyse started volunteering because of a recent career change and would like to begin working in the museum industry. She is trying to build experience in the hopes of obtaining a job in exhibit design or item conservation. She previously volunteered at the Shakespeare Society of America, which is affiliated with the Department of English of the University of Mississippi.

Kenilworth Park in Aviation History

Second in a Series

By Carl Molesworth, Museum Library Volunteer

Petaluma's first flying field wasn't an airport at all. It was Kenilworth Park, Petaluma's grand, one-mile harness-racing track on East Washington Street. Between 1910 and 1913, Kenilworth Park was a hub of the nascent field of aviation, including being the site of two notable events in early aviation history.

The racetrack dated back to 1882, when the Sonoma and Marin Agricultural Society bought 60 acres of the Payran Ranch to build a new Agricultural Park. The track was oriented north-south on the south side of East Washington Street where Johnson Drive is now. With betting on harness racing legal in California at that time, the track provided revenue to support the other activities at the park until the mid-1890s, when harness racing was curtailed by public policy.

According to Petaluma historian Terry Park, "In November of 1902, Harry Stover, a well-known California racehorse owner, purchased Petaluma's

dormant 60-acre Agricultural Park, along with 50 adjacent acres, renaming it Kenilworth Park in honor of his prized thoroughbred racehorse." In 1909, Stover "died while attending a race at a track he owned in Salt Lake City. ... Stover left Kenilworth Park, which he had expanded to 250 acres with more than 100 mares and stallions, making it one of the largest breeding farms in California, to his widow Hattie. In 1911, she sold 65 acres of the property to the city of Petaluma, who converted it into a municipal park for baseball games, gambling-free horse racing, rodeos, and a public campground."

At that time, "The property described as a 'garden spot' consisting of a 'splendid' mile track, grandstand, pavilion, and a forest of shade trees," Katherine Rinehart, *Exploring the Archives as the Sonoma-Marin Fair Goes Virtual*, Sonoma County Farm Bureau, June 3, 2020

FRED J. WISEMAN

As early as July 1910, an aviation pioneer and Windsor resident named Fred Wiseman began making exhibition flights from Kenilworth Park in an airplane of his own construction. Born in Santa Rosa in 1875, Wiseman quickly gained local fame as an adventuring aviator. Before long, people in Santa Rosa began clamoring for Wiseman to bring his remarkable machine to his hometown so they could see what the fuss was all about. Consequently, Wiseman set out from Kenilworth Park on Feb. 17, 1911, for a flight that would secure him a place in the early history of aviation.

It wasn't much of a flight. The distance that motorists now drive in less than half an hour took Wiseman two days to cover. On the day of the flight, recent rains had left the Kenilworth infield too muddy to support flight operations, so Wiseman chose to take off from the front stretch of the racetrack, right in front of the packed grandstand. He launched smoothly but got only as far as Denman Flat (somewhere between Corona Road and the Petaluma Boulevard North interchange on US 101) before his engine quit and he had to make a forced landing. Following overnight repairs, Wiseman continued toward Santa Rosa. He was just short of his chosen landing spot when mechanical trouble forced

him down again, but he landed within the city limits, so the flight was considered successfully completed.

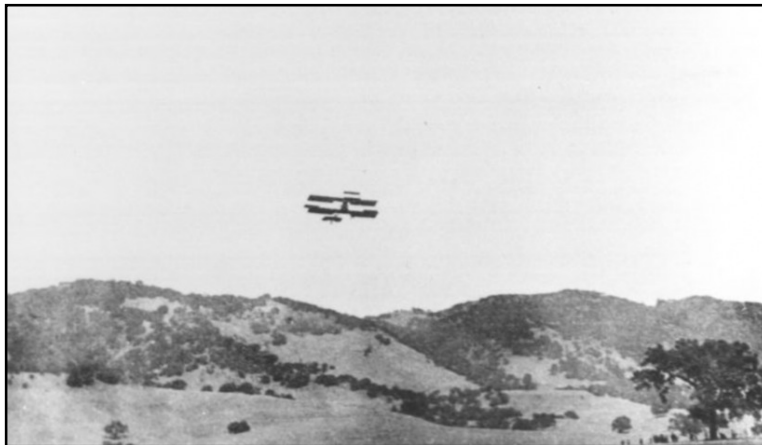
It was Wiseman's cargo, not his piloting skills, that made the flight historic. Before leaving Petaluma, he was given several postmarked letters from Petaluma dignitaries, including businessman G.P. McNear, to deliver to the Santa Rosa postmaster. He also carried 50 newspapers and a container of groceries, according



*Fred Wiseman and wife pose with the airplane in which he made the first air-mail flight in history.
Sonoma County Library collection*

to some sources. Seven months later another pilot in New York was sworn in as the first U.S. airmail carrier.

But because the letters he carried were postmarked, Wiseman was declared by the Smithsonian Institution in 1947 as the first air mail pilot in history. Wiseman's plane, restored in the 1980s, now hangs in the lobby of the U.S. Postal Service headquarters in Washington, D.C.



Fred Wiseman flies over Rincon Valley, circa 1911. Sonoma County Library collection

Grover E. Bell



Grover E. Bell was the first airman to die in a plane crash in Sonoma County history.

Kenilworth Park's other claim to fame was a sad one. Two contemporaries of Fred Wiseman in early-day aviation were the Bell brothers: Grover and Larry. They worked for the Glenn L. Martin Co., a leading aircraft manufacturer, doing flight demonstrations around the country. Grover, the older brother, had started flying around 1910 and served as pilot, while Larry completed the barnstorming team as the mechanic.

in his path. Apparently, the noise of Grover's engine had spooked them, and they had broken loose from a post where they were tied.

A modern pilot faced with this problem likely would have gunned his engine to pick up speed and then climbed over the horses before circling the field for another landing approach. But manned flight was only a decade old in 1913, and many of today's lessons for safe flying were still being learned. Instead of flying over the horses, Grover attempted to turn away from them. He was too low and too slow, however, and as he turned one wingtip dug into the ground, causing the plane to cartwheel. Grover E. Bell died the next day from injuries suffered in the crash. He was the first aviation fatality in Sonoma County history.

The Bell brothers brought their airplane to Petaluma, by train, to perform an Independence Day flying exhibition at the fairgrounds, on July 4, 1913. The Petaluma Argus gushed that the exhibition would be "the flight that will be by far the best ever given in the country."

The Bells assembled the airplane in the Kenilworth Park infield and ran some engine tests on the morning of the show. The setup looked ideal, with plenty of room for takeoffs and landings plus a clear view for spectators in the grandstands. Though tall trees surrounded most of the fairgrounds, a gap in the trees at one end of the racetrack provided space for Grover to fly in and out.

On the morning of the exhibition, Grover took off for a test flight to ensure his machine was in good working order. He was approaching the field to land when he spotted six racehorses running on the infield directly

Witnessing his brother's deadly crash did not deter Larry Bell from pursuing a career in aviation, and quite a career it was. He founded Bell Aircraft Corp. in 1935 and built thousands of fighter planes for the U.S. Army during World War II. Bell's postwar successes included the X-1 rocket plane, first to break the sound barrier. In time, Bell shifted to the production of helicopters. After a series of successful helicopter designs, the UH-1 Iroquois, better known as the "Huey," became the most famous helicopter of the war in Vietnam. Bell Helicopter still designs and manufactures helicopters today.

Apparently, Grover Bell's crash ended Kenilworth Park's days as a makeshift airfield. As newer and faster airplanes came along, they needed longer runways than the confined space at Kenilworth Park could provide. Historical records contain no further mentions of flight operations at the Petaluma racetrack.

Petalumans of Yesteryear Calendar of Events

The Secret Life of Victorian Homes... As Told by Their Interiors



During the Victorian era, the rate of change was fast and furious – social order and values changed, and became our way of living, affecting us to this day!

This new event series, presented by the Petalumans of Yesteryear explores how everyday life so dramatically changed in this era; when our city was born and prospered. And, how homes adapted to the new life style...you will be surprised!

Join us for light beverages, and to enjoy the stories of how it all came about.

Episode 1 – Saturday, August 5th – 4-5:30 pm

Episode 2 – Saturday, August 12th – 4-5:30 pm

Episode 3 – Saturday, August 19th – 4-5:30 pm

At the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum
Each Episode: \$13 Members, \$16 non-members

History Trails Walk takes place Sunday, August 27, at 10:30 am

The History Trails Walk through our historic downtown is a collaborative event led by influential Petalumans of Yesteryear, and will detail stories, historic sites, architectural details, and other bits of our town's history. We'll start outside the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum for a two hour (approx.) walk downtown. Comfy shoes are a must for this event!

\$15 Members/Students, \$20 General

The Annual Cypress Hill Cemetery Tour is Saturday, October 21 at 10:30 am & 11:00 am



The Petalumans of Yesteryear will give a guided tour at the Cypress Hill Cemetery, where you will discover the gravesites of early Petalumans as their POY characters lead us through their stories and historic graves, as you experience living history.

\$15 Members/Students, \$20 General

For all the latest updates for these events and coming events and to purchase tickets please visit us on the museum's website at:

<https://www.petalumamuseum.com/events>

In Memoriam

Connie Hammerman 1932-2023



Connie at the Petaluma Woman's Club researching material for the Exhibit on the histories of the Woman's Club and the Garden Club.

Photo credit: Suzanne Clarke

Connie and Bill Hammerman moved to Petaluma in 1993. Soon afterward, they became deeply involved with our museum. Having led walking tours of historical districts of San Francisco, Connie started the popular walking tours of our historic downtown, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995. The free tours take place on Saturdays from May through October and have close to a dozen docents. Connie remained the "Mother Hen" of the group for many years and was a valued source of ideas and encouragement.

The Annual Victorian Tea benefitted from Connie's organizational skills as well, through various settings, finally taking place at the Masonic Hall's dining room overlooking the downtown at Petaluma Boulevard and Western Avenue.

Recently Connie provided guidance to the Petaluma Garden Club and Woman's Club in their efforts to mount a shared exhibit of the clubs' beginnings, resulting in the popular "Finding Our Roots" in 2022. She will be missed.

DOWNTOWN WALKING TOURS! *Saturdays, May thru October*



The Petaluma Historical Library & Museum invites you to join a "Petaluman of Yesteryear" dressed in period attire for a guided tour of our historic downtown. Petaluma has a unique and fascinating history as a bustling river town during and after the Gold Rush, then the "Chicken and Egg Capital of the World," and now a town that loves its history. Learn about Petaluma's incredible architecture (including 8 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places) and other important and interesting facets of our town's history. You'll be informed by your docent's historical knowledge and entertained by their characters' stories.

Meet on the steps of the Museum at 4th and B Street at 10:30am to embark on your trip back through time.

For more information click on link: <https://www.petalumamuseum.com/calendar-event/weekly-downtown-petaluma-historical-walking-tour/>

What's New in Collections

by Solange Russek, Collections Manager

Thanks again to Barbara Webster for sharing photos of her father's business. Ralph Millet owned the store for a short while in 1931. He filed for bankruptcy shortly after. Barbara also included some articles.

Millet's Grocery Store 1931



NOTICE OF FIRST MEETING

In the Northern Division of the District Court of the United States, in and for the Northern District of California.

In the matter of Ralph O. Millet, Bankrupt No. 4198.

To the creditors of the above named bankrupt.

BUSINESS MAN HAS OPERATION

Ralph I. Millet, owner of the Millet grocery, was operated upon at the Hillside hospital last week by Dr. E. E. Brydone-Jack and Dr. A. R. Elder, for the removal of several teeth. He is now at his home on Bodega avenue where he is reported getting along nicely.

Millet recently recovered from an auto accident on the highway when he suffered an injury to his hip. His store is in charge of his wife and Harry Paula.



Grocery Store on corner of Western & Fair

MILLET FAMILY HAS RECOVERED

Ralph I. Millet, owner of the Millet grocery store on Western avenue and Fair street, who with Mrs. Millet and his mother-in-law Mrs. Elizabeth Wallace, were injured in an automobile accident a few weeks ago have recovered. Mr. Millet is back at his place of business and his wife and mother-in-law are able to be up. Mrs. Wallace was the most seriously hurt in the crash having suffered a broken arm.

Millet had a large ad in Friday's Argus-Courier announcing a special sale at the Millet grocery.



Special Thanks to Advanced Business Equipment Technologies for their generosity and ongoing support of our copier needs in our Hoppy Hopkins Research Library and beyond. History is continually being researched and preserved thanks to the workhorse of a copier, the Konica Minolta Bizhub, which they donated and continue to maintain for us. Very much appreciated!

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Join online at <https://www.petalumamuseum.com/join/>

Support your local museum!



**Lots of exciting events are happening
at your museum!**

For all the latest updates for events and exhibits please visit us on our website at:

<https://www.petalumamuseum.com/events>

Museum hours: Thursday–Sunday, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Exhibits are free to the public — Donations Accepted



Alexander J. "Zan" Stark (1889-1967)
"Public Library - Petaluma Calif."
Real photo postcard #738, March 1941

You have made the Petaluma Museum a part of your life. Now, we hope you will consider making the Petaluma Museum Association a part of your lasting legacy by leaving a gift in your will or trust.

Your bequest will ensure that the PMA remains a vibrant organization that welcomes our community in the historic Carnegie Library Building and passes down our history to the next generation of Petalumas. Petaluma Museum Association is a 501c3 tax-exempt organization.

To make the PMA a part of your estate plans, contact your financial planner. To find out more about how your will or trust might sustain our educational mission, contact Stacey Atchley, Executive Director, PMA at 707-778-4398.

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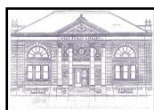
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