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New Signs Direct To Adobe

Do you know the way to the Adobe? Signs have been recently installed around Willow Glen to direct people to the Roberto Adobe & Suñol House museum.

Paul Bernal, chair of the Roberto Adobe & Suñol House museum, came up with the idea of installing State Historic Landmark signs for this significant property owned by the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County. "The signs will not only help people find the museum, but the signage will stimulate business in the Willow Glen area," said Bernal. He adds, "The adobe will be the only historic museum in Willow Glen. If people come to enjoy this cultural gem, it is likely they will also dine and shop around Lincoln Avenue."

The markers will also highlight a cultural resource in Willow Glen. Bernal, who is on the Pioneers Board of Directors and serves as the San Jose City Historian says, "Attractive landmark road signs have the added benefit of giving the neighborhood a sense of place." The Pioneers think some neighbors will be surprised to learn they have an 1836 adobe in their backyard that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Bernal adds, "It makes a very special district even more special and Willow Glen residents should be proud of this saved landmark."



Sign installed on Lincoln Ave. directing to the Roberto Adobe and Suñol House 1/2 mile ahead. (Photo: Terry Reilly)

Bernal researched the specifications for State Historic Landmark signs, which included thickness of sign metal, fonts, color, and arrow styles. For City approval, Bernal prepared a PowerPoint presentation that contained suggested content and sign locations.

Bernal asked San Jose District 6 Councilmember Pierluigi Oliverio to support this request. Oliverio did so with enthusiasm and Oliverio's aid, Terry Reilly, spearheaded the project. Bernal applauded Reilly's service: "Terry was a real can-do person. The community is fortunate to have such a skilled, pleasant, hard working, focused person in District 6. Councilmember Oliverio and Terry really saw it through from beginning to end. These signs are a testament to their love for the community."

Bernal also has plans for installing State Historic Landmark signs on Highway 280, near the museum. ❖

Message from our President



Photos: Tim Peddy

Ken Machado, President
California Pioneers of
Santa Clara County

I have written in the past about the vital role that volunteers play in this organization given the fact that we are an entirely volunteer group. That is, we have no paid staff and we therefore rely entirely on our membership and volunteers to keep the Pioneers alive and thriving and relevant to our mission statement to “**preserve, promote and celebrate the history of Santa Clara County and the heritage of its past generations.**”

Trailblazer

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The Pioneers is a 501(c)3
non-profit organization

Obviously, our board of directors spearheads that volunteer effort and guides the organization with long term planning and day to day decisions. Those members also volunteer their time in various activities of the Pioneers from coordinating our docent program (**Jonna Baker**) to organizing our quarterly luncheons and guest speakers program (**Tim and Barbara Peddy**) to the editing of our amazing Trailblazer newsletter (**Gayle Frank**). **Tom Kearney** adeptly handles our finances and **Paul Bernal** chairs our Roberto Adobe and Suñol House Museum committee. All of our board members contribute to making our organization stronger and more interesting in their own ways.

Besides board members we also are blessed with numerous volunteers who help out with special projects and events. Recently some of those volunteers have been helping at the **Roberto Adobe** to get that property ready for its opening. Members such as **Rachel Fischer**, who brought her two boys to a workday at the museum last month, helped to move a 500 lb. tree into one of the rooms of the **Suñol House** where it will be used to display a classic Mexican saddle, horsehair bridle and other items which would have been used by Antonio Suñol during his days at the home.

Others, such as our blacksmith and overall expert on tools and implements of early California, **John Grafton**, have enlightened fellow volunteers with his outstanding knowledge and skills. Recently, John gave lessons to volunteers like new board member **Dr. Mike Shea**, board member **Mary Berger** and volunteers **Tom Bernal**, **Joe Coughlin** and **Carol Arnoldy** in how to use his handmade shaving tool to scrape the bark off of tree limbs which will be used to create the palisade, a fence around the traditional garden (being implemented by volunteer **Jenny Walicek**). The garden will be planted near the adobe and will showcase the type of medicinal and

food plants and herbs which would have been found in Roberto's garden in 1835. Other volunteers like **Veronica Jordan** and board member **Mary Hanel** have been busy identifying and assembling death and burial records in an effort to reunite long lost gravestones we have recovered back to the burial sites of these early valley pioneers.

These are just a few of the worthwhile and interesting areas where you can serve as a volunteer in the Pioneers, in addition to maybe being a docent in one of our two museum homes. If you are interested in getting involved, ask one of the people listed above about their experiences or drop me a note or an email at president@CaliforniaPioneers.com and I will put you in touch with the right person and maybe give you a suggestion as to how you may share your expertise to help our organization. You will most likely learn some new skills, discover some historical facts you may not have been aware of or find hidden talents, but you will most certainly be in contact with some great people. Come join us! ❖

-Ken Machado



Pioneers Quarterly Luncheon

Saturday, Dec. 5th, 2015

11:00 AM to 2:30 PM

THREE FLAMES RESTAURANT

Banquet Room—1547 Meridian Ave. in San Jose

Luncheon Presentation Movie Premier of Arnold Del Carlo Film

**presented by
Tom Layton**

Make Reservations by Wednesday, Dec. 2nd

Email to sccpioneers@aol.com

or call 408-554-7587 with your menu selection

**If, after reserving, you cannot attend the Luncheon
PLEASE call or e-mail to cancel your reservations.**

We have to pay for no-shows !

Luncheon cost is now \$30

**Please make checks payable in advance to
California Pioneers and bring to Luncheon.**

Menu Selections

Three Flames Special Steak
tri-tip steak topped with sautéed mushrooms

Grilled Salmon
Above served w/Anna Potatoes & Fresh Vegetables

Pasta Primavera
Veggies tossed with Penne Pasta & Marinara Sauce

**All of the above served with Salad, Coffee and Dessert
No Host Bar for soft drinks, beer and wine**

***Parking is limited in front of the restaurant; however,
ample parking is available in the rear and close
to a separate banquet room entrance.***

About Our Luncheon Presentation

The Arnold Del Carlo Photograph Collection consists of photographs and negatives that document the transformation of Santa Clara Valley from orchards to an urban landscape. The years covered by the collection range from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, and include photographs taken from the street level as well as from the air. Prominent groups of photographs include; San Jose State College, the City of San Jose, the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), General Motors Company (GMC), land developers and builders, and business establishments in the cities of San Jose and Santa Clara. The collection also holds portraits of individuals and families, as well as weddings and anniversaries.

Arnold Del Carlo was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. During his childhood and teenage years, Del Carlo became fascinated with both airplanes and photography, but it was not until the beginning of the Second World War that the two interests merged when he snapped photos from military planes.

After the war, a burgeoning population brought a building boom to the Santa Clara Valley, which was treated by designers and developers as a broad, blank canvas upon which they could sketch and then build their wildest architectural fantasies – and photographer Arnold "Del" Del Carlo was there to record it.

His work depicting the exuberance of mid-century modern architecture throughout San Jose has been recorded in Heather David's book, *Mid-Century by the Bay*. The August Sourisseau News video, sponsored by Linda L. Lester, is Heather's tribute to Del Carlo and to the mid-century building boom that he documented. Many of Del Carlo's photos can be viewed at www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt8j49s2b2/admin/.

Arnold Del Carlo and his wife are planning to attend the Pioneers luncheon when the premier of this 38 minute movie will be shown. ❖

Quarterly Pioneers luncheons are held on the first Saturday of March, June, September and December.

Adobe Fun Day



Stripping off bark to make a palisade around the Adobe kitchen garden. Top left clockwise: Tom Bernal and Mary Berger; Tim Peddy and Tom Bernal; John Grafton, Mary Berger and Joe Coughlin; lunch inside Adobe Tom Bernal, Diego Bernal, Mary Carol Bernal, Joe Coughlin, John Grafton; Carol Arnoldy and Mary Hanel. (Photos: Paul Bernal)



Meet One of Our Docents

Our highlighted docent for this quarter is **Carol Arnoldy**. She joined the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County back in 1991. Carol's former neighbor, the late, long-time Pioneers member Edith Lewis-Walter, sponsored her as a member. In the past, Carol has served on the Pioneers Board as Vice President, Secretary, and Marshall during various terms of office.

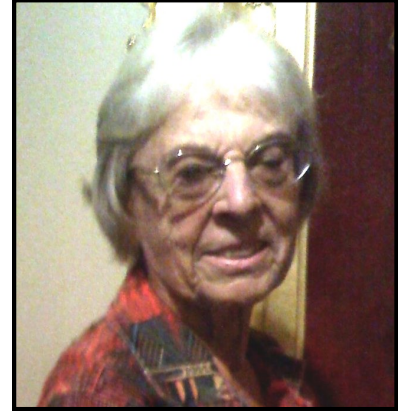
In 2012, Carol became a docent at the Pioneers' Paulson House at History San Jose.

Carol is a second-generation Californian and was born and raised in San Francisco.

In 1948 she attended college at San Jose State.

Over the years Carol has worked locally for Germaine Seed Store (now Mel Cotton's), the Emporium (now Valley Fair, Macy's), at the San Jose Airport in a long gone piper rental trailer, and for the Santa Clara Unified School District.

Carol is proud to say she has two children, two grandchildren and recently two great-grandchildren. ❖



Carol Arnoldy
Paulson House Docent

-Jonna Baker

Roberto Adobe & Suñol House Update

New signs were recently installed identifying the Roberto Adobe & Suñol House; one along the north side of the driveway and one in front of the Suñol House.

In other news, in September, three original mission heritage trees were delivered from Mission Santa Barbara for the Roberto Adobe & Suñol House: mandarin orange, sweet orange, and date. The Pioneers sent one of the original mission pear trees, which Tim Peddy, John Grafton and Paul Bernal cloned, back to Santa Barbara as a thank you gift. ❖



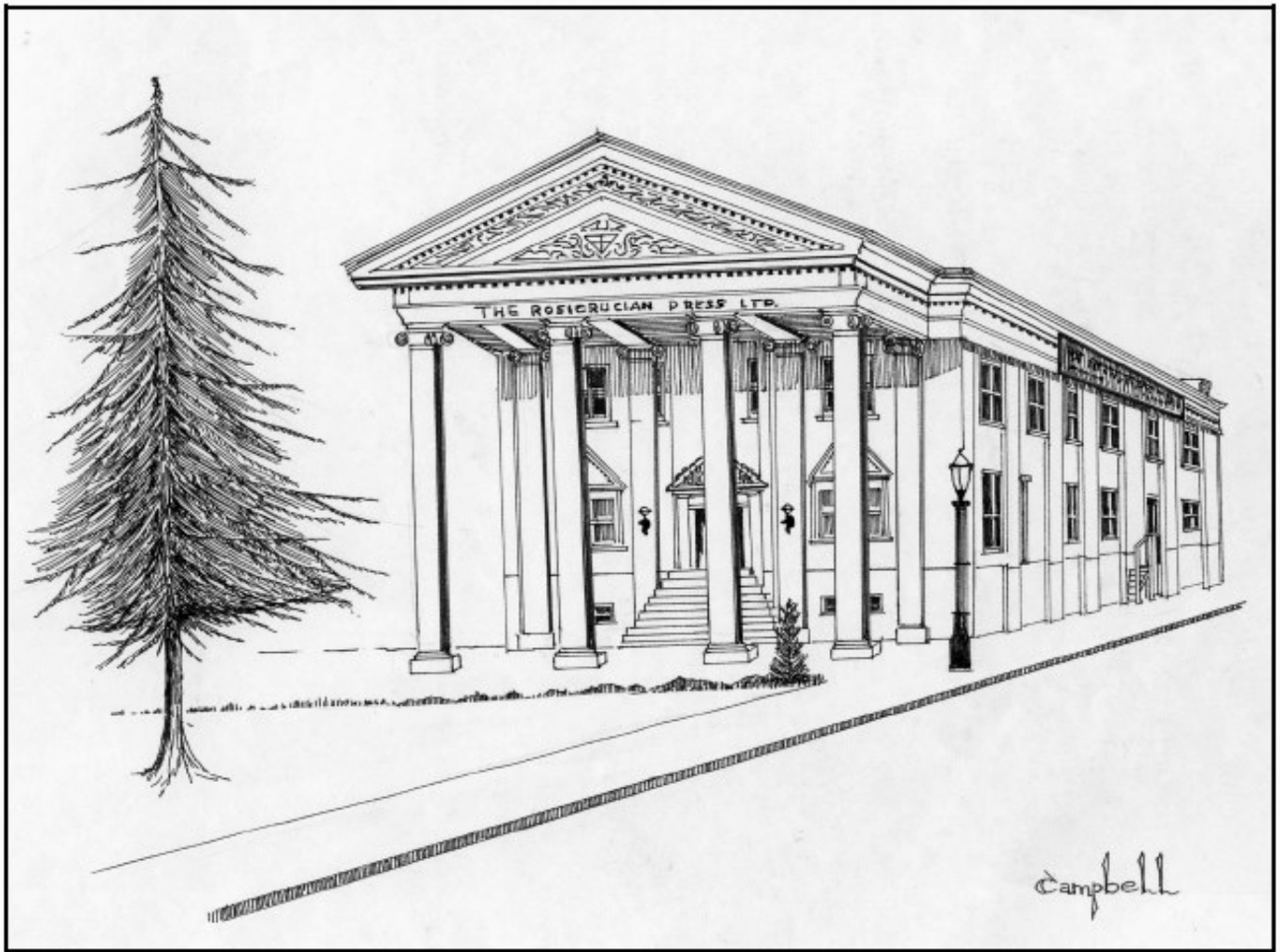
Above, the new sign in front of the Roberto Adobe & Suñol House.

Left, the new sign atop the brick wall on the north side of the driveway. Highway 280 is in the background.



(Photos: Gayle Frank)

Rosicrucian Press—A Sketch By Jim Campbell



Pictured above is the old science building from the former College of Notre Dame, that was located at Notre Dame Avenue and Carlyle Street in San Jose. It was the last structure to be added to the Notre Dame campus, constructed in 1906 at a cost of \$35,000.

The appearance of the structure was impressive: four white columns were each four feet in diameter, granite steps led up to a porch beneath a spacious Greek portico with wrought iron torches by the front door. It seemed to have been built for some super race of beings.

When the college reluctantly moved to Belmont in 1923 after more than 70 years in San Jose, the science building was the only building not demolished.

The sprawling campus was later replaced by the Mercury-News Building and the De Aza Hotel.

The Rosicrucian Press, founded by Harry L. Shibley, bought the science building and remodeled the interior into a printing and publishing company. In 1966 the building was demolished for an extension of Almaden Road northward from

Santa Clara Street through to Terraine Street. Today nothing remains of this larger-than-life building.

One member of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County, the late Theron Fox, was employed at the Rosicrucian Press for 37 years. He was a leader in preserving historic buildings and landmarks and was instrumental along with Clyde Arbuckle and others in saving the Roberto Adobe from being razed to make way for the construction of Highway 280. ❖

Made in San Jose - Sunset Auto

After the 1906 earthquake, Frank Holmes and his partner at the time, Wilbur Edwards, moved down to San Jose from San Francisco and incorporated the Victory Motor Car Company (SJ Mercury & Herald 6/17/1906). Here they built the Sunset automobile; it was the only auto manufactured on the Pacific Coast outside Los Angeles. The autos were manufactured in San Jose from 1906 until 1913.

In 1906, Holmes and Edwards built a one-story factory building with a 75 x 135 floor space, at 866-896 South First Street near Martha Street, to house the Victory Motor Car Company. The business included a machine shop and an assembly department with plans to add on a paint shop and upholstery department. The machine shop held lathes, shapers, drills and milling machines.

By November of 1906, the Sunset automobiles, manufactured in San Jose, were delivered to San Francisco to be sold, receiving many favorable comments by potential buyers and owners (Evening News 11/11/1906). Before sales delivery, each Sunset auto was taken on a trial 90-mile run from San Jose to Oakland and back to ensure excellent quality.

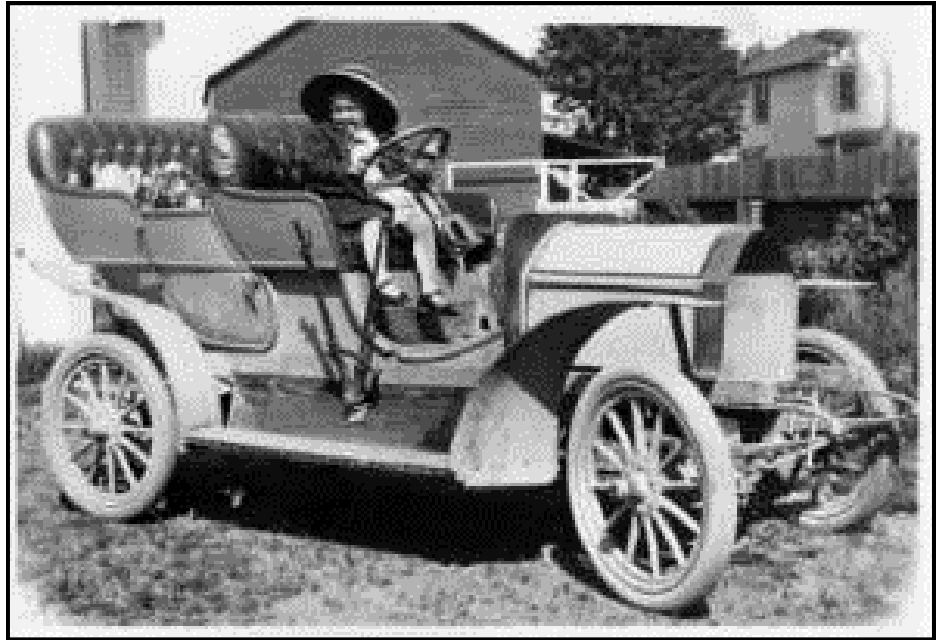


Photo: San Jose Public Library California Room
*Young Elizabeth Talbot sits in her family's Sunset c. 1909,
the only automobile ever mass-produced in San Jose.*

Back then, the Sunset was described as a "trifle longer" than the ordinary 2-cylinder models. Three models of the Sunset "machines" were exhibited in a San Francisco Auto Show in February of 1907, including the runabout and a touring car.

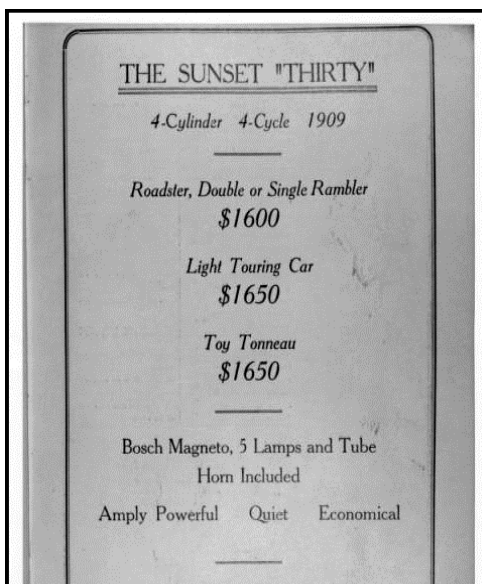
In 1907, the officers of the Victory Motor Company, who produced the Sunset, were: Frank H. Holmes—president and general manager; R.E. Knapp—vice-president; and W.F. Kennedy—secretary. The Security Bank acted as treasurer. During that same year, Harrison P. Smith was a general sales agent and was actively seeking inroads into the Los Angeles auto market. By 1907, the Victory Motor Car Company employed 30 people and produced 100 autos per year. Several San Joseans were mentioned in the local newspaper as new owners of a Sunset automobile in March of 1907: Dr. Frazzer; A. Brassay; William Lenzen; J. E. Gilley; and Arthur Caldwell.

The Sunset was said to be "so simple a child can run it" (SJ Mercury & Herald 3/9/07). The twenty horsepower engine was tuned to a "thousandth part of an inch."

The runabout was designed to reach up to 45 miles per hour and was "effective in hill climbing." All components of the Sunset except the bent wood frame, wheels and tires, were manufactured in San Jose.

Frank Holmes spent four years perfecting his engine. The same 1907 news article described the engine as a "marvel of precision." The owners took pride in the Sunset's improved 2-cycle engine that was the same weight and size of other engines but gave "double the power." The Victory Motor Company was also the sole manufacturer of radiators on the West Coast.

By 1909, the Sunset "Thirty," with 4 cylinders and 4-cycles, (Continued on pg. 8)



When San Jose Was Young

The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County will be reprinting a series of historical articles from 1916, written anonymously and appearing daily in the San Jose Evening News.

We will print one article in each issue of the Trailblazer. The subjects all deal with life in the earliest days of the first pueblo in California.

Most historians agree that the author of these enlightening articles was Cora Baggerly Older (1875-1968). More about her in the next issue.

To give you a preview of what's coming, here is her description and rationale for her articles, published in the evening news on September 20th, 1916.

"Many people have the mistaken idea that history is dull. How can it be dull, when it is the recalling to life of thousands of interesting men and women who trod this earth before we did? How can it be dull, when it quickens the imagination, and fills the waste places of today with the busy hum of voices and songs of long ago?"

Wine, that stores up within itself the sunlight and chemical energy of years gone by, has never been accused of being dull, whatever else may have been said against it. And history is a sort of wine, sparkling and revivifying, containing the vital essence of olden days, and enlivening our own times with the memory of brave deeds and beautiful characters of earlier years.

Why then, we see that history is veritably an intoxicating draft from life's wine cup, and by no means the dull thing that it is pictured by those who simply remember it as a string of hard-to-remember dates painfully studied at school.

The historical series entitled 'When San Jose Was Young,' the first installment of which appeared in yesterday's issue of The News, is bound to interest deeply all those who feel that the mere food and drink of the moment are not the only things worth thinking about. It will awake in all readers a keener appreciation of the present if they gain the knowledge of the past which these articles will give." ❖

The Wireless Age: Electronics Entrepreneurs Before Silicon Valley.

History Park, Pacific Hotel, Arbuckle Gallery

Tues – Sun; 11:00am – 4:30pm; Exhibit through July, 2016

Docent Opportunity

For more information
or to

volunteer, contact

Jonna Baker at

(408) 533-3256 or

J234belle@yahoo.com

Made in San Jose (Continued)

was advertised as able to carry five passengers up Mt. Hamilton without shifting gears out of high. The advertisement described three models: the roadster double or single rambler, the light touring car, or the Toy Tonneau—each at a price of \$1,600-1,650 including magneto, lamps and horn.

"Toy Tonneau" referred to the rear passenger compartment of the auto,

which was not integrated into the body of the car and could be removed.

Sales of the Sunset must have declined because there is no mention of or any advertisement for the auto in the local newspapers after 1911. By 1915, the Sunset factory on South First Street was taken over by J. A. Ostberg who made engines from 8 to 80 horsepower that burned low grade oil. These

engines were designed for farm and pumping use (*SJ Mercury Herald* 3/14/1915).

By 1916, the Victory Motor Car Co., Inc. moved to Niles. The new owners of the San Jose site on S. First Street now called their business Victory Motor Works. ❖

The 1948 Robbery of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. Safe Burglars Strike in San Jose, Part I

By Kathryn Collins Philp

A dilapidated cardboard box tucked under a workbench in Bart Collins's garage provided the genesis for this story of crime in the mid-20th Century. Collins, who was appointed to the San Jose Police Department in 1935 and eventually served as Chief of Detectives (1951-1974), had a love for history. As a result, he left his own little archive to be sorted out at a later time.

Among the many news articles and other records, a few subjects stood out for their significance to the City of San Jose. One of these, the 1948 Robbery of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, resulted in a nearly two-year, nationwide search by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). One of the two robbers, Emery Lee Downs, was subsequently placed on the FBI's original "Ten Most Wanted List," and the search for him, his eventual arrest, and the two trials that followed garnered widespread publicity.

A trove of primary sources that survived the past 67 years provided insight into the times relevant to this paper. Collins taught courses in both Criminal Investigation and Advanced Criminal Investigation in the Department of Administration of Justice at San Jose State College (now San Jose State University). One of his lecture outlines focused on the crime of safe burglary that was prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s; in another lecture, he stressed the importance of writing down notes from interviews and interrogations as soon as possible for later use—possibly in court. Thus, a detailed, eight-page, single spaced typewritten transcript of the cross-country trip extraditing Downs by car, used during his testimony as a chief witness in the two Downs trials, was also left in the cardboard box.

Through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), this author was able to obtain nearly 900 pages of Downs'

1100-page FBI file that details the robbery in San Jose and the subsequent exhaustive search for him. It has been an invaluable resource for the writing of this topic, and many of the details and descriptions herein derive from that source. At the time of his arrest and extradition hearings in Florida, the St. Petersburg Times, The Florida Times, the Tampa Morning Tribune, and the Florida State News provided extensive coverage. The San Jose Mercury Herald, the San Jose Mercury News and the San Jose Evening News provided detailed coverage of the robbery and the two trials that ensued.

Although the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted List" (available online) names the subject as Lee Emery Downs, other reports state, in addition to his many aliases, Emery Lee Downs. Since his death certificate lists him as Emery Lee Downs (as reported by his sister) this author has chosen to use that name.

The intent of this paper is not to call attention to the career of a widely known criminal but rather to bring together a piece of mid-20th Century history that focused on San Jose. Although horticulture was still the Santa Clara Valley's leading industry in the late 1940s with Santa Clara County ranking tenth of all counties in the nation in farm wealth, the region was transitioning into the fastest growing industrial area in the West. (1) There was growing affluence, and with that, money was a lure for the safe burglars who trolled the West Coast in search of their prey.

Downtown San Jose Circa 1948

Downtown San Jose was the hub of activity for the city's residents, and many major stores and businesses were located within the perimeters of Market, First, and Second Streets between San Carlos and St. John Streets. The intersection of First and Santa Clara Streets, the heart of San Jose, was the location

of the two major banks: The First National Bank, which advertised itself in the city directory as a "home-owned independent bank," and the Bank of America. Residents often stopped in to pay their bills, in cash or by check, at the local establishments. These monies were subsequently stored in safes usually located in a cashier's office on site. Police officers, working in pairs, routinely made the rounds of these establishments to pick up money and transport it in paper bags or bank bags to the local banks. (2)

According to Polk's 1947 San Jose City Directory, there were 99 members of the San Jose Police Department operating out of one central station. By 1949-50, that number had grown to 116. (The 1948 volume of the City Directory is missing). The officer assigned to "walk the beat" at First and Santa Clara Streets had a prestigious assignment; his duty was to "help the little old ladies cross the street, to rub noses with business people, and more importantly to make sure that no bank robberies took place at the two major banks." Depending on the sergeant's orders, the perimeters of this beat might have been just the four corners at Santa Clara and First Streets or out to St. James Street on the north and San Fernando Street to the south. (3)

Sometime around June 1, 1948, Emery Lee Downs arrived in San Jose driving a 1947 Oldsmobile convertible bearing the Nevada license 23941. (It was later reported that the automobile had been stolen). Using the alias of C. E. Gardner, he checked into the Cottage Court Motel on Bayshore Highway and began to "case" the downtown area for his next target. He ultimately settled on the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company that was providing service to the nearly 47,000 telephones in the area.(4) According to the records maintained by the company's cashier, about

(Continued pg. 10)

Safe Burglars (Continued)

\$5,000 in cash and \$9,500 in checks were stored in the safe—waiting for the taking on the night of June 3, 1948.

The Robbery at the Phone Company

Shortly before midnight on June 3, 1948, two unmasked, neatly-dressed men wearing light pigskin gloves and carrying heavy caliber automatic pistols entered the office of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co. located at 70 South Market Street in San Jose, California, in order to make some easy money. Ira Miller and Sidney C. Rogers, two janitors who arrived to work at 11:45 p.m., encountered the burglars breaking into the safe and were ordered to lie down on the floor. The men were bound and gagged using paper towels and the sash cords off the venetian blinds and were warned they would not be harmed as long as there was "no monkey business." The two janitors heard the robbers "crack" a large Mosler fireproof safe in the cashier's office before they saw them casually saunter off with a metal wastebasket stuffed with money.

Although the bound and gagged janitors did not see the actual opening of the safe, they heard the pounding of steel instruments. This author found that there were two differing accounts as to how the safe was "cracked." That night, the two janitors had indicated to local reporters that an explosive had been used to blow the outer door of the safe. Thus, the headline in the San Jose Mercury Herald on June 4, 1948, read "Bold Robbers Blow Phone Headquarters Safe, Escape." Further, on June 5, the caption accompanying a front-page photo of the crime scene referred to the debris left by the "blast." However, documents in the FBI file state that San Jose Police Department officials had reported that the safe was broken into by drilling a 3/4" hole in the upper left-hand corner of the door on the side opposite the hinges. A heavy crowbar was used to force the door open, and

the combination and locks were apparently broken by use of a sledgehammer. Law enforcement officials knew this technique as a "peel job."

In addition to noting the tool marks (which could later be matched to a burglar's cache of tools) officers assigned to the investigation followed the standard protocol of gathering evidence including specimens of the safe's fireproofing material, package, label, and name of the safe's manufacturer. No fingerprints were found.

In short order, police were able to identify Emery Lee Downs as one of the two robbers. Using information from witnesses outside the building, they ascertained that the two robbers drove off in a yellow convertible coupe (later determined to be stolen) with a Nevada license that had been parked out front of the building for some time. Since it was a pattern for high-profile burglars and robbers to stay at auto courts or trailer camps in or near the vicinity of the city in which they planned their next job, police routinely canvassed them immediately following a crime.

During a careful check of all such in the vicinity, officers located the registration of C. E. Gardner at the Cottage Court Motel and identified it as being in Downs' handwriting. Downs and an unidentified accomplice were also considered suspects in a similar safe job netting \$5,000 at the Garibaldi Hotel in Santa Cruz during the first week of July 1948. Although Clifford J. Judd was arrested in August 1948 as a possible suspect in both cases, he was later released because of lack of evidence. It was never determined who Downs' accomplice was that night in San Jose, and typical of the "wise guy" he never talked.

On June 23, 1948, a criminal complaint charging Emery Lee Downs with the crime of burglary and robbery was filed in the Police Court in and for the City

of San Jose before Judge Percy O'Connor. District Attorney Napoleon Menard requested the United States Attorney at San Francisco to issue a federal warrant for Downs' arrest as he was alleged to have fled interstate in order to avoid prosecution for the crime of burglary. On August 3, 1948, the warrant was issued and the FBI took over the case. Menard stated that in the event of Downs' apprehension, he would extradite him from any place in the United States.

The Modus Operandi of the mid-20th Century Safe Burglar

The general rule in law enforcement in the 1940s was that a safe burglar would follow a given modus operandi throughout his career. All safes had doorplates built of steel plate with interiors of cast iron, fire insulation, and metal connectors such as spindles and handles made of lightweight metal. A safe burglar had to come prepared to the scene of the intended crime according to his modus operandi with the tools to fit his method in opening safes. These might include: chisels, hacksaws, tools for boring holes, strong pointed bars, nitroglycerin, soap, acetylene torches, and batteries.

Downs had a reputation of being skilled in opening a safe by any known method but specialized in the "peel" job. FBI records in August 1948 described him as having a long criminal history and as being experienced at "peeling" safes.

While Downs left no fingerprints at the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co., he left two important clues instead: his modus operandi and the fact that he never disguised his face during the robbery. This, in addition to the identification provided through the license plate on the car—and his reputation throughout the West as an elite,
(Continued pg. 11)

Safe Burglars (Continued)

skilled and prolific safe burglar—quickly led authorities on his trail.

Emery Downs and the Troop Gang

Emery Lee Downs was born in Butte, Montana, in 1906. His criminal record dated back to August 22, 1920, when at the age of 14 he was sentenced to an Idaho prison for second-degree burglary. Thus began a long, steady descent into a career of malfeasance marked by repeated burglary, robbery, and pimping offenses. He had a penchant for gambling, women, and luxury automobiles—all of which required money—usually acquired illicitly.

By the time of the San Jose robbery, Downs had spent twenty years in penitentiaries in Idaho, Washington, Utah, and Oregon. While out of prison, the peripatetic Downs was constantly on the move and had no permanent home, thus making his whereabouts difficult to trace.

To law enforcement officials, Downs was “a wise guy” and a braggart. He preferred to do things “in style” and was skilled at “learning the ropes” in order to accomplish his wishes. He was fond of fishing and bragged about knowing all of the best fishing spots in the United States. He was also adept at changing his alias, location, and hair color. Over the years, he had been involved in several shooting scrapes and was thus reported to be armed and extremely dangerous.

Ex-cons always know ex-cons, and Downs was a veteran ex-con. When he was not in prison, he teamed up with his “colleagues” to make money in order to maintain the lavish lifestyle to which he had become accustomed. This seasoned group was referred to as “the Troop Gang” and operated throughout Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, and California. Sobriquets of these men included such terms as “The Galloper,” “The Goat,” “Apples,” “Bones,” and

“Bad Eye.” FBI officials described them as “a loosely knit gang of the highest caliber holdup men and burglars.” They were, for the most part, ex-convicts who had served terms in the penitentiaries of the aforementioned states and were well known to practically all the major police agencies in those states.

Downs was considered to be the most proficient of them all at safecracking. Indeed, this motley gang (and their like-minded cohorts) engendered such concern on the part of proactive California law enforcement officers that by the mid-1950s, they had joined together to form the Safe and Burglary Investigators Association that operated out of the State Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation. Officers from around the state gathered regularly to report on crimes committed, license numbers of suspicious cars, wanted burglars’ habits, “M.O.s” of opening a safe—all in an effort to bring the responsible parties to prosecution as inter-agency communication was a key to capture.

The Origin of the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" List

The United States was in the throes of the Great Depression in the 1930s while the 1940s brought World War II. During this time, bank robberies and safe burglaries were major sources of crime, and they were guaranteed to generate headlines in the press. In February 1949, a reporter for the United Press International contacted the FBI and asked for a list of the names and descriptions of the “toughest guys” they wanted to capture. As a result, the FBI listed the names of the ten fugitives it considered to be the most potentially dangerous; the story resulting from that query generated so much publicity and interest that the “Ten Most Wanted Fugitives” program was instituted a year later on March 14, 1950, and continues with a high rate of

success to this day. Emery Lee Downs met both criteria for the list: 1) he was armed, dangerous, and had a lengthy record of committing serious crimes, and 2) his apprehension would be facilitated by nationwide publicity. On March 20, 1950, Downs’ name was the sixth to be entered into the handwritten log book maintained by the FBI. He was subsequently arrested on April 7, 1950. San Jose was to become closely associated with Downs, the FBI, and two well-publicized trials.

The Search for Emery Lee Downs

Around the nation, law enforcement authorities searched for Downs for nearly two years. He was described as extremely dangerous, generally armed, and involved in several shooting scrapes. One confidential informant to the FBI stated that Downs was armed at all times and that he would attempt to shoot his way out of any “tight spot” in which he might find himself. The FBI file shows “Leads” being sent to the Anchorage, Billings (Montana), Butte, Denver, Chicago, Kansas City, Springfield (Illinois), Portland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Spokane, Los Angeles, Reno, Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), and Salt Lake City Divisions requiring follow-up interviews and contacts. FBI agents traveled throughout these areas to interview associates and possible acquaintances of the reputed leader of the Troop Gang and reminded them of the provisions of the Federal Fugitive Harboring Statute. Occasionally, this prompted agreement to report immediately any information received on Downs.

Interviews in the file were typically introduced with the standard, “The following investigation was conducted by Special Agent” Only a few decades removed from the era of the Wild West, the agents’ travels took them to the underworld; bars (among

(Continued pg. 12)

Safe Burglars (Continued)

the many, the “Bucket of Blood,” “Wild West Club,” “Chiseler’s Inn,” “Golden Nugget Casino”), brothels, prisons, and residences of Downs’ former associates, most of whom were known criminals and almost always uncooperative in providing any useful information. To do so would be labeled “a snitch” in the underworld community. Some gave reliable information; many did not.

In January 1949, Downs and his wife Patricia were seen at a Sunset Boulevard (Los Angeles) motel with John De La Casa who also worked with Downs from time to time. On January 25, 1949, De La Casa was killed in a gun battle with 100 police officers in the hills above Sunset Boulevard in the Silver Lake district of Los Angeles. Three officers were also wounded in what was vividly described as a “noisy tiff” in which “the darkness of the hills was punctured by tiny beams of lights from officers’ flashlights and the stillness of the night was broken by the sharp crack of gunfire.” (5)

After Downs was placed on the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list on March 20, 1950, tips came in from throughout the country. As the search broadened into the South, there were reports of Downs and his wife Patricia driving a 1949 Lincoln convertible pulling a two-tone green house trailer in Georgia. In addition to the usual investigative sources of having police and the highway patrol check bridges and install roadblocks, an aerial search using five airplanes from the Air National Guard was employed to look for the Downs’ vehicles.

For a brief period, on April 5, 1950, the FBI thought they had found Downs when, acting on a tip, an FBI agent and a rookie California Highway Patrolman engaged in a 70-mile-an-hour chase across the Mojave Desert ending in a shootout. The fugitive, Fred Walter Lennon, was a longtime partner of Downs and was sought in many cities through-

out the country for unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. Inside the expensive, late-model car, authorities found \$9,000 and four other pistols. (6) Lennon and Downs had worked together for many years as burglars and robbers, and both men had been reported seen in Los Angeles the previous week. The Sheriff’s office in Bakersfield initially announced that Downs had been killed in the gun battle, but soon after it was determined that the deceased fugitive was Lennon. (7)

The shooting of Lennon, however, led the FBI one step closer to Downs who was subsequently arrested two days later. When the Montana license plate on Lennon’s car was checked, it showed the registration of a trailer that proved to be the same one that Downs—using the alias of George Clarkson—and his wife had been using for the past four months as they moved from one trailer camp to another. After Lennon’s death was announced, Downs left the Holly Hill, Florida, trailer camp in which he had been staying since December 14, 1949, and relocated to another camp one mile away. (8)

On the night of Thursday, April 7, 1950, a raiding party of 12 FBI agents with guns drawn finally closed in on Downs and his wife at the trailer camp near Holly Hill. Although Downs was armed with a .32 caliber fully-loaded revolver in the pocket of his jacket, he did not resist arrest. He had over \$3,000 on his person, and his automobile was stocked with an additional revolver as well as four high-powered rifles, all loaded. Additionally, the trunk contained leather briefcases full of ammunition, nine sticks of dynamite and 12 electric fuses.

Agents described the trailer as having a television set and piano and as being “one of the most sumptuously appointed trailers ever built.” (9) Later that night, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover announced the arrest of Downs. It was Good Friday in more than one sense for the FBI. *[End of Part 1]*

Footnotes:

- (1) Polk’s San Jose (California) City Directory 1947, pp. 14-15.
- (2) Donald Ewing, interview by author, February 23, 2004, San Jose, CA.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Polk’s San Jose (California) City Directory 1949-50, p. 11.
- (5) “Ex-Convict Slain Battling Police in Silver Lake Area,” Los Angeles Times, 26 January 1949, p. 2.
- (6) “Fugitive Slain After Long Desert Chase,” San Jose Mercury, 6 April 1950, p. 1.
- (7) “Suspect in Phone Co. Theft Dies,” San Jose Evening News, 5 April 1950. (microfiche file).
- (8) “FBI Nabs One of Nation’s Top Fugitives in Florida,” Tampa Morning Tribune, 8 April 1950, p. 1.
- (9) “One of Nation’s ‘Most Wanted’ Fugitives Arrested in Florida,” St. Petersburg Times, 8 April 1950, p. 1.

Kathryn Collins Philp is a member of the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County and currently lives in Woodbridge, Connecticut. She wrote this essay for the Pioneers. Part 2 (The Downs Trials) will appear in the March, 2016 issue of the Trailblazer. The entire essay with photos and bibliography will be available soon on our website.

**Pioneers
Dues
for 2016
will be
owed on
January 1st,
2016!**

Eulogy Found of a Pioneers Past President

California Pioneers of Santa Clara County member Rosaleen Zisch acquired historical items and ephemera from her mother's friend, who was the widow of Ella Graham's nephew. Who was Ella Graham? After reviewing the documents from her mother's friend, Rosaleen discovered a laminated article from the San Jose News that appeared on April 9, 1956. The article, about Ella Graham, stated that Ella had served as President of the Pioneers so Rosaleen sent the information to the Pioneers.

Board member Tim Peddy confirmed that indeed Ella Graham was Pioneers President from 1941 to 1944, but her photo is missing from our "Presidents Wall" in the Paulson House.

Rosaleen also found the eulogy of Ella C. Graham that was delivered at the Young Ladies Institute (Y.L.I.)* convention in 1956.

Ella C. McDonald Graham (11/15/1876-4/8/1956) was born in San Jose, attended the Sisters of Notre Dame and

St. Joseph's Church, and later taught in the San Jose Schools. She joined the Y.L.I., San Jose No. 32, in 1898 only eleven years after it was founded. After being persuaded by friends in 1915, she attended her first Y.L.I. Convention in San Francisco and was elected to the Board of Grand Directors that same year, serving 58 years until her death. Ella organized seven new orders of Y.L.I. throughout California.

She was praised for giving so much of her time and talent to building and strengthening the Y.L.I. organization as well as her strength of character, sincerity, candor and wise simplicity. The eulogy states, "Ella was truly an outstanding and hence a memorable person."

Ella was also one of the founders for the Catholic Women's Center, served as its first secretary and was appointed President of the National Council of Catholic Women when it was first

organized in San Jose. She was an active member and a Past President of both the Native Daughters of the Golden West and the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County. Always interested in governmental affairs in San Jose and Santa Clara County, she was appointed to many political committees, often as the only woman.

Although she was "always strong in the defense of her own opinion," she "was open to persuasion." Her activity in public life was unselfish and effective and included many projects for the public good. She thought that "the unselfish dedication of time and talent to the constant increase of everything that was good in the past, [made] for the betterment of the present and the future." ❖

** Y.L.I. (Young Ladies Institute) is a Catholic Women's organization founded in San Francisco in 1887. Today there are about 8,500 members of all ages in California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii. Their mission is care and concern for each other and those in need.*

Santa Clara Historic Home Tour

The 2015 Santa Clara Historic Home Tour will be held Friday, Dec. 4, 6-10 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 5, noon-5 p.m. Four private homes of Victorian and other architectural styles are on this year's tour.

The public building on tour this year will be the historic Santa Clara Railroad Depot at 1005 Railroad Avenue which houses a restored waiting room, model train museum, and library.

Advance purchase tickets went on sale October 1st. Buy soon—tickets have sold out in past years. For purchase information, call the Harris-Lass Museum message line at 408-249-7905 or purchase online at www.sc-hometour.com/tickets.html. Tickets will also be available from City Lights Espresso, 1171 Homestead Road in Santa Clara and at the Antiques Colony store, 1881 W. San Carlos Street, San Jose.

-Mary Hanel



(Photo: Mary Hanel)

The historic Santa Clara Railroad Depot

CA Pioneers of SCC New Members - Welcome!

Linda Avignon-Wikke lives in San Jose and is a teacher of the blind. She is a native Californian. Her ancestors include Gianbattista Avignone and Theresa Lagomarsino who came to California around 1878. Linda's membership was proposed by Pioneers member Sylvia Hew.

Stanley Bellow lives in San Jose and worked as an advertising consultant. His ancestors include Mitchel Bellow and Thomas J. Stone. Stanley notes that his family arrived in California in 1819. His parents were Edith Edmonds and Eugene Bellow. One of Stanley's interests is music.

Jim Fanucchi lives in Saratoga and joined the Pioneers last month.

Rachel McDaniel-Fischer is a native Californian and lives in San Jose. She works as a probation officer. Her

ancestor is Drew Mays McDaniel Sr. and her father is Drew Mays McDaniel Jr.. Rachel has told us, "The California Pioneers of Santa Clara County work in the community gave me a renewed appreciation for our California heritage through historical awareness which has been a very pleasant surprise for me."

Drew Mays McDaniel Jr. is a native of Texas and was given a Pioneers membership at the Loomis Level for his 80th birthday by his daughter Rachel. He lives in San Jose and was a professional truck driver. He came to California with his family in 1953. His father, Drew McDaniel Sr., was a WWI veteran and is buried at Golden State National Cemetery. His mother was Francis Sue Avant.

Curt A. Moore lives in San Jose and serves as Director of Housing, GSB, Stanford. His mother is Lita Mae Rasmussen Moore and his father is Robert James Moore. His

ancestors came to California around 1846 from Mexico, England and France and included Maria Faustina Ceseña Wilkes, Frank (Francis) Wilkes, Eliza Fiacro Wilkes Montroy, Philippe Montroy/Montreluil/Montrouil and Peslita Rasmussen.

Curt is interested in local history, historical buildings and the Californios. The memberships for Curt and his two teen-age daughters (see below) were gifts from Curt's wife, Lois Fisher Moore.

Alexandra Evalita Moore is Curt and Lois Moore's daughter and lives in San Jose. Alexandra and Catherine (below) are seventh generation Californians.

Catherine Annelise Moore is also Curt and Lois Moore's daughter and lives in San Jose. ❖

Membership Report

The membership dues for the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County are **due on January 1st every year.**

You can pay your annual dues for 2016 by mailing them to CA Pioneers, Membership Chair, P.O. Box 8208, San Jose, CA, 95155, or bring a check to our December luncheon. Basic dues are still only \$25.

Check your mailing label on the Trailblazer and it will indicate when your dues have expired. For example, if after your name it says, Dec-15, that means your Pioneers membership is up-to-date until the end of 2015.

Additional donations or higher membership levels are always appreciated.

Visit www.CaliforniaPioneers.com for more details. And please don't forget the Pioneers in your estate planning. If you have questions, please contact April Halberstadt at 408-293-2860 or email her at aprilhalb@gmail.com. ❖

Donating to the Pioneers From Your IRA

In recent years, retirees have been able to utilize the "Qualified Charitable Distribution" (QCD) rules to donate *directly* from an IRA to a charity, decreasing taxes owed on their Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) for the year.

Unfortunately, the QCD rules have come and gone several times since they were created in 2006, and after being briefly reinstated at the end of 2014, the rules for QCDs have lapsed once

again for 2015, raising doubt for those who want to donate for 2015.

But the benefit of contributing RMDs directly to a charity as though the QCD rules still existed is that, if they *are* retroactively reinstated again for 2015 (as they have been in 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014) then the direct charitable contribution will retroactively qualify, because the rules were otherwise complied with. ❖



Time Travel *(Past News from San Jose Newspaper Archives)*

Santa Clara County, July, 1905: Congress Springs Park was sold to a corporation known as the Congress Springs Improvement Co., headed by Judge J. R. Welch as president. This transaction went on to stress the sale and consumption of the far-famed Congress Spring water which scooped up first prize at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 as the best mineral water in the U.S.

Palo Alto, August, 1905: Shall the telephone poles of Palo Alto be square painted white or shall they be round and painted green? This was the harassing question that confronted Sunset Phone Co. officials and the town's Board of Directors. The Telephone Company was to make extensions into residential areas of the town and insisted the only way to go, economy wise, would be round poles painted green. Town officials desired their present

pole arrangement, square painted white. This agenda flared for months when the city finally surrendered to round poles painted green and all brought to uniform height.

San Jose, July 24, 1912: Herman & Son just completed painting the Court House. As a climax to their work flag pole painter Lee Jensen shimmied the 65-foot shaft for its share of paint. With paint pot and brush he scaled the pole from the dome to the tip. The task nearly proved disastrous for Jensen when the huge glass ball that capped the pole broke, scattering glass in all directions. Within a few days fearless Jensen was back to complete the job, installing a non-glass gilded ball while giving the pole its final coat.

San Jose, Aug. 1912: Lights to make city shine! An electrical firm



had a workforce placing electric light bulbs outlining the entire northern front of the City Hall. The lights ran from the ground to the roof at the northeast and northwest corners and extended along the cornice of the entire north front and also outlined the central tower. Five hundred bulbs were required at a cost of \$700. *(This 1887 brick structure that withstood the 1906 earthquake was doomed by progress in 1958.)* ❖

Pioneers Sunshine

Let us know if you learn of a Pioneers member who is ill or needs some cheer. Our Sunshine Chair is Madeline Streight and you can contact her by email (madeline.streight@att.net) or phone (408-259-4422). ❖



Pioneers Gone to the Golden Hills



Leota E. Jett



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Our Mission is to promote, preserve, and celebrate
the history of Santa Clara County and the heritage
of its past generations. We collect, archive, educate
and encourage research and scholarship.