

# CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY WORKING HARD TO PRESERVE AREAS RICH AND COLORFUL HISTORY

By Marci Wormser

Ann Vincent's passion is Chatsworth history, working to ensure that Chatsworth's colorful history as a pioneer town and later as a movie mecca will not be forgotten by future generations.

Ann, along with her husband, Ray, joined the Chatsworth Historical Society nearly 20 years ago. As a Chatsworth High School graduate, she currently serves as the Society's historian and newsletter editor, while her husband, who also matriculated from Chatsworth High, is the research director. Their focus in recent years has been to digitize the collections for safekeeping and research. These efforts have resulted in 25 presentations on Chatsworth History, available at [slideshare.net/chatsworthhistory](http://slideshare.net/chatsworthhistory), or [chatsworthhistory.com](http://chatsworthhistory.com). The chatsworth history website also includes a variety of research documents and publications available to the public.

Together with Linda and Andre van der Valk, as co-presidents, and other volunteers, the group works to preserve historic landmarks in the area; collect artifacts and historical documents that represent the history of Chatsworth and surrounding communities; and educate the public about the area's rich history.

"We want kids to learn the way things used to be done," Ann says. "I think that as we look back on our lives, we realize what was important for us growing up...We want future generations to have the opportunity to learn and experience



**TEA AND SCONES**

how things were done in the olden days." To that end, the organization regularly does presentations and provides tours to Chatsworth Park Elementary School students and other groups.

The Historical Society was founded in 1963 to save and move the historic Pioneer Church – now located at Oakwood Memorial Park on Lassen Street - that was slated for demolition.

About 15 years later, the organization became conservator of the 1.3-acre parcel of land located in Chatsworth Park South that's known as Homestead Acre. That land parcel is where the Historical Society resides. The Homestead Acre is home to the 1911 Hill-Palmer Homestead Cottage, the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum, the Frank H. Schepler Jr. Memorial Library and more than an acre of gardens.

As a result of the Homestead Act of 1862, U.S. citizens could acquire up to 160 acres of federal land. In 1886, James David and

Rhoda Jane Hill homesteaded 120 acres with their eight children. Their daughter Minnie was born in 1886 in Chatsworth, and lived in the cottage most of her life, raising her children with her husband Alfred Palmer, and caring for her mother. Over the years the homestead grew to 230 acres.

In 1956, Henry Berkenkamp of Oroweat Bakeries bought the Hill Homestead property, granting a life tenancy agreement for Minnie Hill Palmer to live rent free at her 1911 cottage and surrounding grounds of 1.3 acres. Henry represented the Aqua Sierra Sportmans Club (a skeet shooting range and golf course). The Club grew and became the Roy Rogers Sports Center in 1959, until it was closed in 1968. In 1973 the City of Los Angeles purchased the 75 acre skeet/fishing/golf course site, and it became today's Chatsworth Park South.

In 1976 Minnie moved out of the cottage to a retirement home, and passed away in 1981 at the age of 94. In 1978 the Chatsworth

Historical Society was named as conservator of the Homestead Acre.

"Minnie Palmer was good friends with the founding Historical Society members," says Ann. "She asked the Historical Society to be custodians of her remaining property". The Hill-Palmer Cottage is the only remaining homestead cottage in the San Fernando Valley. It was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

"Today, the museum display celebrates Chatsworth's founding in 1888, and represents 130 years of Chatsworth history," Ann says. It houses such items as historical photos and maps from as far back as 1880, Native American artifacts from the surrounding hills, old handtools and various display cases on the first pioneer families.

The Societies archives include photographs and memorabilia from the Iverson Movie Ranch, best known for Classic and Western films. "Shirley Temple was making movies at Iverson Ranch in Chatsworth," says Ann. "A lot of early silent films and many westerns were filmed in Chatsworth." And of course Roy Rogers and Dale Evans lived just down the road from the Acre, and filmed their television show episodes at their Double R Bar ranch on Andora St. "Chatsworth was a major movie hub," concedes Ann.

In addition to housing archives



**AT THE HILL - PALMER COTTAGE**

and preserving the Hill-Palmer Cottage, the Society also works on preserving other local landmarks. "We have quite a few landmarks here in Chatsworth," says Ann.

Landmarks include the historic lime kiln, which is located at the Chatsworth Reservoir near Woolsey Canyon Road; Harvester Barn on Devonshire Street; the Munch Box eatery, also on Devonshire Street; Stoney Point; and 76 olive trees on Lassen Street that were planted in 1890.

"There will be more," Ann promises. ETI Corral 54, a local equestrian group, is working with the Society to obtain landmark status for the local Old Mission Trail to ensure its preservation.

The Society holds two communitywide events each year to help maintain the Hill-Palmer

Cottage and pay for new museum displays, says Ann. The Garden Festival, held on the last Sunday in April, pays homage to the city's namesake. "Volunteers serve tea and scones in the cottage garden," Ann says. "It's our tie back to England because Chatsworth was named after Chatsworth, England."

Pioneer Day is held on the first Sunday in October and features such tradespeople of yore as woodcarvers and blacksmiths, along with arts and crafts booths, vendors, games and such activities as panning for gold and bee keeping.

The organization is largely run by docents and volunteers, says Ann, who are just as passionate about the history of their community as she is. "We're always looking for more docents, and the gardens and roses can always use volunteer help" she says.

An open house event at the Homestead Acre, where docents lead tours of the cottage, is held from 1-4 p.m. on the first Sunday of every month, except on holiday weekends.

For more information about the Chatsworth Historical Society or to find out how to become a docent or volunteer, email [chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com) or call 818-882-5614. ❖



**ALONG WITH GARDEN FESTIVAL CANDLES**