

THE TATTLE

JOURNAL OF THE HISTORY GUILD OF DALY CITY - COLMA

GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT MARK

For our March meeting we are delighted to welcome back old friend and former Guild Board Member Neil Fahy. Neil has presented to us in the past, and this time around we are fortunate to have him lecture on how the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire impacted the area that would become Daly City a mere five years later. This is very fitting as this April marks the 110 anniversary of that great and most tragic occurrence. Our thanks go to Marcus Gonzalez, for arranging this presentation. A quick aside: for those of you who have seen the 1936 MGM classic *San Francisco*, starring Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald, and Spencer Tracy, there is a famous line just after the earthquake scene--brilliantly done--when Clark Gable asks the driver of a horse and wagon where he is headed. The fellow replies "to Daly City to get milk for the kiddies." Of course, he meant John Daly's dairy in the area that would become incorporated as Daly City in 1911--five full years later. A slight faux pas of the film, though it doesn't diminish this classic at all. A nice tidbit for all lay, film, and other historians out there.

Thanks to the very generous donation of a HUGE ultra-thin TV by our Treasurer Judith Christensen, we will soon have it wall-mounted and ready to show both Ken Gillespie's 2001 presentation of *Daly City: Ninety Years in Nine Minutes* and the Bryan Kingston documentary *Daly City: Growing Up In America*. We have shown the former and excerpts of the latter for several years now, but our original TV is on its last legs and takes up a great deal of space on the floor. This new state of the art monitor, which will also be connected to the Internet, will allow us to continue feature presentations but also enable us to stream other relevant content such as our web page and more to both attract new patrons passing by and engage those who are viewing various displays inside the museum.

We would really like to present a future program on the two horse stables on Skyline Boulevard at the end of John Daly Boulevard and next to the Thornton Beach Overlook. The land that is today the Palo-Mar and Mar Vista stables has a long and interesting history, or so we've heard at one time or another over the years. One of the stables dates to at least World War II, the Coast

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President's Message, cont'd

EVENING HISTORY LECTURE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16TH, 7 PM

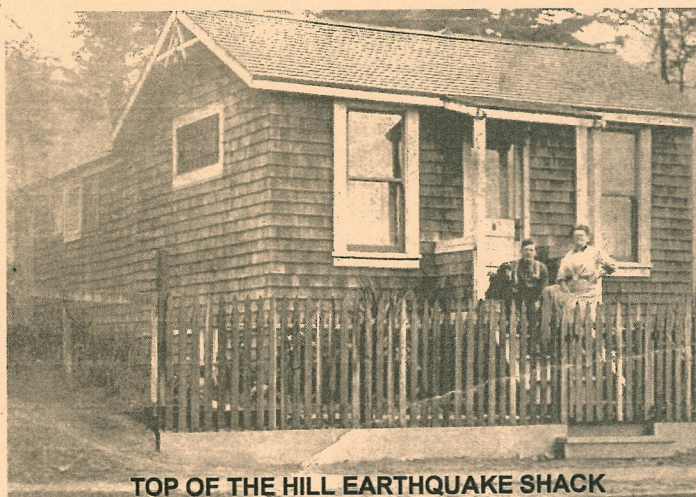
101 Lake Merced Blvd. Daly City
Doelger Center Cafe

Neil Fahy
presents

1906 REFUGEES



HOW THE 1906 EARTHQUAKE & FIRE IMPACTED THE AREA THAT BECAME DALY CITY



TOP OF THE HILL EARTHQUAKE SHACK

REFRESHMENTS: Will be provided by **Judy Hnilo, Roy and Sue Figone, Marcus and Grace Gonzalez, and Sandra Bolds.** Thank you to refreshment donors and to our gracious Hospitality Chair, **Annette Hipona,** and her assistant **Grace Gonzalez.**

Guard might have had a station there, and at one time there was an old road house on the property during Prohibition. We have no records nor any history on the two properties, only undocumented word of mouth.



Yes, I have approached both stables only to be rebuffed and told that there was either no interest nor desire to assist us on the part of the operators in our quest to gain an understanding of the area's history. Really a shame. Therefore, if there is anyone who has a detailed understanding of the area or better still, would like to be a presenter or knows of one for a future program, please let me know. You can write to me at president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org or leave a message at the museum, **650-757-7177**. Any knowledge that you can share regarding the horse stable properties would be most appreciated.

Finally, don't forget to mark your calendars for the remainder of 2016. Guild General Membership meetings are held on the third Wednesday evening of the months of **May 18, September 21, and November 16**. We begin at 7:00 pm.

A WALK THROUGH TIME

Curated by Dana Smith

Join us on a journey through 10,000 years, highlighting local events and their relationship to the wider stage of history.

Editor's Note: In October of 2013 the "Walk Through Time" exhibit opened at the Guild's museum. The exhibit was the final project for my Master's Degree from SFSU in the Museum Studies Department. In addition to a list of events and images in date order, each period of history has an overview interpretive panel. In this and future editions of the Tattler I will be presenting successive overviews of history from the exhibit. A key concept of the timeline exhibit is to show the context of our local history in relationship to events and culture in the region, country and internationally.

1850-1877

Gold Rush, A Duel Influences California's Side in the American Civil War, Local Settlers Defend Their Farms At the U.S. Supreme Court, Railroads Signal the End of the Frontier West

Attracted to California by gold fever during the Gold Rush of 1849, Patrick Brooks and Robert Thornton were the first pioneers to settle in the area between the Rancho Laguna de la Merced at the southern edge of Lake Merced and San Bruno Mountain. In 1853 when a government survey declared the area open to homesteaders, Thornton claimed 160 acres of flat land east from the coast. On the very same day Brooks claimed the hills west and south bordering the Buri Buri Rancho. A rush of other land seekers soon followed: James and Charles Clark; Israel Knowles, who settled east of Thornton; gold miners Jason White, Millard Holmesworth, and J.E. King, who had given up trying to find riches near the gold country town of Coloma; and Peter Doncks, James Casey, Sr., Michael Comerford, and Ben Greene.

Many early Irish immigrants came to the United States during the Irish potato blight and famine of 1845. In the days of early settlers, Spanish cattle were running wild throughout the whole area known as Sand Hills. At today's Top-of-the Hill, known by the early Spanish as La Portezuela, the Abbey House tavern was established sometime prior to 1853 and became a well-known landmark to travelers. It also became known as a place where sailors were "shanghaied" as unwilling crew members on sailing ships. [The Abbey House still existed in 1906 when refugees fled south from the earthquake and fire, but no records have been found that document its demolition and no photos have been found of the tavern.]

In 1854 a 13-year old John Donald Daly arrived in San Mateo County with his father and two sisters after his mother had died of yellow fever in Panama en route to California. At age 14 Daly began carrying the mail by horseback from the Howard ranch in San Mateo to San Francisco. In 1856 a one-room school house was built at the junction of Mission Road and Old San Pedro Road by Robert Thornton. At the same time a gang of racketeers from San Francisco known as the Chris Lilly gang were stuffing ballot boxes at the Abbey Tavern in a failed attempt to take over the new county of San Mateo. In 1858 Robert Thornton was elected supervisor of San Mateo County in the area where a little village was growing near the schoolhouse (which would eventually become part of the modern Daly City).

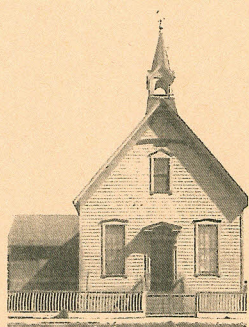
In 1859 the Broderick-Terry duel was fought in a ravine on the shores of Lake Merced between U. S. Senator David Broderick and Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court David Terry over a personal political feud and California's stand in the American Civil War as a slave or non-slave state. The public outrage over the death of Broderick influenced California's support of the North in the American Civil War. In the same year the

new American owners of the Laguna Merced Rancho laid claim to the lands settled by the Sand Hill pioneers. The settlers organized as the North San Mateo Settler's Union, armed themselves with rifles and a canon, and built fortifications with bags of potatoes. Instead of going to war, they went to state court where they lost their lands, were evicted in 1863, and waited six long years before Robert Thornton, a blacksmith by trade who was a self-taught legal expert, won the case on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Robert Thornton, often referred to as Daly City's first pioneer, built his first home on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, later named Thornton Beach. In 1866, after returning home from his land victory in the U.S. Supreme Court, he built the more elaborate two-story home shown. In the early days this was considered practically a "mansion." Unfortunately, this historic home was not preserved. In this famous portrait of Thornton He is shown with his ho-down fiddle which he often played for family and friends.



The San Francisco and San Jose Railroad came to the area west of La Portezuela running past the one room schoolhouse. The train depot was named Schoolhouse Station. In 1865 President Lincoln was assassinated, the Civil War ended with victory for the North, and Robert Thornton returned home from Washington, D.C. with a Supreme Court victory in the land dispute for the Settlers Union.



1856 - A one-room school house was built at Mission and Old San Pedro Road by Robert Thornton and named Jefferson School after the U.S. President Thomas Jefferson. Later the entire school district was named for President Jefferson. This picture shows the original one room school in the back, with the 1886 front two-story addition with steeple.

In 1868 John Daly and his young bride Lilly Carrick of Millbrae bought the Holmesworth ranch at the northern border of the township with San Francisco and

established the San Mateo Dairy. In the next few years many of the early settlers sold their land to speculators. At this time land speculation was not very successful and few lots were sold. Most of the land between John Daly's diary and Sand Hills village lay abandoned on the delinquent tax list for so long that the area became known by the locals as "the commons."

1869 a post office was opened in the grocery store of Joseph Hill at Mission and San Pedro Road where farmers hauling their crops, mostly potatoes and wheat, to San Francisco would change their teams of oxen or horses and continue on the easier route to San Francisco with fewer animals. In 1871 a potato blight hit the area and put an end to the profits of potato growing for the early Irish farmers.

A first big wave of Italian immigration came to the U.S. between 1850 and 1870. Many Irish farmers sold their farms to Italians who had more success with their diversified crops. In 1870 the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad was acquired by Southern Pacific Railroad and the Schoolhouse Station was renamed Colma Station. The surrounding village gradually became known as Colma

During this period, many hardships were faced by the native Indian people and Chinese immigrants in California and across the nation. In 1850 many Chinese arrived in California fleeing famine in China and many more were brought in later to work on the transcontinental railroad. With the arrival of the transcontinental railroad to California in 1870, the era of the frontier west was coming to an end. In 1877 when almost a fourth of the California workforce was unemployed, the Chinese in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chico and Truckee were attacked and killed by mobs and their property destroyed by fire.

To be continued in the next issue...

The New York Times

The Town of Colma, Where San Francisco's Dead Live

By JOHN BRANCH, FEB. 5, 2016

COLMA, Calif. — While the Super Bowl will be played at Levi's Stadium, and thousands of news media members who descended on the Bay Area this week were based at the Moscone Center, Levi Strauss lay inside a marble crypt in one of this tiny town's 17 cemeteries, and George Moscone lay under the grass in another... The road to Sunday's Super Bowl stretches about 50 miles, from San Francisco, the epicenter of festivities this week, to Santa Clara, site of the actual game. The corridor, mostly along Highway 101, is a time capsule of the Bay Area's history and its quirks — and a modern-day testament to its traffic problems...

But nowhere along the way may be quirrier, or filled with more history, than Colma, a quiet town of roughly two square miles covered mostly in graves. More necropolis than metropolis, the town's worst traffic jams are caused by funeral processions; Colma residents receive warnings, by automated phone blast, whenever a big procession is expected, whether for San Francisco firefighters or an area Hell's Angel...

"All the cemeteries you go through here, they're a history of San Francisco and of California," said Richard Rocchetta, a Colma Historical Society board member whose father emigrated from Italy and spent 30 years as a caretaker at Olivet Memorial Park. "The cemeteries [in San Francisco] had all fallen into disrepair, essentially because they relied on new plots to make money for their upkeep," said Maureen O'Connor, president of the Colma Historical Association.

Coming Events at the Colma Historical

Association: Sat., March 12 – **Annual Tea**, noon – 2 pm. (doors open at 11:30). \$30 per person. Colma Community Center, 1520 Hillside Blvd.

Info: 650-757-1676.

Garage Sale, Colma Museum April 23rd, 9 am – 5 pm.

San Francisco History Days, Sunday, March 6, 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM., 88 Fifth St, S.F. The Old Mint becomes a series of pop-up museums of San Francisco history with dozens of organizations telling the stories of the City's unique past. Join community historians, archivists, genealogists, archaeologists, researchers, educators, re-enactors and other history enthusiasts for a FREE Community Open House. *(Editor: This is a great event! Don't miss it!)*

THE KNOWLES' FAMILY SAGA

Based primarily on excerpts from a research paper by Russell Brabec, "Israel Graham Knowles and Mary Sanderson Knowles, Early Pioneers," with additional notes from Dana Smith's timeline research.

If you have watched the PBS television series "Finding Your Roots," you know how following the paper trail can reveal personal history. Former Guild board member Russ Brabec follows the paper trail for our local history from the records of San Mateo County, the California Digital Newspaper Collection (Internet) for nineteenth century and very early twentieth century newspapers, and the main library of San Francisco for city directories and newspaper microfilms. Thank you Russ for your scholarly approach to historical research.

"Israel Graham Knowles, an Ohio native, is the only one of my thirty pioneers who has a record of being in the California Gold Rush," comments Russ Brabec. He left his home in Ohio in 1849 with a company of nine persons for the California gold fields by the Isthmus route being compelled to remain three months at Panama because no passage to San Francisco could be obtained.

Four of his party died in Panama from what was called the "Panama fever." Two died during passage and another died on arrival in San Francisco. In 1850 Knowles started for the mines on a sailing vessel to Sacramento and then by small steamer to Marysville and up the Feather river to the Oregon Gulch diggings. In 1851 he traveled to Rich Bar on the Feather river over snow which in places reached a depth of fifty feet and later to Long Bar, on the Yuba River. He later settled in Sacramento for a short while where he worked for a dairyman for two months and then purchased the business. He managed the dairy until the spring of 1853 when he moved to what became San Mateo County a few years later in 1856.

In 1853 there was a rush of settlers. And a rush indeed it was. I. G. Knowles later recalled that when he built his home in August of 1853, the only improvements in the region were the houses of James and Charles Clark in the edge of the present cemetery area, and R. S. Thornton near Thornton's Beach [a mile south of present day Thornton Beach]. But before the end of September there were fourteen more! During the year 1853 twenty-one settlers began permanent improvements in this area. Among these first settlers were I. G. Knowles, Michael Comerford, B. S. Green, Franklin White, and R. S. Thornton. Knowles first owned the land that was sold to M. Holensworth and then to John Daly. Knowles' dairy lay south of the gap which became known as Daly's Hill and previously known to the Spaniards as the Portezuela, and north of what is now Jefferson Union High School. Records show that Knowles also owned 140 acres in 1878 in the "Ocean View" area of San Francisco, but his post office address was shown as Colma.

In 1853 Israel Graham Knowles established the state's first commercial dairy in Colma (now Daly City). The operation provided house to house delivery in San Francisco. It was probably the first regular dairy. In 1854 Knowles returned to Ohio to become engaged to Mary Sanderson, whom he subsequently married. She was the first cousin of Sibyl Sanderson, the famous opera singer born in Sacramento whose father was a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of California. Sibyl died at the age of 38 of pneumonia after years of depression and alcoholism. A similar tragedy with alcohol would befall her cousin Mary.

The *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco in 1856 reported "MORE CALIFORNIA WONDERS – We acknowledge the receipt this morning, from Mr. I. G. Knowles, of two monster turnips. The largest weighs thirteen pounds, and the other twelve pounds and twelve ounces. They were raised on Mr. Knowles' Ranch near Abbey, on the San Jose road. These specimens are to be seen on the counter of our publication office."



Cont'd pg.

In 1856 I. G. Knowles was appointed one of three judges and inspectors for the First Precinct by the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. In 1861 Knowles joined the Settlers Union to defend his 160 acre homestead against seizure by the owners of Laguna Merced Rancho.

In 1874 the Ocean View Grange No. 157 was organized at Colma by local farmers. Its Master was I. G. Knowles. The following year the Grangers purchased a lot near the residence of Robert Thornton and spent \$380 to build what came to be known as Jefferson Hall. The Hall was built on Dunks Street and later was used as a temporary high school in 1922 while Jefferson High School was being built.

The Knowles family's water supply was a spring at what are now Knowles Avenue and Junipero Serra Boulevard. In addition to his dairy business, Knowles established the area's first commercial fishpond in Knowles' Gulch in 1886, where their first home was built and seven children were born and raised. The homestead was described by neighbors as a "paradise" and it seems the Knowles family led an idyllic life. (Knowles' Gulch is where Marchbank Park is now located.) It was reported "His ponds rank among the finest in the state, affording sportsmen from the city, who appreciate so rare a privilege, an opportunity for indulging in the exhilarating and remunerative pleasure of angling for trout."

In 1887 the 22 year-old eldest daughter Eva, a teacher at the local Jefferson School, married 38 year-old Captain William Matson at the Knowles farm in Ocean View. A short time later that same year tragedy struck when Eva died suddenly after an illness of five weeks. The local schools were closed as a tribute of respect to her memory. Captain Matson went on to found the famous Matson Navigation Company.

In 1890 I. G. Knowles and Robert Thornton founded a new stage coach line running stages to San Francisco with three large four-horse coaches. The eight mile trips were made every hour from Colma for 20 cents, and from Ocean View, about six miles, for 15 cents. The *San Mateo Times and Gazette* noted that "For some time past considerable complaint has been made by the residents of those towns at the treatment to which they have been subjected by the railroad and it is the expectation of the stage company to secure the bulk of this travel."

In 1888 the Knowles dairy land was subdivided into lots known as the Knowles Tract. It was bordered to the North by Parkview Avenue, the South by Citrus Avenue, East by Mission Street and extended West just past the Southern Pacific Railroad line.

Israel and Mary Knowles moved to San Jose in the early 1890's where they lived in the impressive home shown to



the right. No doubt this was less humble than their original home in Knowles Gulch.

In the early 1900s Knowles Hall was built at the Top-of-the-Hill. It was a two story, wood-frame structure with a towering cupola that became a local landmark. It included shops, a saloon, and dancehall run by oldest son Frank. In 1919 Crocker Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons purchased Knowles Hall and the Knowles name sign was removed from the roof. In 1935 the building was destroyed by fire and a new building which stands to this day was built on the site by the Masons.

Israel's wife Mary died in 1895 of cirrhosis of the liver at age 62 in San Jose. Chronic alcoholism is the leading cause of cirrhosis. In 1898 Israel, age 70, married Mrs. Mary McKillip, age 49. Five years later in 1903 the *SF Chronicle* reported:

"SAN JOSE CAPITALIST BECOMES A MANIAC
I. G. Knowles, a Large Landowner of the Garden City,
Loses His Reason"

SAN JOSE,— I. G. Knowles, a well-known local capitalist, with large holdings in this and San Mateo counties, was taken in custody by the Sheriff's office tonight, a raving maniac. He is about 78 years old and has been a man of strong mentality up to about a week ago, since when he has failed rapidly. His hallucination is that railroad companies are conspiring to get his land away from him." His oldest child Frank S. Knowles was soon appointed his guardian. Later that same year he died. His ashes were interred at Cypress Lawn Cemetery and later taken to an unknown location.

In 1905 the Knowles Gulch property was transferred to John Marchbank in payment of debts. Mr. Marchbank later donated the land to Daly City for Vista Grande Park, later renamed Marchbank Park.

In 1906 Knowles Pond dried up after the natural springs were diverted by the 1906 earthquake. The gulch became known as Vista Grande Park with a large wooden dance floor with the benches on the hillside.

Editor's Note: I have often wondered why more history hadn't been written about I. G. Knowles, so I was thrilled to read the research paper by Russ Brabec. I am hoping to find a portrait of the Knowles family with further research.



THE HISTORY GUILD OF DALY CITY/COLMA

DALY CITY HISTORY MUSEUM

6351 Mission Street, Daly City, CA 94014

650/757-7177

Current Hours: Tuesdays and Saturdays from noon to 3 p.m.



Please visit us on Facebook at "Daly City History Museum"

www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Shaping San Francisco - Walking Tours through San Francisco every 3rd Saturday February-May, \$10-20 sliding scale donation requested.

Walking the Rebellion: Irish-Americans and the Easter Uprising in the Mission District, Saturday, March 19th
Scandalous South of Market! Saturday, April 16th
Visit their website for more information at <http://shapingsf.org> and a fantastic archive of written and pictorial history, an excerpt below.



In the 1960s, a 17-year-old boy stole a car in Hunter's Point and was promptly chased down and shot by the police. This drastic action taken by the police sparked a rage in the youth of the area, who gathered and took to the streets... rioting against the mistreatment of

African American youth by authorities. See the 1999 interview with Thomas Fleming, 91 years old, former editor of the *Sun-Reporter* in San Francisco.

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president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org

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Board meetings are held as necessary and are open to the membership. Please contact Mark for further information.

**History Guild of Daly City/Colma is a
501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization
Memberships begin at \$25 per year.**

Tuttler Editor & production: Dana Smith,
director@dalycityhistorymuseum.org
Your comments and suggestions are always welcome!