

THE TATTLER

JOURNAL OF DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM & ARCHIVE

GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT MARK-

I want to share that we lost our Guild Secretary Algis Ratnikas in January. He was a great friend, historian and loyal supporter of the Guild. Algis had been our secretary since 2013 and a member for many years prior to joining the board. His dedication to the causes of preservation, promotion and dissemination of history went unequaled. Algis had a splendid vision of what our museum should be and always made sure that it was available for the community to visit. Whenever one of the board was unavailable to perform docent duty, Algis would step up and assume yet another day in addition to his own to always make sure that the doors were open to all. Algis' presence loomed large, and his dedication to the Guild will be sorely missed. No doubt his spirit will endure as we continue our mission of community engagement. I like to think he will be watching over us. Please see Dana Smith's tribute to Algis inside, which includes photos by Raymond Jue from the January memorial reception at the museum that the Guild hosted. There were easily over 100 in attendance; Lithuanian musicians performed traditional folk songs; a medley of delicious foods; wonderful tributes to a life well-lived; and copies from Algis' private library of history books for guests to take home, generously donated by his widow Florence and daughter Dalia.

Our January program was well-attended despite the rain. Gene Slater was our featured speaker and presented a fine lecture based on his recent book: *Freedom to Discriminate, How Realtors Conspired to Segregate Housing and Divide America*. Henry Doelger's Westlake development featured prominently as Gene completed research in our archives. All of his copies sold out.

For our **March 19 General Membership Meeting** we welcome back good friend and Guild member, Neil Fahy, who served as our vice president during the organization's early years. The title of his program is: "How the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake affected lives on the peninsula". According to Neil, "this is not another 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire presentation of ruined buildings in the city. It is about how it affected the lives of the residents, including my grandparents, who lived on Ocean View Farm in Vista Grande. My mother remembered the soldiers coming and telling my grandfather to clear the barn so refugees could find shelter. Come and hear their stories."

MARCH IN-PERSON LECTURE AND MEETING

Sunday, March 19TH

2 pm

Merced Room, Westlake Park Pacelli Gym

NEIL FAHY

Presents



HOW THE 1906 SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE AFFECTED LIVES ON THE PENINSULA

*Attendees are asked to be fully vaccinated.
This venue allows space to social distance.*

Lots of free parking – refreshments

Neil Fahy has been a Westlake resident since 1955 and is a geologist by profession. He was born and raised in San Francisco. His mother's family, truck farmers, lived in Vista Grande from 1899 - 1907 and in Colma from 1908 - 1910. After serving in the Army Air Force in the Philippine Islands during WWII, Neil graduated from UC Berkeley majoring in geology. After working for the Chevron corporation for 32 years, he retired and has been so for the past 38 years. Neil has written over 120 publications in the 80-year period of 1942 - 2022. His diverse subjects include geology, botany, zoology, and history. His San Mateo County publications include: *The Origin of Lake Merced*; *The Italians: Ferro-Cafferata Family Histories* [a history of his maternal grandparents]; *San Mateo County Sourdoughs in the Klondike and Nome Gold Rushes of 1896 - 1900*; co-author of *A Flora of San Bruno Mountain*; and the video *Picture of Our Past*, with the late Guild president Ken Gillespie. This is your chance to hear from a still vital and active WWII veteran (a chance to thank him for his service) and enjoy and cherish his unique contributions to our local history human, flora, and geologic.

Reluctantly, we have made the decision to close the museum on Tuesday afternoons. We had originally opened on Tuesday and Saturday afternoons from noon to 3 pm when the museum moved to its present location in 2009. However, due to the recent death of our secretary and some of our board stepping away due to pandemic concerns, we just don't have the capacity to continue operating on both days with regularity. Therefore, the museum is now open only on Saturdays from noon to 3 pm. This, coincidentally, conforms with the Colma Historical Association day and time of operation. We are always looking for volunteer docents to help operate the museum. Furthermore, we are recruiting for the board for our upcoming May election. Terms of office are for two years. The main requirement to serve on the board is that one MUST docent a minimum of one day a month for three hours. However, one need not be on the board to docent. There is a difference and more flexibility for someone who does not wish to docent every month, and thus would be a sometimes volunteer. If we are to go back to Tuesdays, we would need the commitment of one or more who are willing to docent monthly. Of course, there is flexibility to trade days with other board docents when feeling poorly or going on vacation, etc. Please consider making an investment in your museum by becoming a docent, either by joining the board, or in another volunteer capacity. Let me know of your interest in serving on the board prior to our published proposed slate for membership consideration in the May *Tattler*. Contact me by April 10th at president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org or by calling 650-757-7177 and leaving a message.

This is the second *Tattler* mailing requesting your renewed membership for 2023. If we haven't yet received your support, you will find a return envelope and member form in this mailing. Thanks in advance and our sincere appreciation to all of you who already sent in your checks.

I would also like to mention that Guilder Raymond Jue has agreed to become our official photographer. He has been a member for many years and always takes great pictures that record our general membership meetings, which he then shares via our Facebook page. Thank you, Raymond! Thanks also to board member Michael Rocchetta for his frequent contributions of photos.

FEBRUARY 12TH - A DAY AT THE MUSEUM Marcus Gonzalez

(Editor's note: We have a "Docent's Log" in the museum, kept by every docent to record the day's activities. A tradition started by Mark Weinberger, and now continued on a regular basis by all docents, is a follow-up group email "Today at the Museum". The following is an example...)

"It was a wet, overcast day, which may have discouraged attendance. Emily and I had three visitors. Two visitors stayed for a short while, but one, Ted Simmons, stayed for over two hours doing research on Dolan Building/Dolan Construction, a company that had been in Daly City since at least the 1930s and for several decades afterwards. We were able to pull together some items for him, of which he made several photocopies. As we did the research, we realized that the old Daly City directories are such a vivid snapshot of businesses and other local organizations for any given period of them; they are indeed a valuable resource.

We didn't do the usual clean-up since the front area because Grace [Gonzalez] had been out a couple days before and did a massive cleanup. Besides the shrubbery, Grace said the steps were a real mess, like someone had been camping out there--we had that happen once before.

Just to verify, Emily and I will be back for a shift on March 4. - *Marcus*

THE GUILD REMEMBERS ELSIE TONELLI (Excerpts from obituary)

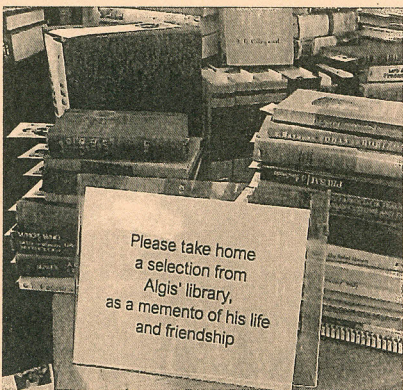
Longtime History Guild member and native of Daly City Elsie Tonelli, died peacefully January, 2023 at age 96. Her parents were Rose and Lazarus Belli and she was the little sister of Carol and Artie. Elsie attended Our Lady of Perpetual Help School, Jefferson High and the

College of San Mateo. She and husband Dino bought the Central Drug Company [4494 Mission St., SF] and the family owns it to this day. Everyone on Mission Street knew and loved Elsie and Dino, from Joe's Fish Grotto to the Chicken Coop, and of course, the infamous Farrah's Uniform Store, which clothed the majority of Catholic school kids in the Bay Area. Up until six months ago, Elsie was still going to work.

In 1951, Dino, Elsie moved their growing family [eventually 7 children] to 91 Windsor Drive in Westlake, Daly City. Countless friends included the local families the Murray's, Luttringer's, Fambrini's, Enright's, Columbini's, McKenna's, Pacelli's, Kelcheva's, Baciocco's, Tripaldi's, Grealish's, Herman's, Symes, and Feeney's.

Elsie once ran for Daly City Council-she lost... being a matriarch of a very large Italian family... she left behind a legacy to be carried on for decades to come.

**"A GENTLEMAN AND A SCHOLAR" —
REMEMBERING ALGIS RATNIKAS**
Dana Smith



When my father gave high praise to a man, he would always use the phrase "a gentleman and a scholar". This aptly describes Algis. I first began to really know the man when I visited his "Timelines of

History" website (www.timelines.ws) while I was researching my "Walk Through Time" exhibit at our museum, the thesis project for my Master's Degree in Museum Studies at SFSU. Algis's awesome universal timeline provided not only an inspiration, but was also a major source of facts for my project. In a large part, the exhibit at our museum represents a small part of Algis's monumental timeline. Algis was born in refugee camp in Europe in 1947 and immigrated to the U.S. with his family when he was a few years old. He maintained his ethnic Lithuanian identity, speaking the language and helping to maintain the folk music, culture and history of the Lithuanian community in the Bay Area. I think this influenced his identity as a world citizen and his truly remarkable commitment to preserving the truth of world history (the good, the bad, and the ugly) in his timeline project which began during his college years and became a life consuming passion until the end of his life.

Memorial bookmark



Algis J. Ratnikas

February 1, 1947 - January 5, 2023

writer, musician, historian
scientist, engineer, tinkerer
life-long learner
servant to those in need

loving son, brother, husband, father
uncle, godfather, grandfather, friend
true son of Lithuania

thank you for your gifts,
which live on
in us
as we walk this earth,
sturdied by your memory

*rašytojas, muzikantas, istorikas,
mokslininkas, inžinierius,
skardininkas
besimokantis studentas
tarnas vargstantiems*

*mylimas sūnus, brolis, vyras, tėvas
uošvis, tėvukas, dėde
krikšto tėvas ir draugas
tikras Lietuvos sūnus*

*ačiu už jūsu nuoširduma
dovanomis ir išreikštos
užuojautos kurios mus palydės
gyvenimo žingsniose*

I feel fortunate that I pestered Algis long enough to get his submission to my (hopefully) ongoing series of *Tattler* articles "Immigrant Stores" in our September

2022 edition. His wife Flo (Florence) also shared her similar immigrant story in that article. All editions of the *Tattler* are posted at year's end to our Guild online website.

I had originally conceived of my timeline exhibit on a smaller scale on Daly City local history, but after becoming almost obsessed with Algis's universal timeline, I realized that local history makes no sense unless it is put into the wider context of regional, national, and world history. And thanks to Algis's timeline, I was able to give an abbreviated amount of that context to my exhibit, currently on display in our museum. If you visit his website, you will read more about how his project

developed over time. He retired early to devote up to 7 hours a day on researching and entering daily world history on his website, which received over 8,000 hits per week. Algis was truly a scholar, someone who I

would call a "Renaissance Man," who had an extremely wide range of interests and talents. His first degree was in cell biology, followed by a Master's in humanities. Despite all his wide-ranging knowledge, he was never a "know it all," and was actually rather reserved. When he thought something was funny, you could see a twinkle in his eyes... which leads me to believe he had a great sense of humor. His wife Flo complimented his disposition with her outgoing, artistic personality.

His passing was unexpected, sudden after complications from a short illness and untimely, after a life lived fully but ended far too soon. (The family has designated the History Guild as the recipient of memorial donations.)

Jug Band playing at Algis's memorial at the Daly City Museum (photo R. Jue)



Memorial guests, timeline exhibit on the left, photo murals above. (Photo R. Jue)



*The phrase "You are a gentleman and a scholar" most likely originated in England in the 18th century. During this time period, scholarly pursuits and noble manners were seen as important characteristics among men. This phrase was made popular in modern times when it appeared in J.D. Salinger's novel, "The Catcher in the Rye." The protagonist, Holden, says this to his roommate Ackley. "You're a real prince. You're a gentleman and a scholar, kid."

DALY CITY'S LARGEST PARK DEDICATED IN 1941- By Rich Rocchetta

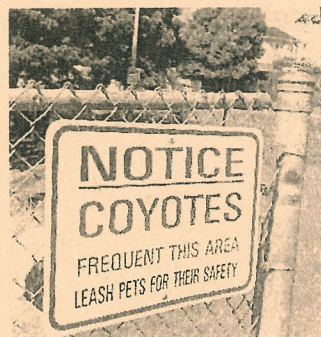
That was the headline of the *Daly City Record's* June 4, 1941 edition celebrating the dedication and naming of "the newly beautified park in the Vista Grande Tract" that was named after J.W.

Marchbank. The 7-acre park was valued at that time at more than \$50,000 and was actually given to the city 20 years prior by Marchbank. The dedication ceremonies were arranged by councilmember Henry Sundermann began that day with a parade starting at Acton and Brunswick. A baseball game was held immediately following the dedication of the park where councilmember Edmund Cavagnaro gave a talk about the history of Daly City and a biography of John Marchbank.

Another feature of the dedication was to celebrate Daly City's 30th anniversary of recognition was given by Sundermann to all "pioneers" who had been residents of the city for more than 25 years. They were given badges and introduced to the crowd.

Another article in this edition of the *Record* described the landscaping of the park and the nursery responsible for beautifying it. It was Lake Merced Nursery owned by August Conci, located approximately where the office building now stands at 2171 Junipero Serra Blvd. (adjacent to the Carvana car dealership). He reported that 1,656 trees had been planted and when fully planted the park would have 4,700 trees—mostly Monterey pines and Monterey cypress. The article also stated that the turf area (where baseball would be played) would contain almost 80,000 feet of grass. It is interesting to note that Mr. Conci eventually became Parks Superintendent in the 1960's and 70's.

The park, once a barren area with a muddy swimming hole, in a few years had become the "crown jewel" of a growing city thanks to the generosity of John Marchbank.



Current sign at Marchbank Park -- D. Smith

SF Animal Control reports that coyote relocation is not an option under CA State law and lethal methods are dangerous to humans and pets and do not work... 4

another coyote will immediately take over the territory. California voters passed Proposition 4 in 1998, which broadly speaking, ban the use of certain traps and poisons to capture or kill wildlife in the state.

THANKS TO: Thanks to **Julian Jimenez-Montano** who volunteered working on cleaning up and organizing our extensive archival files. He is unable to continue until we open again on Tuesdays. Thanks to continuing docent volunteer **Emily Chen**; Thanks to volunteer **Grace Gonzalez**, not only for serving on our refreshment crew, but also for working with husband and Board member Marcus to keep the front of the museum cleaned; Thanks to **Daly City Public Works Director Richard Chiu and his department** for the installation of a beautiful new tankless water heater, which replaces our 'vintage' 1960s one that had all but died and they also ran a heating unit to our public bathroom, which previously had no hot water. We are very appreciative also for the repairs to the front door, which now actually opens without brute force being applied. Thanks to **Mark Weinberger** for coordinating these repairs and assisting the Ratnikas family in their plans to use the museum for the memorial; thanks to **Dana Smith** for creating the flower arrangement for the memorial on behalf of the Guild; and to **Vaughn and Glorian Jones** for ongoing donations to our library.

THE MUDDY SWIMMING HOLE, KNOWLES GULCH, OTHER INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MARCHBANK PARK – A TIMELINE

by Dana Smith

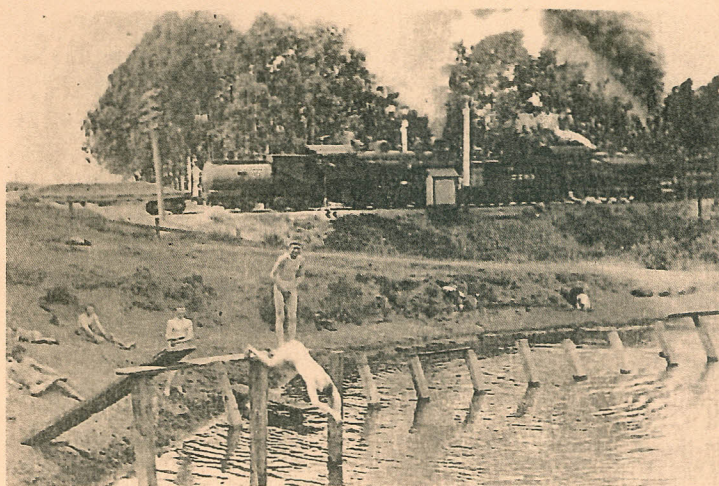
1853 – Pioneer rancher Israel Graham Knowles owned a large farm in an area west of Mission Street later known as Vista Grande. Knowles established the first dairy in San Mateo County in the middle of what is now Daly City to supply milk to SF.

1886 – J. G. Knowles established the area's first commercial fishpond in Knowles' Gulch (later known as Vista Grand Park, and then renamed Marchbank Park.)

Early 1900s – Knowles Hall, a two story, wood-frame structure with a towering cupola, was a landmark at The-Top-of-the Hill, Mission Street. It included shops, a saloon, and dancehall. (In 1919 Crocker Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons purchased Knowles Hall.

Knowles name was removed from the roof sign. In 1935 building destroyed by fire and rebuilt as the current Masonic Hall in 1939.)

1905 – Knowles estate subdivides their land holdings. The old Knowles house was moved to Lake Avenue, the second street south of Vista Grande School House. Mr. Knowles had attempted to establish a slaughterhouse which was never finished. As Mr. Knowles became indebted to John Marchbank, it was necessary for him to sell Knowles Gulch to Mr. Marchbank.



Early 1900s at current location of Niantic and Westlake Avenues. With Southern Pacific train passing

1906, November - Knowles Pond dries up after the natural springs were diverted by the 1906 earthquake. The bowl surrounded by trees became known as Vista Grande Park with a large wooden dance floor in the grassy and the hills were lined with benches. Vista Grande Park became the site for the Volunteer Fire Department's 4th of July picnics.

1938 – Vista Grande Park is now graded to three levels, paved and playground equipment installed.

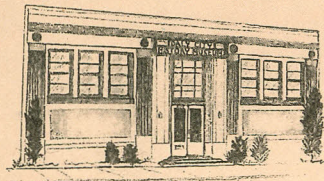
1941 – Marchbank deeded the city the park that was renamed Marchbank Park for the sum of \$10.

Memorial Day Parade down Mission Street to Vista Grande Park, which was renamed Marchbank Park on the same day. Lincoln Park in the Crocker neighborhood was also dedicated on the same day. Henry Sunderman was the speaker for the City Council and Mr. Crane, Superintendent of the elementary schools, spoke at the Marchbank Park dedication. After the dedication, a baseball game was played between the Owl Drugs and a group of Jefferson High School graduates. The Owl Drugs team was one of the leading semi-pro teams in San Francisco.

1992 – The Pepsi Cola Company installed play equipment in Marchbank Park.

2001 – Daly City Historian Bunny Gillespie makes a history presentation at the Marchbank Park improvement project dedication, which included a new recreation building. When officials failed to recognize the presence of the neighborhood association president, Original Daly City Protection Association President Annette Hipona boldly stepped forward to make comments on behalf of the surrounding neighborhood.

(Editor's Note: Although the "muddy pond" disappeared, there are many underground streams in the area, evidenced by the sometimes-soggy area in the lower baseball diamond area.)



DALY CITY HISTORY GUILD MUSEUM

& ARCHIVE

6351 Mission Street Daly City, CA 94014

650/757-7177

OPEN SATURDAYS NOON – 3 PM



Please visit us on Facebook at "Daly City History Guild Museum & Archive"

www.dalycityhistorymuseum.org

FIRST CLASS MAIL

**ANNOUNCING THE THIRD ANNUAL
KEVIN STARR LECTURE**

Presented by Charles Faulhaber, Director Emeritus of The Bancroft Library

Friday, March 10, 2023 at 5:30 PM
University of San Francisco
Xavier Auditorium, Fromm Hall
2497 Golden Gate Avenue

Hubert Howe Bancroft, J.S. Holliday, and Kevin Starr have shaped California's understanding of itself and its history for more than 150 years.

Charles Faulhaber will offer an overview of the contributions of these three towering individuals to that understanding as well as to the institutions that they shaped, The Bancroft Library, the California Historical Society, and the California State Library.

Presented by Charles Faulhaber, Director Emeritus of the Bancroft Library. Attendance is free, but you must sign up at https://www.sfhistory.org/events/third-annual-kevin-starr-lecture/?blm_aid=906097 to attend.

GUILD OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

- Mark Weinberger, President** (Facebook, Programs)
650/757-7177 president@dalycityhistorymuseum.org
- Richard Rocchetta, Vice-President** (Raffle)
- Marcus Gonzalez, 2nd Vice-President/Museum Director** (programs)
- Judith Christensen, Treasurer** (membership)
- Secretary – vacant**
- Directors: Michael Rocchetta** (database, mailing labels)
- Dana Smith** (Tattler editor and production)

Grace and Marcus Gonzalez Hospitality Crew
Raymond Jue photographer

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

Daly City History Guild Museum & Archive is an all -volunteer 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. Memberships begin at \$25 per year.

Tattler comments: dana@vikingsmith.net

Editor: I have to thank member Bill Lex (former Library Commissioner) for inspiring my continued efforts for this issue when my energy was lagging.