



# Sunnyvale

HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

July/August 2017

Newsletter

[heritageparkmuseum.org](http://heritageparkmuseum.org)

## BERNARD D. MURPHY

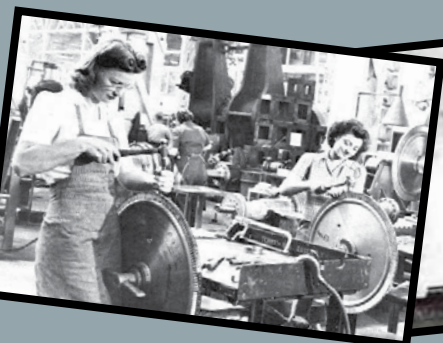
Having been hidden away for more than 100 years, this large bas-relief bronze plaque of Bernard D. (B.D.) Murphy now hangs in the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum.

Bernard Murphy (1841-1911), son of Mary Bolger Murphy and Martin Murphy Jr., practiced law, served as a state senator, and was elected Mayor of San José for three terms. He donated his salary to the public library.

In addition to bringing the state college to San José, he served on the board of trustees of Alum Rock Park, and was very influential in getting the Lick Observatory built on Mt. Hamilton.

He ran into financial trouble as president of the Commercial and Savings Bank due to too many outstanding loans to family and friends. He sold his personal properties to pay off the bank's debts leaving him poor but with a wealth of friends.

The story of the plaque and how it ended up at the Heritage Park Museum can be found on page 4.





*Sunnyvale Historical Society  
and Museum Association*

570 E Remington Drive  
Sunnyvale, CA 94087  
Open Sundays/Tuesdays/Thursdays  
12:00 pm — 4:00pm

**FREE ADMISSION**

- President** Flo Stafford
- Vice President** Frank Quinn
- Secretary** Tara Martin-Milius
- Treasurer** Alan Smirni
- Past President** Leslie Lawton
- Museum Director** Laura Babcock
- Artifacts/Database** Jeanine Stanek
- Newsletter Editor** Margarete Minar
- Contributing Writers** Katharina Woodman and Margarete Minar

The Board of Directors meets on the 3rd Monday of every month, at the Heritage Park Museum, 7:00 p.m.

If you have a story about Sunnyvale, please forward by the 15th of each month.  
Email: [sunnyvalenewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:sunnyvalenewsletter@gmail.com)  
Mail: P.O. Box 2187 • Sunnyvale, CA 94087

[www.heritageparkmuseum.org](http://www.heritageparkmuseum.org)  
[info@heritageparkmuseum.org](mailto:info@heritageparkmuseum.org)

*The members of the Sunnyvale Historical Society are grateful to Leslie Lawton for all of her hard work and dedication in these last two years as president. We thank her for her service as board president and are glad she will continue to be an important part of the Museum Association.*

*We welcome Flo Stafford as our new board president and look forward to continuing the Society's mission of promoting Sunnyvale's heritage under her leadership.*

## *The President's Letter*

By Flo Stafford



Dear Members,

My name is Flo Stafford and I am happy to serve as your new president this year. I have lived in Sunnyvale all my life and have a great interest in the unique history of this town.

My mother, Pearl Gilmore, introduced me to the museum when it was located at Murphy Park. She served as a docent for many years. I am proud to carry on the tradition of serving the museum and helping to share the history of Sunnyvale with our citizens and visiting guests.

My hope for the future is increasing our volunteer base and I would encourage any of you to please stop by the museum to offer your time and energy.

I am looking forward to the creation of a new entry way to our museum. We are hoping it will be completed before our 10-year anniversary celebration next year.

Thank you for all of your support for our museum activities. We appreciate and desire to serve our membership.



The mission of the society is to make known to the residents of Sunnyvale and neighboring communities, the heritage of Sunnyvale through the actions of preservation, promotion, education, and coordination.

# *Sunnyvale Museum Memories: The Cannery Worker*

By Linda Kubitz

I have had many delightful experiences with museum visitors during my nine years as a docent, but one encounter stands out.

A few years ago I guided a lady in her early nineties on a tour of the museum. Because she had grown up in Sunnyvale, she was particularly fascinated by the items on display, some of which she remembered firsthand. When we arrived at the cannery exhibit in the museum's central hallway, with its photograph of the old Schuckl Cannery surrounded by cannery labels and tools of the trade, my visitor's face lit up. In a voice filled with excitement, she told me she had worked at Schuckl when she was young! With great enthusiasm she began to describe her experiences at Schuckl . . . until she suddenly paused! Then, using a much softer tone, she continued:

“But I did something very bad when I started working there”.

As I was imagining what “bad thing” this charming lady could possibly have done, she leaned toward me and whispered:

“I lied about my age. I told them I was fifteen years old, but I was really only thirteen!”

According to my visitor, the minimum age for working at Schuckl Cannery was fifteen, but because her family was poor and would not be able to buy clothes or shoes for her for the upcoming school year, she pretended to be the minimum age for hiring. And although that had happened nearly eighty years before, she still felt guilty about her “lie”!!

In the past century, when fruit ripened in the orchards every summer, Sunnyvale canneries offered employment to high school students, housewives and others who needed the extra work. Throughout several decades of the 20th century, including the years of the Depression and World War II, many people eagerly snapped up those jobs. During my years as a docent I have met other, older museum visitors who echoed the need to earn money for school clothes and other necessities when they were young. The canneries in Sunnyvale and in the rest of the valley played an important role in helping people earn the extra money, so desperately needed during the tough economic times of decades past. I'm certain my museum visitor was not the only young person to “change the facts” in order to be hired to work at the canneries.



*Schuckl Cannery - Cutting room for pears. Unknown date.*

# Rediscovering the Plaque of B.D. Murphy

By Allen Roundtree

*“Who is that handsome fellow in that relief?”, visitors ask when they enter the hallway across from the bedroom display. Our docents, meanwhile, have been wondering, “Why is this plaque displayed only now?”, since until recently, on that same spot on the wall, we showed a drawing of the museum building, in order to juxtapose it with the one of the original Murphy home hanging in the bedroom. – Well, our master sleuth, museum researcher Allen Roundtree, has all the answers!*

Bernard D. Murphy was a child of three when the Murphy family crossed the Sierra Nevada into California. Later, he was a California State Senator and a popular mayor of San José for three two-year terms in 1873-1877 and 1880-1882.



*The Saint Claire Club around 1910.*

In 1888, U.S. Senator James Phelan, the Hon. B.D. Murphy and other distinguished men of the valley organized the still-venerable Sainte Claire Club. Their 1893 clubhouse still stands in downtown San José. It was that club that commissioned the memorial plaque, after B.D.’s death at age 70, in December of 1911. The esteemed local sculptor Haig Patigian created the bronze

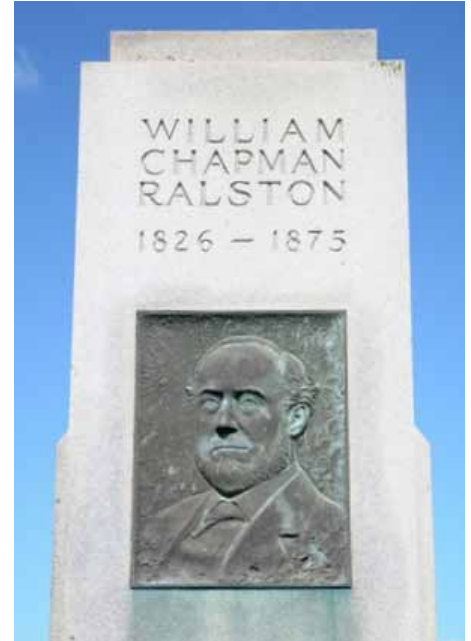
plaque in his studio in San Francisco in 1912.

How our museum acquired this work of art weighing 60 pounds is a detective story of lost artwork and missing history. In the summer of 2015, Anne King Nehmens, the great-great granddaughter of Bernard D. Murphy donated a box of Murphy-Wright-King family photographs to the museum. The portraits and wedding photographs were a valuable record of Murphy descendants, but no one at the museum recognized the photo of a wall sculpture engraved “B.D. Murphy”.



Enlarging the photo, I could see “Haig Patigian 1912” engraved in the lower right corner and discovered that he was an Armenian-American sculptor with a studio in San Francisco from 1900 to 1950. Patigian, pictured at left in 1929, has sculptures on display at the Oakland Museum and created more of San Francisco’s statues and bas-reliefs than any other artist of his time.

Among his works is a 1940 bas-relief bronze of pioneer financier William C. Ralston that stands on the Marina Green in San Francisco. This monument is an example of how the Murphy plaque would have looked on a building or in a grand public lobby. Ironically, William Ralston also has a six-degrees-of-separation connection to Mary and Martin Murphy Jr.



Mary and Martin helped finance the founding of Notre Dame Academy for women in San José in 1851. In 1923, the College of Notre Dame campus moved from San José to the 40-acre family estate, Ralston Hall in Belmont, built by this same William C. Ralston in 1867.

In the search for the B.D. Murphy plaque, I emailed photos of the plaque to numerous local museums and historical societies. No one had ever seen or heard of the plaque, until the director of History San José, Cate Mills, replied that they had the plaque in storage. They had recently acquired it from the de Young Museum of San Francisco. At some point, the Sainte Claire Club had given the plaque to the de Young where it had been in storage for 100 years! The plaque did not look like it had ever been mounted or installed on a wall. Fortunately,

History San José was willing to place the plaque on long-term loan with the Sunnyvale Historical Society in January 2016.



Included in the Anne King Nehmens photo collection was this fine portrait of B.D. Murphy with his trademark wide-brim planter hat that shows that the artist indeed captured the essence of the mayor and state senator. At long last, the B.D. Murphy monument resides in a grand public building, where it belongs and will be appreciated.

*Where is this lamp post?*



Very few lamp posts are still standing that were produced by Hendy Iron Works of Sunnyvale. Fewer than a dozen remain in places like Chinatown in San Francisco, Oak Court in Sunnyvale, Franklin Street in Santa Clara, and at History San José Village.

The Heritage Museum in Sunnyvale has three of them outside the entrance gate, which is where the one in this picture is located.

## *Yugoslav Orchardists Event Recap*

The dedication of the new panels for Yugoslav families in our OHPIE pavilion June 25th was very well attended. Many families came to help celebrate—there was wonderful Slavic food, and music as well. Fresh apricots from our heritage orchard and cherries donated by C.J. Olson's Cherries rounded out the offerings.

There were many stories shared amongst the guests. It was a beautiful day and a wonderful way to celebrate the orchard families, the efforts of Barbara Mardesich, as well as the museum committee of volunteers who worked with her to bring about the festivities. See the article in the [Mercury News](#).

## *Interested in volunteering?*

The Sunnyvale Historical Society is looking for someone who would be willing to serve as the coordinator for our school program serving local third grade students. The program takes place in our Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum and is all set up and ready to go. We need a person as liaison with the teachers and to schedule docents for the program. Training and support will be provided. Experience working with children would be helpful.

For more information please call: (408) 736-1665 or (408) 738-2482.

## **GARAGE SALE**

**SATURDAY OCT 7 8AM-2PM**



*We hope to see you there!*

Help us raise money for the month-to-month operations of the Sunnyvale Heritage Museum.

# First Chain Letter in Collection

By Sandra Guerrero

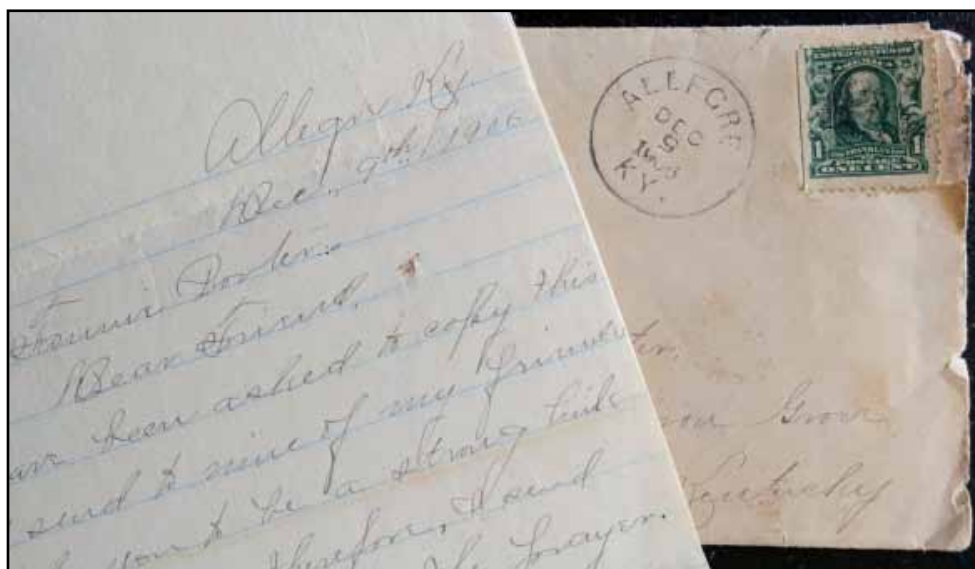
Recently the museum has acquired an intriguing piece of history, a handwritten chain letter from 1906.

Docent Lynn Bearden donated a letter belonging to her husband's great-aunt, which is a great example that even 111 years earlier, friends were forwarding each other spam.

This particular letter is interesting because it sends a prayer and asks the receiver to send it on to nine other people before the 9th of December, which curiously is when this letter is dated although it is postmarked December 5th.

While we typically think of chain letters forwarding luck, there are actually several different types of these letters, ranging from religious, sending luck, charity, and protection. This particular chain letter is classified as a religious letter as it contains a prayer and asks the recipient to keep the prayer going. Interestingly, there was a very similar letter to this one published in The Kansas City Kansas Globe newspaper two weeks before this letter was sent out!

Chain letters have a fascinating history in the United States. Originating in Europe, they made their way across the pond around the 1880s, from a Methodist academy for women missionaries in Chicago. Faced with mounting debts, they decided to fundraise in an unusual way, "...each one receiving the letter would send us a dime and make three copies of the letter asking three friends to do the same thing."



This idea of mail-in fundraising took off, and by the 1890s, chain letters were being sent to raise funds to build a memorial for the Spanish-American War. So many of these letters were being sent back and forth by 1899, the US Postal Service put their foot down and stated that the "dime letters" were violating the anti-lottery law as they were dependent on chance. Chain letters picked up again in popularity just after World War I and by 1935, various "chain letter stores" popped up in vacant buildings to peddle "official" stock certificates for chain letters. There were even chain-mail brokers and one store was said to have 125 employees!

This chain-mail madness of the 1930s only lasted a few weeks, after the chain-mail market crashed and it became hard to sell letters once the brokers took off with the cash. There was even a lawsuit filed against Western Union for permitting the first telegraph chain letters!

Now, 80 years later, chain letters are still a part of our culture. Most chain letters today are either sent by text message or email, and are often focused on sending luck, blessings, or affirmations of friendship instead of asking for monetary contributions to various causes.

It's amazing how something that seems as modern as forwarding a chain letter has such a curious and enduring history.

**August**

Mon/21 Board Meeting

**September**

Mon/4 Labor Day

Mon/18 Board Meeting 7:00pm

Thurs/28 Last day of the Gabriel Ibarra exhibit in the Upstairs Gallery

**October**

Sat/7 Garage Sale

Mon/9 Columbus Day

Mon/9 General Meeting - Everyone welcome  
Presentation on Hendy Iron Works

Tues/31 Halloween



**LOOKING FOR FORMER BLUE CUBE EMPLOYEES**

We are gearing up to install another part of Sunnyvale's important history: the world-known but still secret Blue Cube. Now that many of the programs coming from the Blue Cube are declassified, we would like to gather as much information about them as we can and install a permanent exhibit in the museum exhibit hall dedicated to it.

If you or someone you know ever worked there, and can now talk about your work, please call or email the museum and join a committee to help design the exhibit. We need your help in deciding what is important. We are also interested in obtaining any related artifacts you may have from those projects. Please email [info@heritageparkmuseum.org](mailto:info@heritageparkmuseum.org) or call 408-749-0220 and leave a message.

A special thank you to Ebe Frasse who donated to the SHSMA Annual Giving. Your generosity is very much appreciated.



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Museum & Museum Store Hours:  
Sunday, Tuesday & Thursday 12 pm to 4 pm



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