



Since 1971

## THE GATE POST

◆ October-December 2025 ◆

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## Hopkins 125th Wedding Anniversary Celebration a Big Success

Approximately 200 people joined our celebration of the 125th Wedding Anniversary of Helen Hopkins and Augustus Taylor on Saturday, September 13th. The party took place at the Hopkins mansion on the grounds of Vallombrosa Retreat Center. Numerous vintage cars, including a vintage police car and Old Tom, Menlo Park's vintage fire engine, delighted attendees outside (*see page 3*). Inside, a variety of presentations and artifacts entertained and educated guests.

Helen Hopkins was the grandniece of Mark Hopkins of Big Four railroad fame. Her father, Edward Whiting Hopkins (frequently known as E.W. Hopkins) purchased the civil-war era mansion at Vallombrosa in the early 1880s. The family enjoyed the mansion as their summer home, where Edward's wife, Georgina Smith Hopkins, and their children, Helen, Edna, Georgina, Samuel, and Florence, frequently entertained. The society wedding of Helen Hopkins and Augustus Taylor took place in a parlor in the mansion, which is also where we celebrated their 125th wedding anniversary.

The Museum of American Heritage ([moah.org](http://moah.org)) had the mansion's East Parlor filled with artifacts from their extensive collection. They included vintage telephones, toasters, and other appliances,

as well as a series of mystery items about which people could try to guess what they were. Multiple vintage phonographs were among the artifacts. One played vintage tunes that brought the upbeat sounds of long ago back to modern ears, giving attendees an auditory historical perspective.



*Steve Walter (right) with a life-sized cutout of Helen Hopkins Taylor and family members, (l to r) son-in-law Brian and daughters Marika and Corey. Steve's wife Diane was in the Peninsula Harmony Chorus Annual Show that day, so she's not pictured. See pages 4-5 for a story about the Walter family.*

*(Continued on page 2)*

# Hopkins *(Continued from page 1)*

Jim Wall, the Museum of American Heritage's president, gave a fascinating presentation on "Quack Medicine in the 1900s." It included a number of vintage machines and



*Deric Torres, Senior Vice President of Clars Auction Gallery, providing information and valuations of items attendees brought to the event.*

devices that wasted people's money long ago – and made the audience grateful we live in the age of modern medicine. Some of the devices, however, were strikingly similar to those currently sold online and on late-night television, so *buyer beware* remains good advice.

Deric Torres, Senior Vice President of Clars Auction Gallery (clars.com), shared his expertise by providing

information and valuations of items attendees brought. It was just like the Antiques Road Show had come to Menlo Park. Deric's deep knowledge and passion for history make every item he discusses fascinating. You may have seen Deric also as a regular guest commentator on California and Washington state PBS stations. He has also been featured on the internationally syndicated television series *Pawn Stars* on the History Channel.

Karen Kitterman, Menlo Park Historical Association board member, gave presentations on the Hopkins family and mansion history. They included an extensive series of photographs from Helen Hopkin's family photo albums, which are now part of UC Berkeley's special collections. Dori Ives, a Hopkins family descendent, provided additional family photographs for the event. She also brought some beautiful family heirlooms attendees enjoyed viewing, while Deric Torres described their origins and significance.

The Daughters of the American Revolution (dar.org) joined the event as well. Members of the local El Palo Alto Chapter (<https://elpaloalto.californiadar.org>) hosted an information table with exhibits on the mansion's expansive veranda. The Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in 1890. It is a non-profit, non-political volunteer women's service organization dedicated to historic preservation, education, and patriotism. Members volunteer millions of service hours annually in



*Jim Wall, President of the Museum of American Heritage, giving a talk on Quack Medicine in the 1900s.*



*The Daughters of the American Revolution's information table, hosted by the local El Palo Alto Chapter members.*

their local communities, including supporting military personnel and assisting veteran patients, awarding scholarships and financial aid to students.

Roses and pampas grass plumes decorated the Hopkins mansion for the celebration, echoing the decorations featured at the September 1900 wedding of Helen Hopkins and Augustus Taylor. Their wedding was covered extensively in local newspapers, which is how we were able to have the same types of decorations. Three hundred guests attended their wedding, with many arriving to Menlo Park via a special wedding train.

Guests at our anniversary celebration also enjoyed raffles and beautiful vintage-inspired cakes from Menlo Park's Susie Cakes bakery. We had a special cake-cutting



*A life-sized cutout of Helen Hopkins Taylor, from a 1902 photograph, was part of the event, shown here in the Hopkins mansion with Jennifer Ives Larson and Dori McNear Ives, descendants of the Hopkins family.*

ceremony, featuring Menlo Park's mystery sword, which long-time resident Steve Walter uncovered in his yard in the mid 1980s. See *Menlo Park's Mystery Sword* article on page 4 for more details on the sword and cakes!

# Hopkins *(Continued from page 2)*

## Montage of vintage cars



*The Hopkins mansion as it appeared circa 1908, with daughter Georgina Hopkins McNear and one of her children, together with a pony.*

*Special Thanks to Our Friends Who Brought Vintage Cars that Delighted Children and Adults Alike: Dave Blackman, Bob Budelli, Augustine Buonocore, William Dixon (MPPD), Shane Fazzino, Dan Fowler, Nick Sharma, David Shawcross, Jim Wall, and Mike Wegener (MPFD).*

# Menlo Park's Mystery Sword

In September, 2018, MPHA received a call from long-time Menlo Park resident Steve Walter asking if he could borrow a sword he had donated to the Association in the mid 1990s. One of his daughters was getting married and wanted to cut her wedding cake with the same sword that Steve and his wife Diane had used in 1986 to cut their wedding cake. Steve had unearthed the beautiful sword while doing landscaping work in his yard, in preparation for his and Diane's garden wedding. He had been using a rototiller, and it kicked up what he thought was a root, which he tossed aside while he finished rototilling. He soon discovered this it was not a root but an old sword with an ornate yellow metal handle. It was quite dirty, but Steve was able to remove the blade from the scabbard and found the lower 2/3 of the blade was still chromed and shiny. The top of the blade showed some corrosion/rust indicating that water had entered top of the scabbard while it had been buried under inches of soil for years.

On Steve and Diane's wedding day in May 1986, when it came time to cut the wedding cake, Steve realized that the sword would be a much more dramatic instrument than a kitchen knife. Telling Diane and all the guests to hold on for just a minute, Steve ran into the house, leaving all to wonder if he was getting cold feet. Upon his return and realizing what he had in mind, Diane joined him using the sword to cut their first piece of wedding cake (see photo). Don't ask if Steve thought to wipe down the sword blade before bringing it out; he doesn't recall that detail. It's entirely possible that the piece of cake they shared was cut with a blade that had spent the previous four, five, or six decades buried in the dirt, behind the home they had then at 641 Arbor Road. The yard there appeared never to have been cultivated before Steve and Diane decided to landscape it for their garden wedding.

For decades Walter family members have wondered about the origin of the sword. Steve and Diane came up

with two scenarios, both based on facts that they learned about the house at 641 Arbor Road. An anecdotal story is that it had been the Camp Fremont Paymaster's house during WWI and was originally located on Middle Avenue, where the New Community Church is now located.



641 Arbor, circa 1993

Frank Helfrich helped with the original research and told Steve that he remembered that his nanny owned or rented the house back when Frank was a toddler in the 1930s. Frank had played sometimes in her backyard when he was under her care. When the church was constructed in about 1948, the house was moved to the 641 Arbor Road location, where it stayed until it was demolished in the late 1990s, after Steve and Diane had sold it.

During WWI, when the house was on Middle Avenue, it backed up to the parade grounds for Camp Fremont, where soldiers drilled, and ceremonial parades would have taken place. Mounted cavalry may have also practiced and paraded there. Swords would have been used by cavalry troops, so it seems conceivable that one of the swords could have fallen and been lost on the parade ground. Conceivable but not likely.

The other scenario that could explain how the sword came to be on the property is that the property was owned, or perhaps rented, by a Japanese gardener in the years prior to WW II. His name was Kay Suzuki (wife Natsu). Records maintained by the MPHA show their home as being at the corner of Arbor and Middle. Along with other Japanese Americans, they may have been relocated to internment camps early in the war. If the sword had belonged to Suzuki family, it is possible they buried it on the property behind their home, intending to reclaim it when they returned. Their names were not associated with the property later. In any case, if they were the original owners of the sword, they did unearth it later.

In 2019, the Walter family borrowed the sword for their daughter Corey's wedding celebration, where Corey and her husband Johnathan used it to cut their wedding cake (see photo). It was then returned to the Association and brought to our 125th Wedding Anniversary celebration, where Steve Walter gave a presentation on the sword's discovery in Menlo Park and its history.

After Steve's presentation, Deric Torres of Clars Auction Gallery helped solve part of the sword's mystery.



Steve and Diane's 1986 wedding, cutting cake with sword. They donated it to MPHA ten years later.

# Sword *(Continued from page 4)*



*The Walters' daughter's Corey and Johnathan's 2019 wedding, cutting cake with sword they borrowed it from MPHA for her wedding*

He revealed that the sword is in fact a Japanese military sword of a style adopted in 1886 (Japanese calendar for 1886 is Meiji 19) and is called a Type 19 Kyu-Gunto sword. The style continued until the 1940s. It is an Army officer's sword used for dress and parades, not combat. It was inspired by European sword styles but made uniquely Japanese with beautiful chrysanthemum flower decorations. (Those with eagle eyes and good memories might recall Melanie in *Gone with the Wind* holding a very similar sword in the scene after Scarlett O'Hara had shot a pillaging soldier who'd entered their house). Japanese

police had very similar swords, but theirs had five-petal flowers, whereas Army swords had ten-petal flowers like the one Steve found.

We hope to continue studying and learning about Menlo Park's mystery sword. In the meantime, the Walters' other daughter Marika and her husband Brian dressed in vintage attire and used the sword to cut a vintage-style wedding cake at our 125th Wedding Anniversary celebration (see photo). Thus, Marika and Brian became the third couple in the Walter family to use the sword to cut a wedding cake. We wish all the Walter family members much marital bliss and thank them for their generosity!



*Steve Walter in vintage attire at the 125th Wedding Anniversary celebration, showing the mystery sword while educating attendees about its history.*



*The Walters' other daughter Marika and her husband Brian, in vintage attire, continued the family tradition, using the sword to cut the cake at our 125th Wedding Anniversary.*



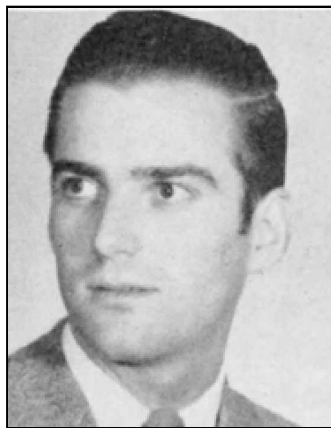
*Special thanks to Brian Ferrin, Cheeky Monkey Toys, Kepler's Books, and Menlo Park Hardware (Ace) in Menlo Park for their donations of gift baskets and items we raffled at the 125th Anniversary event.*



# A Little More About Frank Helfrich

Our last Gate Post Newsletter included a tribute to Frank Helfrich, who was an active member of the Menlo Park Historical Association for over 30 years, serving on the board and twice as president. We knew Frank mostly during his retirement years but wanted to share some of Frank's early life story as well. Francis Eugene Helfrich was born on November 6, 1928, the youngest of seven children. His father William J. Helfrich passed away aged 41, on May 5, 1929, one day before Frank was six months old. May 5, 1929 was also his mother's 37th birthday. His father had been a bond broker, and the market crashed in October 1929, five months after he had passed. Frank's mother, Evangelist Costello Helfrich, lived to be 101 years old and passed away in 1993.

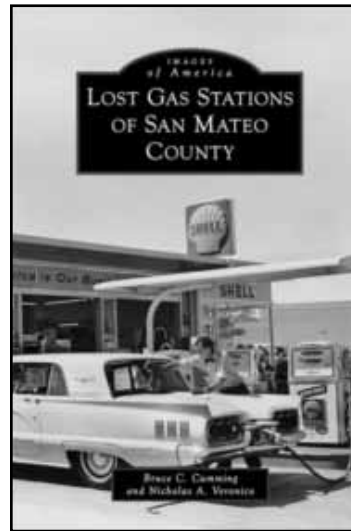
Frank was raised in Menlo Park and graduated from Sequoia High School in 1947. He then attended San Jose State University and Santa Clara University, graduating in 1951 with a degree in business administration. After graduation, Frank was drafted into the US Army and deployed to Korea. He served two years of active duty and was awarded an honorable discharge in late 1953. In early 1954, Frank began working for the Federal Reserve Bank, where he was employed for 30 years in various capacities, including as an internal auditor. Frank was an avid traveler as well. A summer trip to Europe in 1950 with some of his Santa Clara classmates opened his eyes to the world, and he wanted to see more. From 1955



*Frank as a Santa Clara University student*

to 1980, Frank traveled extensively through Europe, Mexico, and the Holy Land. His favorite country was Italy. Being an avid historian and lifelong Menlo Park resident, Frank pursued his interests during retirement as an active member of the Menlo Park Historical Association. His remains are interred at Holy Cross Cemetery in Menlo Park. We are grateful for Frank's fine example and many years of service.

*Looking for a good read or meaningful holiday gift for a local history buff? We recommend "Lost Gas Stations of San Mateo County" by Bruce Cumming and Nicolas Veronico. You can purchase it on Amazon. Bruce and Nick spent two years collecting photographs, maps, and stories from archives, garages, and long-time residents. The result is an amazing book with lots of photos and historical information.*



## ANNOUNCEMENT!

We are delighted to announce: long-time Sunset Magazine Travel Editor, Peter Fish, will be the speaker at this year's Annual Meeting (Sunday, November 23rd, 2-4pm at the MP Library). Peter wrote and edited for Sunset Magazine for more than 30 years. He's an award winning writer who also rescued the Sunset Magazine's archives and had them safely re-homed at Stanford University. He's also an expert on the Sunset Headquarters at 80 Willow Road. Peter's presentation will include a slideshow with images from the Sunset archives. Peter has a Bachelors of Arts in American History from Yale University and a Masters of Arts in English, Creative Writing from Stanford University. He was also a Hoyns Fellow in Creative Writing at the University of Virginia. You may have also read some of Peter's articles not only in Sunset Magazine but also in the San Francisco Chronicle, AAA's Via Magazine, AFAR, Coastal Living, Westways, and Alta.

REGISTRATION CARD (Men born on or after July 1, 1924, and on or before December 31, 1924)			
FORM APPROVED Budget Bureau No. 33-8012-42			
(Also for the registration of men as they reach the 18th anniversary of the date of their birth on or after January 1, 1943.)			
SERIAL NUMBER W. 307	1. NAME (Print) Francis Eugene Helfrich		ORDER NUMBER 11.724
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 920 De las Pulgas Rd., Menlo Park San Mateo Calif.			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON LINE 2 ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]			
3. MAILING ADDRESS Same			
4. TELEPHONE Palo Alto 6483			
5. AGE IN YEARS 18		6. PLACE OF BIRTH San Francisco	
DATE OF BIRTH 11 6 28		Calif.	
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs. Margaret O'Brien, 1421 Balboa St., San Francisco, Cal. (Aunt)			
8. EMPLOYEE'S NAME AND ADDRESS Student			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS			
10. SIGNATURE Francis E. Helfrich			

*Frank's draft registration card.*

## A Special Thank you!

Special Thanks to Everyone Who Helped MPHA with the 125th Wedding Anniversary Event: Atherton Heritage Room, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, Brian Ferrin, Cheeky Monkey Toys, Clars Auction Gallery, Dorthy Ives, Fred Weissberg, Lynn and Jim Bramlett, Menlo Circus Club, Museum of American Heritage, Nevada County Historical Archive, Paul Martin, SusieCakes Bakery in Menlo Park, Truckee-Donner Historical Society, Vallombrosa Retreat Center and Its Fabulous Staff, Vintage Car Team: Dave Blackman, Bob Budelli, Augustine Buonocore, William Dixon (Menlo Park Police Department), Shane Fazzino, Dan Fowler, Nick Sharma, David Shawcross, Jim Wall, and Mike Wegener (Menlo Park Fire Department), and countless generous volunteers!

## Volunteers

We're always looking for members to get involved with organizing the office, helping with requests for photos or articles, as well as scanning images, filing, and more. Perhaps you'd like to even create a walking tour or lead one. And if you're tech-savvy, we could use computer help too! We also need assistance keeping the office open on Tuesdays from noon to 2pm. If interested, please email us at [mphistorical@yahoo.com](mailto:mphistorical@yahoo.com).



## Upcoming events for 2025

### Union Cemetery Tour

Sunday, October 26  
10:00 am, Redwood City  
(One hour tour)

### Annual Meeting

Guest Speaker: Sunset Magazine's Peter Fish  
November 23, 2:00 to 4:00 pm  
Menlo Park Library

## HAPPY Anniversary

### Happy 100th Anniversary to Draeger's Market and Happy 75th Anniversary to Kepler's Books!

Draeger's and Kepler's service to Menlo Park's communities and contributions to Menlo Park's history are greatly appreciated! Wishing us all many happy years to come!

Join us for an hour long tour of the

**Union Cemetery**

Sunday, October 26  
10:00 am  
Redwood City



Entrance and parking located at 330 Woodside Rd, next to M&M Nursery. The cemetery is wheelchair accessible with flat gravel paths and an access ramp. Please note there are no restroom facilities or drinking water.



*Since 1971*

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Simply send a \$30 check made out to "MPHA"  
and mail to: MPHA, 800 Alma St.,  
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