

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, November 1 and Saturday, November 2—**Eichler Celebration.** This two-day event will be held at the Cubberley Community Center. The Eichler Network will celebrate a “hot off the press” book on Eichlers and also the National Historic Landmark status of four Eichler sites, which includes two Palo Alto neighborhoods. Co-sponsored by the Palo Alto Historical Association.

Sunday, December 8, 2002—**PAST Holiday House Tour.** *Volunteers welcome!* Let us know what you would like to do to help on this special tour. Call Emily Renzel at 321-4156 or Gail Woolley at 327-4977 to see how you fit into the picture.



Through Sunday, January 26, 2003—**Toys, Trains and Treasures** at the Museum of American Heritage, 351 Homer Ave., Palo Alto. Fridays through Sundays 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.. Free admission. Call 650-321-1004 for more information.

PAST Heritage Board of Directors

Dave Bubenik
Bonnie Blythe
Irene Deitsch
Aino Vieira de la Rosa
JudyAnn Edwards
Laura Ferrell
Carolyn George
Pria Graves
Grace Hinton

Dianne MacDaniels
Jennifer Pollock
Steve Staiger
Emily Renzel
Cheryl Vicenti
Natalie Wells
Caroline Willis
Gail Woolley

PAST Website: www.pastheritage.org
PAST Hotline: 650-299-8878
Editor: Carolyn George
Contributors: David Bubenik, JudyAnn Edwards, Dianne MacDaniels, Mark Marciniak
Photos: Carolyn George, Sheri Moody
Palo Alto Historical Association.



PAST News

Palo Alto Stanford Heritage
P.O. Box 308
Palo Alto, CA 94302

PAST Heritage is a nonprofit organization advocating the preservation of the historic architecture, neighborhoods, and character of the greater Palo Alto Stanford area.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Holiday House Tour	1
President's Message	2
Edgewood Plaza	3
The Roth Building	4
Meet Emily Renzel	6
Web Resources	7
Membership Form	7
Calendar	8



PAST News

Vol. 16, No. 2

P.O. Box 308 • Palo Alto, California 94302 • (650) 299-8878

Autumn 2002

16th Annual HOLIDAY HOUSE TOUR

Sunday, December 8

1-4 p.m.

The Ashby Addition

Forest Avenue



Mark your calendars now to relive the charm of Palo Alto holidays PAST! Tour enchanting historic homes! The PAST Board is excited to announce that this year's tour features the Ashby House, one of the earliest homes in what is now Palo Alto. Built in 1889, it actually predates the City of Palo Alto. The other historic homes, Victorian mansions and a carriage house, on the the tour make up the heart and soul of one of the oldest neighborhoods in the area, the Ashby Addition. These historic homes are a scenic stroll away from each other in what is now the picturesque and historic Forest Avenue neighborhood, just east of downtown Palo Alto. Ticket holders can enjoy light refreshments at still another house. Tickets are \$20 each (or \$25 if purchased after December 1) and will be available on Forest Avenue on December 8.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER—And It's Only Begun

In my last column I predicted a very interesting, productive year for PAST. Looking back, I understated the matter.

Since then, our **Professorville** historical district has been the subject of major feature articles in the San Jose Mercury News and the San Francisco Chronicle Magazine. Perhaps as a result, or maybe just perhaps, requests for historical tours of Palo Alto have snowballed. Not just casual inquiries, but groups wishing to become acquainted with our city's architectural heritage. By contrast, the scene was very quiet at this time last year.

There's more. On September 4, 2002, the PAST Board of Directors voted to make history. For the first time, Palo Alto Stanford Heritage will advocate for the preservation of an example of modern architecture—Palo Alto's Eichler-style **Edgewood Plaza Shopping Center**. Threatened with summary demolition as Palo Alto's first official redevelopment project (a resume builder for someone), Edgewood has gained supporters ranging from the very active Eichler Network, to the Los Angeles Conservancy Modern Committee, to residents who live nearby and appreciate how it complements their neighborhood character. Built between 1955 and 1958, Edgewood is too new to be formally historic. But it is nevertheless a recognized resource.

Preservationists are drawn by more than Edgewood Plaza's Quincy Jones architecture. Edgewood is a surviving example of the optimism and quest for realizable utopia that once galvanized American visionaries. Joe Eichler's vision for Edgewood was to unify commercial and domestic functions into a coherent, mutually-supportive whole—a mid-twentieth century concept for an integrated living neighborhood. At Edgewood, preservation looks beyond saving the assembled wood, bricks, and mortar that achieve the architect's concept and seeks to conserve the larger vision.

PAST will cooperate with the Edgewood neighborhood, local Eichler proponents, and the Los Angeles Conservancy to save this unique resource at Embarcadero Road and 101.

In a parallel project, PAST is working with the City of Palo Alto to create a continuing educational historic exhibit at the **Roth Building**, which was

designed in 1932 by Birge Clark as the anchor of the Palo Alto Medical Clinic, but which now waits behind boarded windows while its new owner, the City, ponders what to do with it. Come see PAST Board member Dianne MacDaniels' creative display after it opens in early November. While you're there, view the murals by Depression-era artist Victor Arnautoff, who also created the celebrated fresco "City Life" at Coit Tower. The Roth Building's address is 300 Homer Avenue, at Bryant Street.

Guided by past president Pria Graves, the **2002 Holiday House Tour** is forming up. It will be held in the 1000-block of Forest Avenue, the scene of Board member Emily Renzel's well-regarded Preservation Week 2002 tour. Meantime, veteran organizer Caroline Willis is preparing Preservation Week 2003. And, as their own initiative, Pria and Emily are convincing the City to preserve Birge Clark's Sea Scout building at the Palo Alto baylands.

This is turning out to be an interesting year indeed.




INTERESTING WEB SITES

www.sfheritage.org San Francisco Architectural Heritage. Preservation is more than an academic exercise—it is an integral part of the City's growth and renewal.

www.californiapreservation.org The California Preservation Foundation, promoting historic preservation statewide.

www.losaltoshistory.org Visit the Los Altos History Museum's site for information on exhibits and events close to home.

www.pastheritage.org. Our PAST website is full of information and links to other sites that cover local, regional and more general topics relating to both structures and gardens.

www.gamblegarden.org Gamble Garden Center located in a Centennial home at 1431 Waverley Street.

TIME TO JOIN PAST OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Since our membership year is September to August, your dues are due. Membership in PAST includes complimentary tickets to the Holiday House tour on December 8. Individual members receive one and the other levels two. Extra tickets are \$20 before December 1 and \$25 thereafter.

To the many of you who have already sent in your dues, thank you very much. Tickets will be mailed at the end of November.

Please indicate interests here:

- Advocating for preservation
- Researching 1903 houses
- Mailing parties
- Host/Hostessing at the Holiday House Tour
- Helping with refreshments

Membership categories:

- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family
- \$75 Sponsor
- \$100 Patron
- \$500 Lifetime

New Renewal

Number of extra tickets to the **Holiday House Tour**. _____ \$ _____

Total amount enclosed. _____ \$ _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____ email _____

Please make check payable to PAST Heritage and mail to us at P.O. Box 308, Palo Alto, California 94302
Because PAST Heritage is a tax-exempt charitable organization, contributions are tax deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.

MEET EMILY RENZEL

One of our newest board members is Emily Renzel, who comes with a background made to order for historic preservation. She is a native Californian and has lived in Palo Alto since 1964.

Drawing upon her long knowledge and research Renzel led last Spring's Preservation Week tour of historic Ashby Addition homes on Forest Avenue and is co-chairing PAST's 2002 Holiday House Tour there on Sunday, December 8th.

Delmar & Ella Ashby's home, the first on the block, was built in 1889 and predates the town of Palo Alto. Ashby's Addition boasts five 100-year old homes and several more about to turn the century mark. This year, PAST Board members will have plenty of time to do research on the Tour's historic homes, Victorian mansions and carriage house, thanks to Renzel. With an organizing flair that is unusual so early in the Tour's typical planning cycle, Renzel already has commitments from most homes on the Tour. And this year's Tour should be interesting since Renzel has been personal friends with many of the neighbors over the decades, gathering lots of wonderful stories and anecdotes to share.

Emily's own Forest Avenue home evokes historic Palo Alto. Surrounded by a large garden of wildly flowering bulbs and bushes, it was built in 1924 as a gardener's quarters over a garage for the large 1904 home next door, formerly known as Rosedale Manor. Renzel is proud of her garden's birdbaths, planter, and bench from the Pan Pacific Expo of 1915 which were purchased by Arthur & Eugenia Fosbery. The artifacts were sold after the Expo to help defray its costs. The Expo, she points out, was recently featured at the Museum of American Heritage.

Much of Renzel's political and community work through the years has been to preserve some of the best of Palo Alto. She was on the City Council from 1979 to 1991 and the Planning Commission before that. She has served as a member of the Measure G Steering Committee and been a member of PAST for years. She served on the Board of The Committee for Green Foothills for ten years, and also served on the Boards of the Sierra Club, the Crescent Park Neighborhood Association and

the Citizens' Committee to Complete the Refuge. Of all of those accomplishments, Renzel says she's most proud of having an impact on general planning for the city and efforts to retrench from the ambitious land-use megalomania of the sixties. She's proud of modest progress in addressing the jobs/housing imbalance, and protection of the Baylands.

"I've been involved in saving the baylands," remembers Renzel, "from my time on the Planning Commission when I served with Mary Gordon and Frances Brenner. These remarkable women were very knowledgeable about the Baylands and sensitized me to its fragility. We served together on the Baylands Subcommittee of the Planning Commission and we educated ourselves on flood control, geology, dredging, wetlands and many other baylands issues."

When she was asked to join the PAST Board, it was a natural fit with Emily's years of dedication to Palo Alto. "I am very committed to preserving Palo Alto's character," she continues, "and our historic built environment is a major contributor to it. My goal is to support PAST's continuing efforts to raise people's awareness of our historic heritage."

With this kind of commitment to preservation, actively organizing the Holiday House Tour in her historic Forest Avenue neighborhood forces Renzel to speculate on its future. "At the turn of the century," she recalls, "there were only 12 houses in this neighborhood. Now, in 2002, five homes are 100 years old and several others will be 100 in the next ten years.

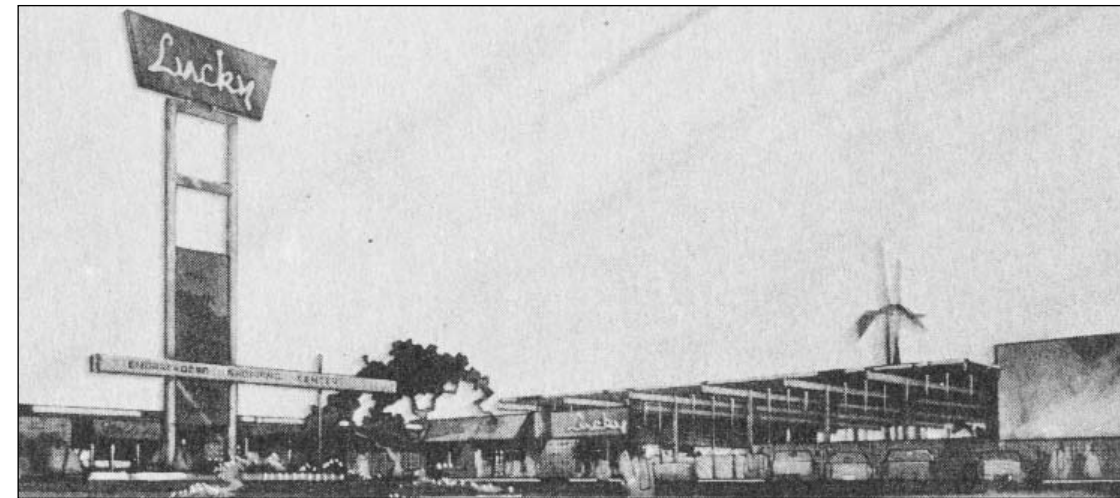
"I hope those wonderful houses last that long."

JudyAnn Edwards



TIME-SPACE CONTINUUM: 1958- 2002

Having been born in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, it never entered my mind that time and history were not a continuously unfolding phenomenon. School friends lived in houses built by their great- great-great-grandparents. I played in the ruins of Industrial Revolution era flour mills, explored abandoned barns, and tried to discover the purpose of rusting iron contraptions. I once contracted quite a case of poison ivy play-driving a 1940's Woody that was in the process of being reclaimed by nature. It is rather perplexing to me, therefore, that yesterday, the day before yesterday, the day before that, ad infinitum is not viewed by many as history or worthy of being called historic. It seems to me a profoundly unscientific viewpoint. I wonder if contrary to the belief



that time is speeding up, time for many has actually stalled and its importance as a force of social continuity and cohesion has been lost. The proliferation of personal ads and internet chat rooms are symptomatic of today's loss of social structure and resultant social isolation. Denying that the mid-twentieth century fits into the mosaic of history is a time prejudice that erodes the essential aspect of history, its continuity. It is the continuity of time that develops the complex associations that people develop with their places and other people. Cities that cultivate these associations are ones where crime and vandalism are low because people feel connected and consequently respect place and person.

Edgewood Plaza should not be seen as the blight needed to fulfill the City's perceived need to get into the redevelopment business. Edgewood Plaza looks different than Professorville because of the exciting meanings and associations behind its architectural forms. In the world view, Palo Alto's significance abides in its being ground zero of the nascent electronics age, post World War II. Edgewood Plaza is richly imbued with the spirit and inventiveness that won the war and even invented the Super Market.

Second to Leland Stanford, Joseph Eichler is the man that most shaped Palo Alto, yet there is a conspicuous lack of official recognition for his contribution. Eichler achieved what the dreamers had only waxed poetically about. He built communities that embodied the ideals of the unprecedented American democracy and the great, culturally and economically upwardly mobile middle class.

The city's proposed demolition of this human scaled commercial venture and Eichler headquarters building is an exercise in official disdain. Planned as an essential part of the adjacent Edgewood residential tract Edgewood Plaza adds value and depth to the community. We see at Edgewood the courage to experiment. We see the rejection of the formal and tired forms of the past

for the dynamic and informal forms so much in sync with the California experience. We see the traditional building techniques (wood, post and beam construction) turned into grand new experiments of space, structure, light and views. A.Q. Jones (the Architect of Edgewood Plaza) designed wood roof beams to soar past the confines of exterior walls. They always seem to be pointing to the infinite horizon and convey the spirit of westward expansion.

Unlike European International style, Edgewood plaza shows a California regional style that makes sense only here. The site planning of Edgewood Plaza that integrates plant materials with parking and building is now seen as cliché (it is even required by codes), but at the time thinking of such mundane necessities as elements of an artistic composition was an edgy achievement.

The Eichler/Jones accomplishment at Edgewood is a touchstone for many Palo Altans. It defines a place and indeed it is an important edge for our city. I really think if restored this place would strike a chord with the new dot com generation. I see them appreciating the cool, clean lined, elemental esthetics. The glass window walls, the openness of the shops, the light, the views and the exterior communal spaces seem to fit their preferences as if it was designed for them. Actually when you think about it, the dot com youthful, we-can-do-anything-spirit probably is the same that built Edgewood. Save Edgewood: it represents and must continue to represent our city's tradition of progressive vision.

Mark Marcinik, Greenmeadow Architects

**THE ROTH BUILDING —
LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK**

THE GRAND OPENING OF THE ROTH BUILDING created quite a stir in 1932...letters, articles and even a big traffic jam. Do you know why? Birge Clark designed the Roth Building and also contributed to the design of 450 buildings in the Palo Alto area. But...do you know why many have called this building the crown jewel of his architecture?

Well, put on your walking shoes and take a stroll down to the corner of Homer Avenue and Bryant Street. PAST has answered these questions (and more!) with informational displays in the courtyard of this historic building.

As you approach the Roth Building, two super-sized, vintage news articles tell you it's August of 1932. That's right, doctors still made house calls, an office visit cost \$3.00 and a fledgling group of



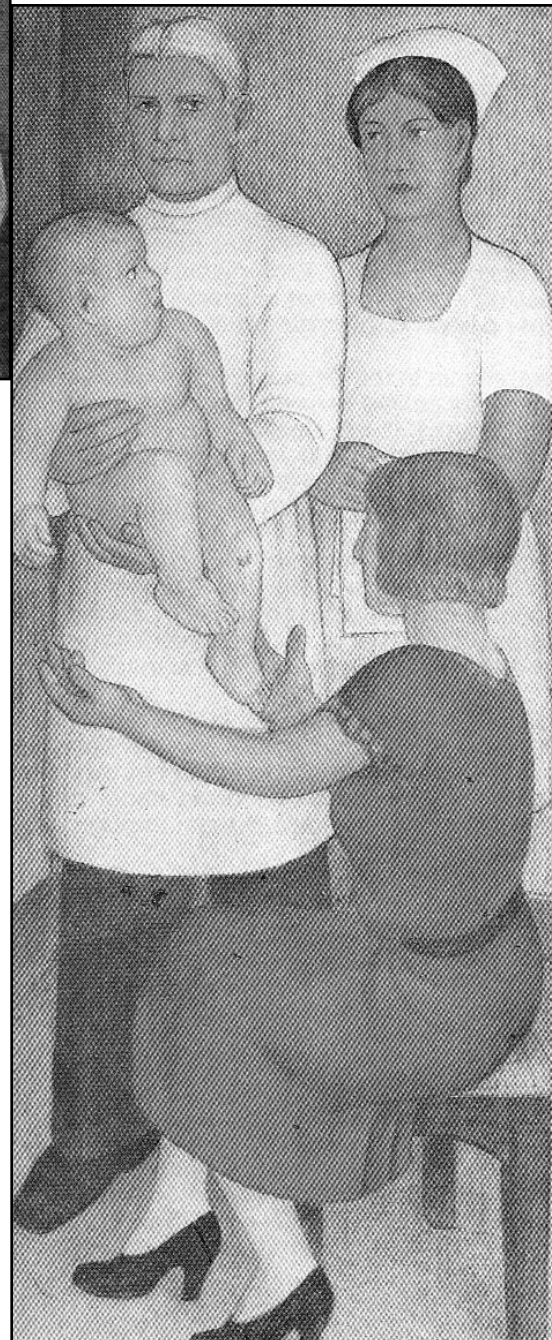
eight physicians were opening an innovative, new medical center called the Palo Alto Clinic.

At the time, however, what was of utmost interest to Palo Alto's sleepy little town of 15,000 were the 4-panel murals created at the front entrance to the new Clinic. The murals were the work of Victor Arnautoff, a Russian artist and disciple of Diego Rivera. Although Arnautoff's choice of subject matter, the history of medicine, couldn't have been more appropriate for the clinic, the murals came under much criticism for their "highly immoral display of nudity and profane modernism". By venturing further into the courtyard, you can peek around PAST's explanatory poster and see the murals. The very same murals that set this "little college town agog" are still there to be viewed, albeit now protected behind a temporary chain link fence.

The Roth Building was built at the depth of the Depression when costs were very low and cost only \$50,000. For this engaging price the architect, Birge Clark, erected a Spanish Colonial

Revival design that he artfully sculpted around the site's large oak tree. This also allowed for a central courtyard, one of Clark's signature styles, as a feature of the layout. As PAST's second informational poster points out, the Roth Building highlights Clark's other architectural hallmarks as well...low clean lines, wooden balconies, tile roofs, thick walls and wrought iron rails.

Birge Clark thought that a building "should fit the clients need; that you can design a beautiful



building, but if it doesn't function you've got a problem". The Roth Building certainly fulfilled its mission of melding both elegance and purpose. It was true back then in 1932, when instead of another austere medical building, Clark chose a more human scale design. How perfect for these Palo Alto physicians catering to patient care with a group practice revolutionary for its time. Some 70 years later the Roth Building continues to meet Clark's standard of excellence, as it gracefully awaits its next incarnation.

Dianne MacDaniels

