

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Markus Fromherz, BPA President



In the right context, good ideas beget more good ideas. In the BPA, we are seeing the evidence this year with the emergence of a number of new

events and volunteers for the BPA. Two years ago, former board member Lydia Kou started cultural diversity events with the first (Chinese) Lunar New Year celebration. She organized the third, successful Lunar New Year event earlier this year, which inspired BPA member Jaya Pandey to propose an (Indian) Deepawali celebration event. With the help of board member Gwen Luce and a small army of new volunteers Gwen helped recruit, we can now look forward to this event in November. For another example, late last year membership chair Lisa Landers suggested an informal member event to enhance interaction between BPA members and the board. We held the first BPA Community Happy Hour in January, and it is already promising to become a regular and popular event (attended by 10–15 residents each month). In turn, it was the first Happy Hour where BPA member Catherine Hendricks proposed a new kind of event, where residents and friends of Barron Park present and teach their expertise in small groups. This became the BPA Meet and Learn, and we just held the third one. It was on the topic

of water conservation, hosted by resident David Coale and attended by almost 20 people.

All of these events came out of suggestions from BPA members, and the board has been happy to support them. Past efforts also included support for a booth at the Palo Alto Chili Cook-Off, for the Juana Briones Run, and for several bicycle events. In the meantime, Lydia Kou is turning her energy to organizing another Movie in the Park event later this year, and BPA member Jeannie Lythcott, who volunteered for the BPA in the past, stepped forward with several new ideas for community events. And of course there was our very interesting annual meeting in March, and board member John King, former resident Sarah Van Zanten, and an army of volunteers put together another fantastic May Fete just a few weeks ago.

It is wonderful to see all of these activities from volunteers contributing to the community. They are not limited to community events, but those currently see the most popularity. Other recent BPA-sponsored activities included the bike path committee and a group that invested substantial time to investigate the proposal for a hydrogen refueling station on El Camino Real. Also, Maurice “Maury” Green recently joined the BPA

board to take on Neighborhood Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and we’re very grateful to have such an experienced member support this important area.

Where else could we use help? Two committee chairs that are currently vacant are Zoning and Land Use, and Traffic and Streets. We know that BPA members care about these. In fact, those were core topics at the recent Palo Alto 2030 Summit, and Barron Park was well represented among the large number of attendants. Or perhaps you’re interested in our surrounding businesses and/or schools; we would benefit from liaisons to these organizations. If you have another favorite topic that you believe the BPA should support, please do not hesitate to bring it to the board. In fact, join us at an upcoming Happy Hour and tell us all about your interests. The board

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HELP WANTED!

BPA Newsletter Editor

(see Markus Fromherz’s article)

also

Photographers

Reporters

Zoning and Land Use committee chair

Traffic and Streets (+ bicycle safety)

Business Liaison

School Liaison

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MAY FETE 2015 A HUGE SUCCESS!



Photo: Doug Moran



Photo: Doug Moran



Juliet Simpson with donkey "Perry" & Leonard Simpson with "Niner," sister and brother, flank Mayor Karen Holman with "Palo Alto Perry," the stuffed donkey ambassador at her feet.



Miniature donkey Perry is content being fed what looks like alfalfa.

This thank you is going out to all the volunteers who helped make this year's May Fete a huge success! We had one of the largest number of people in attendance in recent history, the weather cooperated (albeit a little windy), the BBQ was busier than ever and the raffle netted more than ever before. The cotton candy machine was a popular addition and the bounce house was a hit with the kids.

I would like to directly thank the following people for their wonderful efforts:

■ Sarah Van Zanten (Event Coordinator) - with family and friends, handled obtaining the crafts and games, the food and soda, the raffle and tickets.

■ Larry Breed and crew—bought the ribbons, cut and re-spooled them, assembled the may pole, attached the ribbons and the floral basket, directed the setting up of the pole, put the floral basket up, and disassembled the may pole, long after most people were gone.

■ Gary Breitbard—organized the music and the Morris dancers

■ Rich Elder—stage construction

■ Alan Winston—dance caller

■ Hassan at Barron Park Florist & Market—provided the flowers and assembled the flower basket for free!

■ Doug Graham—Barron Park History display

■ Lisa Landers (BPA Board member)—membership table

■ Peter Mueller (BPA Board member)—membership table

■ 3 scouts from Boy Scout Troop 14—From 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, assisted throughout the event. They helped with the cotton candy machine, running the activities, the food booth and taking down the tables and chairs. They were there to raise funds for a trip to Japan for the World Scout Jamboree this July.

■ John King, Karen Saxena and Gene Iwamoto—BBQ

.....and of course the donkeys and their handlers

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In Kind Donations: Copy Factory; Barron Park Florist

Lets see everyone next year!

John W. King
Volunteer Coordinator
Barron Park May Fete

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Photos: Doug Moran

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and your neighbors will be very happy to hear your ideas and benefit from your contributions!

I'd like to add a special thank you and request. Nancy Hamilton is resigning as BPA Newsletter editor after almost 23 years of service. We are all immensely grateful and indebted to Nancy for her diligent and masterful effort to edit a high-quality newsletter quarter after quarter. (See an article on Nancy in the Spring 2014 newsletter.) Now we are looking for someone to replace her. The position takes a few hours quarterly. Experience is preferable but not necessary, except that excellent English and awareness of deadlines are musts. The editor has several wonderful copy editors who help proof-read articles, and a production lead who does the layout. The editor's main responsibilities are gathering articles and photos, getting them reviewed, submitting them for layout, and then submitting the final version for distribution. Please contact me if you can help!

Help Support the Barron Park Donkeys!



Photo by Bernard Andre

All those who care about Perry and Niner seek to guarantee their proper on-going care and shelter, as well as to ensure that funds will be available for health concerns as the donkeys age. The handlers hope that those generous neighbors who have contributed in the past will consider increasing their support this year. Contributions for the donkeys' care may be sent to: The Palo Alto Donkey Project, ACTERRA (Action for a Sustainable Earth),

3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, CA 94303-4303. The check *must* be made out to "ACTERRA-Palo Alto Donkey Fund." All of the above must be included.

For further information about making a contribution on behalf of the donkeys, or if you would like information about how to become one of the volunteer donkey handlers, please call Steven Parkes (650) 918-6768 or email at smparkes@smparkes.net, or go to BarronParkDonkeys.org.

EARLY DAYS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

By Douglas L. Graham, Barron Park Historian

Our neighborhood has long been known for being “different” from most of the rest of Palo Alto. Many of these differences are firmly rooted in our unique history. This article tells a few stories from the early Twentieth Century that may be illuminating, odd, and even amusing.

Part one: Major Forbes vs. the county highway crew

It was a day in the spring of 1926—probably an ordinary sunny day—when a county highway crew showed up at the California Military Academy to cut down the giant eucalyptus trees bordering the new real estate development on El Camino Real called “Barron Park.” The State Highway, as it was known then, was going to be paved through Mayfield and further south. The highway would be widened from two lanes to three, allowing a two-way “passing lane” in the middle. At the same time, the highway would be “straightened out” and made

uniformly 90 feet wide from property line to property line. A 66-foot roadway would be provided, with 12-foot “sidewalks,” according to the *Palo Alto Times*.

The law of eminent domain

To enable the widening, the state had applied the law of eminent domain to seize a strip of land across the front of each of the new commercial lots in Barron Park. On this strip were a line of large, impressive eucalyptus trees visible for about a mile down the highway. They were about 45 years old and the tallest things in the vicinity. The land seizure and tree felling would greatly reduce the real estate value of the lots. The property owner, Colonel Sebastian Jones, had purchased about 50 acres of the old Barron Estate in 1923. He built a military academy on the 15 acres surrounding and including the spectacular, 70-year old Victorian wedding-cake Barron Mansion. He had split off the remainder—about 35 acres—into small commercial lots fronting on the state highway and small

residential lots on driveways and lanes that he named Military Way, Woodland Drive (now La Selva, and Barron Avenue.

A monkey wrench is thrown

Now he was trying to sell both the commercial and residential lots to defray the cost of building the academy. The state’s action had thrown a huge monkey wrench in his plans. And, worst of all, the county (acting for the state) refused to pay him for the seized land! The legal and financial dispute simmered until the day the crew suddenly appeared to cut down Jones’ trees.

To the rescue

But to the rescue came Colonel Jones’ son-in-law, the redoubtable Major Forbes, armed with an impressive pistol. He faced down the crew, who fortunately were not similarly armed. The crew recognized that discretion was superior to valor in this situation. They withdrew, and sent the Sheriff to deal with Forbes. Apparently, the Sheriff had some diplomatic talents, because Forbes withdrew his armed opposition and eventually the trees were sacrificed, thereby becoming victims of the dawning automobile age.

Unintended results

However, Jones never was paid. Since he wasn’t, he refused to dedicate the alley behind the commercial lots to the county, as he had been expected to do. So the alley, designated by the city as Cypress Lane in the 1980s, is now owned by nobody. Or does it belong to the heirs of Colonel Jones? Some day, high priced lawyers will probably straighten this out, and someone will become responsible for its upkeep. All this came about because the county was stingy and Major Forbes was handy with a pistol.

Part two: The spider mites that ate the neighborhood

Sale of the Barron Estate

The era of the Mayfield Farm and the Barron Estate came to an abrupt end in December, 1919 when “Watsonville

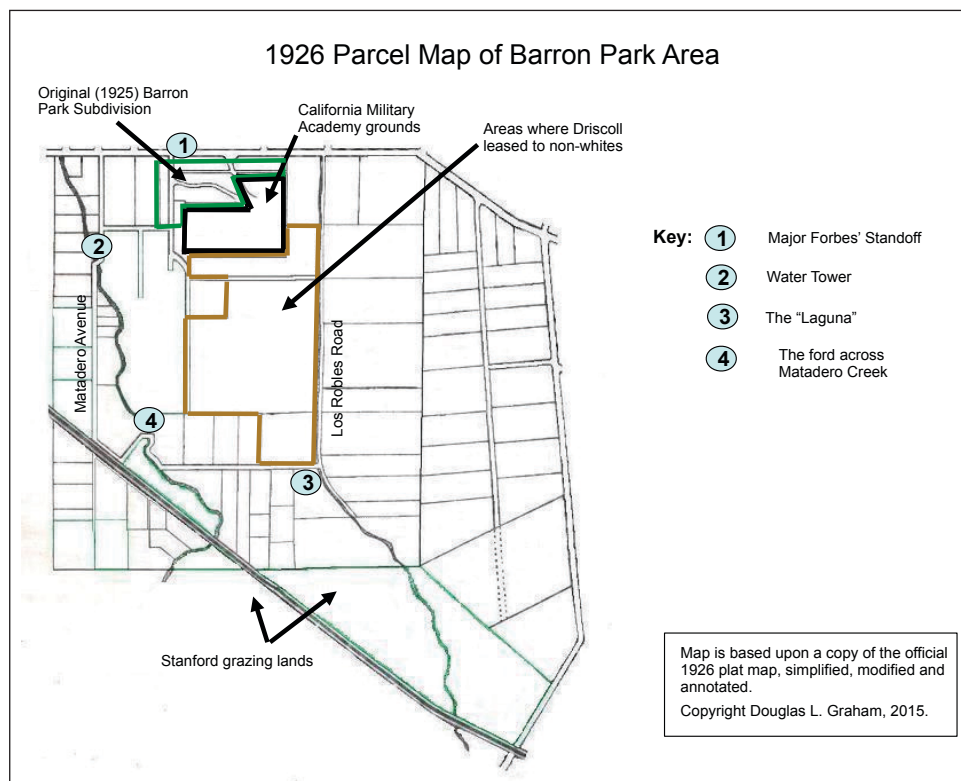


Image A: 1926 Parcel Map of Barron Park area.

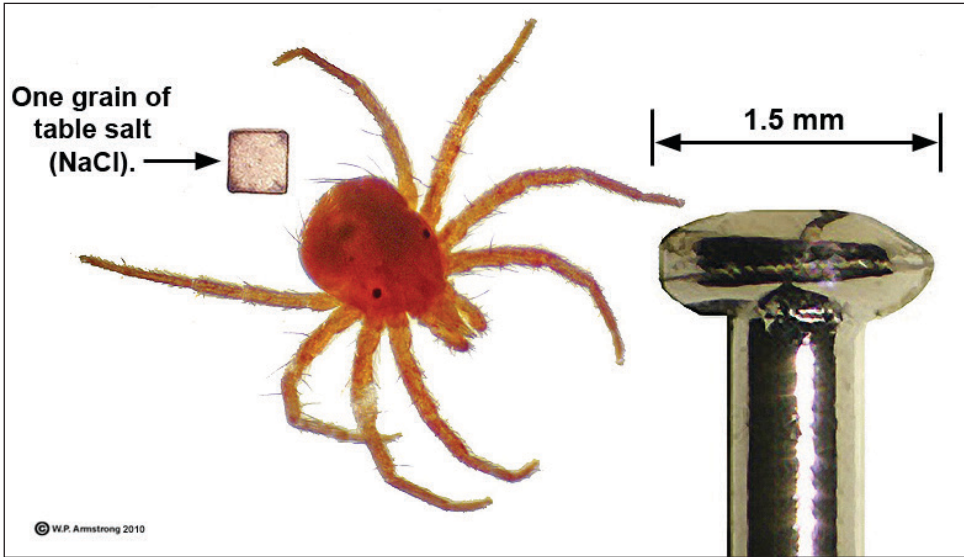


Image B: Spider mite and head of pin for comparison.

capitalists” Driscoll and Reiter bought the 350-acre estate for “almost \$200,000, or about \$570 per acre. The estate had apparently been on the market for several years and the sale was made for less than the asking price.

The Driscoll family was in the business of raising and marketing strawberries: this is the same Driscoll company that supplies the berries to our local markets today. In 1919, Driscoll was expanding the business by buying land that he figured would be good for raising berries. He intended to supply picking, packing, distribution and marketing to a host of small, independent berry growers, and to capture the bulk of the profits that way. The concept echoed the then widespread practice of “sharecropping” cotton in the southern states and wheat in the Great Plains states.

Subdividing into little farms

By early 1920 Driscoll was *selling* two-acre to four-acre parcels of the best Barron Park farmland to white families. At least some, and probably all of the deeds prevented sale to non-whites. He was also *leasing* parcels to families of Japanese, “Spanish” and Filipino ancestry. See Image A, the 1926 parcel map.

Most of the parcels that were sold, especially the smaller ones, were taken up by men who had “day” jobs in the local area, especially Mayfield or Palo Alto. Today these men would be considered “hobby farmers,” but then it was simply a second job to enable a better life. Most

parcels also became the families’ home sites. Some of these early-1920s houses are still here, although many have been demolished to make way for large new homes since the 1990s.

Success of the strawberry growers

At first, the strawberry growers were very successful. Most of the tilled land was planted in strawberries, and the Driscoll Company handled their end of things well. By mid-decade, when the plants in all the plots were mature, Barron Park growers were shipping \$5,000 to \$7,000 worth a day during the height of the season; that would be about \$100,000 to \$125,000 a day in today’s dollars.

What is a Spider Mite?

Spider mites are very, very small. Tinier than tiny. You can see a single one if you have acute eyesight and good light. They look like very fine red dots. See Image B, a photograph of a spider mite compared to the head of a pin and a grain of table salt. However, you never see just one. If you are lucky, you only see a mass of thousands. But they usually come by the million—untold millions of little red dots, slowly covering the leaves of the plant and sucking the juice right out of the living cells.

They ate and ate

The spider mites may have been there from the beginning, but they didn’t cause big troubles until the later years of the

decade. All of a sudden they were very noticeable. Then you couldn’t get away from them—they were everywhere. It was useless to tear out your strawberry plants and replant—the baby plants wouldn’t have a chance to mature. The bugs just ate and ate and then ate some more.

Seven Years to Recover

It was said that, if you waited seven years and replanted, the mites would be gone and you could get a fresh start. Only a few Barron Park growers tried this—and failed. Apparently, the mites had moved in for good, and now owned the territory.

Driscoll’s Response

The company encouraged parcel owners to plant orchards (especially apricot, prune plum, and pear trees). On the leased land they still owned they planted pears. For their strawberry supply, they pulled out of Barron Park and depended on other areas where they had been acquiring sizeable amounts of land. They sold off the remaining Barron Park parcels, including many for home sites. When the process was completed, the agricultural era in Barron Park had come to the beginning of the end. In came suburbia.

Part three: When the water tower fell

Complaints about the water

Cornelis Bol, resident of Roble Ridge, Stanford researcher and inventor of the Mercury Vapor Lamp, took over ownership and management of the EMWAY Water Company in 1942. Bol changed the name to the Barron Park Water Company, but it was generally known as the “Bol Water Company”. It pumped water from deep wells for the orchards and residences in the north end of Barron Park. The Bol family ran it as a family enterprise, like everything else they did. The Bol sons were kept busy reading meters and responding to complaints of low water pressure, leaks or muddy water. Cornelis managed customer and financial affairs and handled major repair and maintenance jobs. This is a story about the biggest breakdown the system ever suffered.

Key to the water supply

A key component of the water system in the 1940s was a 60,000 gallon water tank. It was located at the Matadero Well site on Matadero Avenue nearly opposite

Whitsell (see image A, 1926 parcel map). The tank was originally mounted on a tower. Unfortunately, I've never been able to find a photograph of this water tower, nor any description of its dimensions. What we do know about it is that it was ordinary—nothing out of the usual—and that it was capable of pushing water by gravity feed alone, up to the Bol's house on Roble Ridge.

Assumptions and calculations

Skip this paragraph if you are not interested in calculations. A check of the USGS topographic map covering Barron Park reveals that the well site is 40 feet above MSL (mean sea level) and the Bol's house is about 65 feet, a difference of 25 feet. Assuming that the top of the tank should be 5-10 higher than the house in order to provide a reasonable (if somewhat low) water pressure, this implies a tank top height of about 75 feet above MSL. A cylindrical tank with a 24-foot diameter and 18 feet tall (a reasonable shape for a water tank) would hold slightly more than 60,000 gallons. Such a tank would have to have been mounted on a 17-foot "tower" in order to reach the required height.

A shocking crash

It is interesting to consider that 60,000 gallons of water weighs about 254 English tons (not including the weight of the empty tank). 254 tons falling 17 feet probably made a lot of noise—and the resulting flood could have covered about a 7th of an acre one foot deep in water. The shock of the impact partially crushed the heavy steel tank and took out the water supply completely for several days until an emergency connection could be made from a water main of one of the other systems. This was probably made through a fire hose and may have been from either the Las Encinas or the Los Robles Water Companies. It probably wasn't from Palo Alto since unincorporated Barron Park was feuding with the City throughout the late 1940s. We don't know when this happened but a good possibility says 1949. We know the tank was in place by then.

Repairs and ramifications

Surprisingly, the tank was repairable! Repairs were quickly carried out, but the tank was NOT re-mounted on a tower. Instead, a concrete cradle was built and the tank was installed on its side.

Obviously this made gravity feed no longer feasible, so a large air compression system was installed to provide adequate pressurization. This opened the door for a considerable expansion of service to the new housing developments that were springing up annually. So, the collapse of the water tower may have been beneficial in the end—another unintended consequence.

Part four: Street naming: obsessive Hispanicization?

During the 1920s, it became fashionable throughout coastal California to honor the regions Hispanic heritage by assigning "Spanish" names to new streets, housing developments and even towns. This trend gathered force in the 1930s and 1940s. Barron Park already had Spanish-named roads, most notably El Camino Real (the royal road), Arastradero Road (a hauling road), Los Robles Road (the oaks), Laguna Road (lake), and Matadero Avenue (slaughtering place).

Then, after the end of World War II in 1945, unrestricted suburban development began to take over the orchards, berry patches and pastures of Barron Park. A sort of mania for Hispanicization began to take over in the developer's minds. Each had many competitors, and they hoped that the lure of a connection—however tenuous—with the romanticized past would bring the customers to them first. In their haste, mistakes were made; many of them were understandable but some were downright ludicrous. I have selected a short list of the most egregious ones for your amusement.

Misspelling

The most troublesome error, from the standpoint of the local historians in the Palo Alto Historical Association (PAHA) who researched, wrote and published the excellent and interesting book *Streets of Palo Alto*, was the misspelling of **La Para Avenue**. They could not find this word in any Spanish dictionary and finally gave up trying to translate it. Spanish speakers and professors were equally stumped. In the revised edition I came up with a convoluted explanation that failed to satisfy even me.

Then, about a decade later, I found a map that spelled it La Pera ("the pear") and the truth dawned on me—I had just

finished drawing an agricultural map of Barron Park in the 1930s which showed the street surrounded by pear orchards. Later, additional documentary proof was found: the 1940 and 1941 Polk's City Directories for Palo Alto have listings for "La Pera Av" (sic). Oral histories and photographic snapshots taken in the 1930s and '40s, corroborate that La Para Avenue was lined with pear orchards. So, **La Pera Avenue** (Pear Avenue) was the original and correct name for the Barron Park avenue now known as "La Para Avenue." Some ignoramus must have misspelled the street signs. The people who now pronounce the first syllable so that it rhymes with "hair" are more correct than they realize. Sometimes, the truth wins out.

A spelling error also engenders some confusion about the meaning of a street in Encina Grande Park—**Verdosa Drive**—which can be translated as "greenish." This is another one that you won't find in a Spanish Dictionary—because the correct spelling is **Verdoso**. And, I think, a better translation would be "greenery."

Misleading Geographically

Laguna Avenue was named for a very small reservoir located along the street between Los Robles Avenue and the future Shauna Lane. According to an oral history given by Ernest Johnson in 1977, the reservoir was used for crop irrigation and was fed by pumped well water. The name "Laguna" has to be an extreme example of geographical exaggeration. Even in California a 100-foot wide pond is usually not referred to as a "lake."

Side Note: Prior to the county building the bridge over Matadero Creek (where Bol Park is today) Laguna Avenue ran on its present alignment from present-day Matadero Avenue to present-day Laguna Court, where it turned sharply left to run the length of the court, then half-right to the creek. It crossed the creek by a ford accessed from cut dirt ramps on each creek bank, then turned sharply right and followed the top of the creek bank, turning sharply left again to follow the present-day alignment to Los Robles Avenue. Ernest Johnson referred to this twisting road as "Neal" but the 1926 plat map and 1929 street map show it clearly as "Matadero" all the way to Los Robles. I believe that the name was changed to Laguna when the

bridge was built in 1933. The name first appears on the 1941 street map. See Image A, the 1926 parcel map.

La Mata Way—the word can be translated as “grove” or “clump of trees,” but the 1941 aerial photo shows no trees at that location. Maybe the name-giver was being hopeful.

Misleading Translations

Alta Mesa Avenue—The words translate as high “tableland,” but there are no heights near the 1926 Irven Subdivision, which includes the one-block Alta Mesa Avenue and the double cul-de-sac Irven Court. The literal translation obscures the almost certain origin of the name: The Mesa family, descendants of Juana Briones, for whom Alta Mesa Cemetery and the Southern Pacific Railroad’s Alta Mesa flag stop were both named.

Fake Spanish

However, all the preceding transgressions are trivial compared to the phony Spanish that we encounter in the next two examples. First, there was **Donna Avenue**. We don’t know who this street was named for, but it shows, unnamed, on both the 1926 plat map and the 1929 and 1941 street maps. Then it morphed into “La Donna” by 1949. Maybe they were trying to pass it off as “Doña” (with the ny sound such as in “canyon”), which can be translated as “Lady” and is *not* a common noun with feminine gender, as indicated by the “La.” “Doña” is a title, only used to precede a lady’s given name, as in “Doña Ana” (“Lady Ann”). La Donna is just plain fake Spanish.

However, for ultimate linguistic silliness, it is impossible to exceed the name **La Jennifer Way** given to the street in the 1950 El Centro Gardens Tract #2. This is

just plain ridiculous. The street first shows up on the 1951 street map and was named for Jennifer Hill, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Maurice Hill, property owners.

The quiet cul-de-sac is now best known for the house at 819 La Jennifer, which was the temporary home of Mark Zuckerberg and his startup crew from Harvard, during the critical period when they were writing the code for the launch of Facebook. This is the house where they famously attached a zip line to the chimney (by the way, it didn’t knock the chimney down as shown in the Hollywood movie “The Social Network”, which was filmed in Southern California).

The Sensible Majority

Exercising journalistic objectivity, I have to admit that all the rest of the Hispanic street names in Barron Park are correct Spanish, although not always entirely sensible when translated—like **La Calle Avenue**, which translates to “Street Avenue,” even though it only consists of two short cul-de-sacs running off Barron Avenue. They were named and laid out in 1940 and 1943 by realtor William Wason.

Conclusion

This concludes my article about some of the little-known aspects of our neighborhood’s history. I hope you have enjoyed them. If you have questions to ask or corrections to offer me, please contact me at: Douglas L. Graham, 984 Ilima Way, 650-493-0689, dgrahampaca@gmail.com.

BARRON PARK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Barron Park Association
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Traffic & Streets: vacant

Welcoming: Gwen Luce



BPA meetings are held the 3rd

Tuesday of most months at 7:15 p.m.

E-mail President@BPAPaloalto.org

for location

www.BPAPaloalto.org

EMAIL LISTS

The BPA has four email lists: bpa-news, bpa-issues, bpa-misc and bpa-jobpostings. They are hosted at Google Groups. To join, go to the BPA Website: BPAPaloalto.org and click on the tab “BPA Email Lists.” This provides an easy means to subscribe, and information about the lists.

ART IN THE PARK—LIZ POUX

Maybe you're like me and you have good memories of that wood shop class you took in middle school or high school. Well, I was thrilled to learn that the Palo Alto adult school has woodworking classes that meet at Paly and are available for everyone at all levels. Check the website for class information and registration details: <http://paadultschool.org/class/woodworking/>.

I started with the beginning class and made a bench, which I painted and placed on my front porch. Then I took several intermediate classes and now have kitchen stools, a lamp and an end table for my home. The wood shop instructors are welcoming and patient, and emphasize safety. I love the projects and I have met people from Palo Alto and the surrounding areas. The end table project included the opportunity to work with wood veneers, which got me into marquetry (decorating furniture, boxes and plaques with thin sheets of wood). A Barron Park neighbor (whom I met at the Paly wood shop) and I often carpool to the NorCal Marquetarian meetings and workshops where we make wood boxes, clocks and tissue boxes, which we decorate with marquetry.

I've included photos of the tissue box and wedge clock which were easy beginner marquetry activities; the clock was made with an X-Acto knife and was very easy! Workshops are free to members and it only costs about \$35 to join. To learn more, you can contact me or visit the website at: <https://norcalmarquetarians.wordpress.com/>.

—Liz Poux, Barron Park resident since 2010, izzyou@aol.com.



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NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2015



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