



Smoke Signal

CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Co-Presidents: Linda & André van der Valk

November 2024, Issue #5

Editor: Ann Vincent

Co-Presidents' Message

By Linda & André van der Valk

It is hard to believe that it is November already and the holidays are right around the corner. November is a month of thanks and I would like to mention a few of our docents that are not only active with us but other organizations in the community.

We are of course very thankful to Ann and Ray for preserving the history of Chatsworth through their research and digital records on our website. Ann is also President of The Friends of the Chatsworth Library which makes sure that our library gets what they need that the city does not provide. Ann is also active in the Women's Club, DAR and gives the history of the stagecoach in our area during the 3rd grade tours of our State Park. Ray leads hikes at the field trips and also manages the Library book sales.

Jelena Csanyi is there with whatever we need at the acre which is a lot. She helps me with the displays in the museum and she is the official dresser of our bear in the display case. She is also President of the Chatsworth Community Coordinating Council which brings together the different community organizations once a month. She also oversees the CCCC banquet that recognizes the Citizen and Youth of the Year for Chatsworth. Volunteers from the various organization are recognized for their hard work in the community. Jelena also volunteers with the Friends of the Library and helps with the bear display there.

Wendi Gladstone has been helping out at all of our events (where she mans the front gate) and also attends our Sunday Open Houses with Bob Dager. Wendi is President of the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association. Wendi and Bob are also involved in Sky Valley Volunteers, who plant oak trees in our community to replenish the oaks in our area.
(continued next page)

Chatsworth Historical Society Board of Directors 2024-2025

Co-Presidents	Linda & André van der Valk
Treasurer.....	Jim Van Gundy
Secretary.....	Donna Nachtrab
Hospitality.....	Jelena Csanyi
Gardens	
Smoke Signal Editor.....	Ann Vincent
Research Director.....	Ray Vincent

Upcoming Events

OPEN HOUSE

Continues each 1st Sunday of the month from 1 to 4pm.

General Meeting

Harvester Barn and Mr. Ed

**November 19,
Tuesday 6:30pm**

Join us as we discuss our
LA Historic-Cultural
Monument #645, on
Devonshire west of the
Elementary School.



Harvester was the father of Mr. Ed the Talking Horse. We will also show the 1963 television episode where Mr. Ed coaches the Dodgers to a championship.

Program will
be available in
person at the
Homestead
ACRE and on
Zoom;



[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

Or go to: www.Zoom.us/join
or Dial: (669) 900 9128

Meeting ID: 848 4323 4310 Passcode: 100200

(continued from front page)

Dottie Acker helps with the cottage. She works on our Sunday Open Houses and does the tours concerning the Minnie Hill Palmer family and their contributions in the community. Dottie also organizes the 3rd grade tours for the Santa Susana Pass State Historical Park. This is a wonderful program that allows the 3rd graders to come in and hike in our hills and learn about the stagecoach, the quarry and about the Native Americans that were in our area. This program is run by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains. And Dottie is the treasurer for the CCCC and membership chairman for the Friends of the Library.

Jennifer Romero is another docent that helps with the many things that need to be done at the acre. Jennifer is the current President of the Chatsworth Women's Club. The Women's Club has been in our community for over 100 years. They raise funds and help with different community needs. I heard they also host a great Bingo game.

I know there are many other organizations in the community that do great things but I wanted to recognize the ones that our active docents are involved with. I am pretty sure that these organizations have web sites if you want to learn more about what they do.

We are thankful this year for all of our docents and volunteers that make our community a better place to live in.

Happy Holidays, Linda and Andre

Memorial Brick Plaza



Click the link below for the Memorial Brick Order Form, \$100 per brick.

[Brick Order Form.pdf](#)

Our next brick order will be March 1, 2025

For more information, send an email to chatsworthhistory@gmail.com or call 818-882-5614.

Included in this newsletter:

NOTE: Watch for links in our articles that allow easy access to more information. Right click with your mouse to open the link in a new window, so you can easily get back to the original newsletter.

- **Johnson Family Donations**
- **Pioneer Day**
- **Wheat Farming and the Williams Family in Chatsworth**

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

Drop by to say hello at our Sunday Open House... even if you have seen the museum and cottage, we have a group of members who enjoy sitting out in the shade just inside the gate where we welcome everyone, or on the front porch of the cottage. If you have a Chatsworth story to tell, or would like to hear more about our history or recent activities, come join us for these casual discussions.

GARDEN DOCENTS

Have you noticed how beautiful our roses are looking! Credit goes to Kathy Perger (below) who has diligently been deadheading our rose gardens. Kathy is a member of the San Fernando Valley Rose Society and is training Wendy in the art of pruning.



Wendy Say and Gary Standke spent a day sanding and resealing our wood benches to get them ready for the rainy season.

We could write more about Gary Standke's additional activities outside of our acre with the Blacksmith Association and Adams Forge, State Parks, etc...but we have run out of room!

We have a great team!

Johnson Family Donations – Molly and Ed Garitee

On Nov. 1st we were honored to have Molly and Ed Garitee visit us at the Acre.



Linda van der Valk, Ray and I enjoyed hearing the stories and seeing the items that Molly had brought to donate.

Molly is the Daughter of Mary Huff, who published the book “Grandma Ann”, written by her grandmother Mary Johnson Proctor about her mother Ann Johnson.

The Ann and Niels Johnson family were one of our first homesteaders in the area in the 1870’s (north of the 118 freeway). We are fortunate that two of Ann Johnson’s daughters wrote books documenting the lives of the Johnson family.



The first version of Ann Johnson’s story, “Our Pioneer Mother” was self-published by Lenora Johnson in 1931. Mary Huff published her grandmother’s 1927 handwritten manuscript of Ann Johnson’s life and story in 2001, “Grandma Ann”. And Mary wrote the Preface and Epilogue to Grandma Ann. We now have both versions available here at the museum.

At the age of four with her parents, in 1849, Ann crossed the Atlantic, sailed up the Mississippi and traveled by wagon train to the raw land of Utah. A bride at fourteen, she was a mother of three when she and her husband Niels decided to flee the Mormon Church and farm in California. Ten years and three children later they homesteaded in the San Fernando Valley, where four more children were born.

One treasure Molly brought us was the family scrapbooks assembled by Mary Huff and Molly. These belong to Molly, but she allowed us to scan the pages so they are preserved and can be shared with other family members.

The majority of the items donated were passed down to Molly through Mary Huff. They had originally belonged to Lenora Johnson MacDonald (1869-1947), the sixth child of Ann and Neils Johnson.



Lenora Johnson MacDonald

Lenora got her teaching degree in 1891. She started teaching at Chatsworth Park Elementary School for 3 years, then married David S MacDonald in June 1894. He unfortunately had tuberculosis at the time and he died 15 months later in Dec. 1895. Lenora was a widow at the age of 27 years. By 1900, she moved to teach at LaVerne Grammar School. Later she became engaged to Fredrick G Charlton, a previous Chatsworth neighbor and an aspiring artist who became an illustrator for the San Francisco Chronicle. He survived the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, but was killed 4 months later by a streetcar in Los Angeles where he managed his art business.



*Lenora Johnson MacDonald
“Gibson Girl” Style portrait by
Frederick Charlton*

In 1913, Lenora had a house built for her mother Ann, so Ann could move down from the homestead property to Chatsworth on what was Santa Susana Pass Road and is now Bee Canyon. Her son Charles also purchased land and built his own home just north of Ann’s house. That way, Ann would still be very close to family. Ann’s younger sons continued to live on and manage the ranch.

In 1926 Lenora retired from teaching after 30 years, received a pension and lived out the rest of her days in Hollywood. (Note: Frederick Charlton was the son of George G. Charlton who homesteaded the Stoney Point acreage in 1894. Several of his artwork pieces were donated by Molly and Ed for our collection.)



*Sketch of 1890 Santa Susana School
by Frederick Charlton*

Pioneer Day THANK YOU

We were fortunate to have a great group of volunteers and organizations assist us with our annual Pioneer Day.

We could not have done this without the following organizations that provided their time, manpower and resources to make this a fun filled day. Before we opened the event, over 150 volunteers were already on hand to run the activities and our parking lot was mostly full. So...we really appreciate the shuttle service to and from the train depot from Councilman Lee's office and the porta-potties. The NJROTC from El Camino helped us set up and take down along with Lawrence Middle School Leadership students and teachers. This year, due to the heat, we only had about 800 people. It was really hot and everyone still came to help and enjoy our event. All said and done, it was a successful fundraiser for the Historical Society giving the community the opportunity to come see and experience our pioneer activities.

Thank you to:

Panning for Gold -Keene Engineering
The Valley Hive – Bee keeping
Standing Bear Trading Station -Leatherwork
Blacksmith – Gary Standke
Baking & Butter Churning – Nita Standke
Spinners - Los Angeles Spinning Guild
Southern California Handweavers Guild
Quilters 4 Others - Kids quilt craft
Woodland Hills Rock Chippers
Boy Scouts - knot tying and lashing
Pioneer Church -St. Mary's the Virgin Church
Santa Susana Mountain Park Association
Foundation for the Preservation of the SS
Mountains
Sky Valley Volunteers
Daughters of the American Revolution
Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War
Chatsworth Neighborhood Council
Archeology Adventure – Duke Mulholland
Bake Sale – Rumpa Mishra & the Chatsworth
Women's Club

Lawrence Middle School - Chores and Games of Yore -

Note- Teachers and students managed events:
Cornhusk Dolls, Paper dolls, Paper flowers, Telegraph
display, Music, Sack races, Hoop Rolling, Tug of War,
Washboard laundry, Fishing, and Braiding.

NJROTC – students from El Camino Real HS –
Setup and teardown

Thanks again to Councilman John Lee and staff:
Shuttle bus and porta-potties

In addition to the organizations that show up share their expertise, I need to also thank our CHS volunteers for the day. Jelena Csanyi, Donna Nachtrab, Linda van der Valk, Lynelle Harrigan, and Kathy Perger for assisting in the Museum and at our information desk.

Wendi Gladstone and Wendy Say greeted our guests and managed the gate at the entrance.



The parking lot along with the shuttle buses were managed by Bill Dushman, John Kuhn and Ray Vincent. They also helped supervise the set-up operation on Saturday with the NJROTC to make sure we were ready to go.

Kathy Perger helped coordinate the shuttle buses, waiting at the Depot until everything was operating smoothly.



Our snack bar was fully staffed with the van der Valk family and Gary Bercow (dressed in hot dogs, cooking hot dogs) along with Ed (Buck) Barker, owner of the Munch Box and with Rick and Jerry, previous owners of the Chatsworth Florist shop, all supervising the crew. The snack bar was sponsored by the van der Valks and all the remaining food was donated to Rancho San Antonio Boys Town.

In our cottage we had Dottie Acker, Gloria DeMuri, and a new volunteer, Linda Fitak. Bonnie Cross was on the porch as a greeter.

Jacquie O'Connor managed, brought, sold and donated the proceeds for her own native plants while she also distributed native plant Seeds provided by Ann Vincent.

Lots of our volunteers work behind the scenes in advance and on that day making everything run smoothly. Jennifer Romero, Ann Vincent and Donna Nachtrab spent the morning making sure all the crafts for the Chores of Yore were out on the tables and that the students felt comfortable teaching them. These activities are carefully packaged with supplies several months in advance.

Long time member Connie Ager arrived early and helped set up the wash station. We tied up the clothesline, filled up the wash tubs and found just the right items to be washed and hung to dry with clothespins.

The Lawence Art teacher Kathy Lee helped students and guests make cornhusk dolls, while Rebecca Cannady supervised the paper flowers. Nita Standke instructed guests on how to make butter from cream and provided crackers to taste it on.



Gary Standke our blacksmith, was unable to light the forge to make horseshoes due to the excessive heat that day, but he enjoyed speaking with everyone about the art of blacksmithing with a large crowd all day.

The Gold Panning crew was ready with enough real gold to allow all the children to try their hand panning for gold. Pat Keene of Keene Engineering has been coming to our events for many years to let people experience panning.

The Quilters 4 Others, our Blacksmith Gary Standke and Gold Panning sponsored by Pat Keene of Keene Engineering have been at our Pioneer days since 1999.

Extra Thank you to Mark Hovater for creating our video to advertise our program. You can find it here on YouTube. [Promotional Video for 2024 Pioneer Day](#)



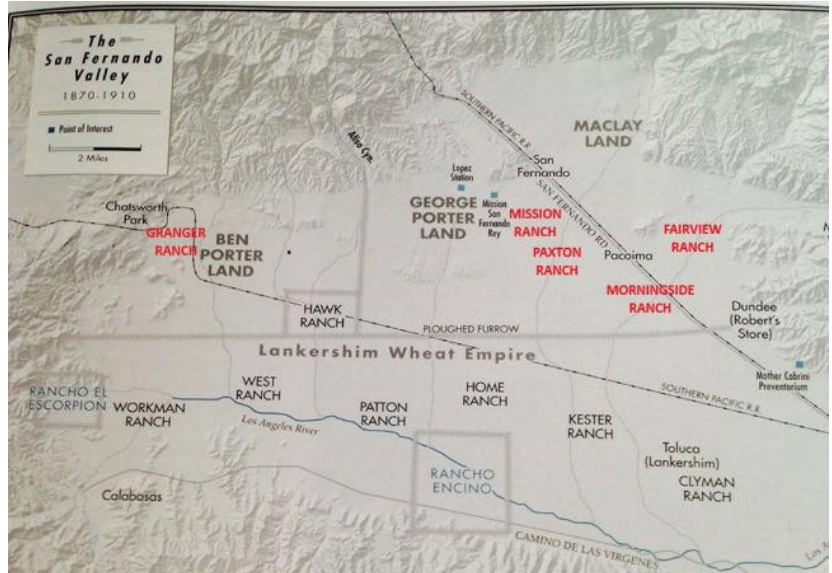
Wheat Farming & The Williams Family in Chatsworth

Program Recap from October 15, 2024. The entire program can be found at [Wheat Farming and the Williams Family in Chatsworth](#) or go to our Presentations folder on [chatsworthhistory.com](#) under Digital Archives to download the PDF program for better quality.

Before Chatsworth was founded in 1888, it was known as the Granger Ranch, owned by Benjamin Porter. Dry wheat farming was the main crop, and homesteader James Williams ran the harvesting crew.

Our [September 2024 Newsletter](#) discussed the 1924 book “[The Valley of San Fernando](#)”, which was written by the direct descendants of the founding families of the North San Fernando Valley.

Dry Wheat Farming was a huge crop in the San Fernando Valley from the 1870's to 1910. Erosion of the surrounding mountains over thousands of years created a flat valley, 8 miles in width by 12 in length. Seasonal creeks from the foothills created a source of groundwater for crops.



The presentation started with a discussion of the 13 wheat ranches in the San Fernando Valley from 1870 to 1910. Their success was brought about by development advances via railroad connections from San Pedro to Los Angeles in 1869, Los Angeles to San Fernando in 1874, and the completion of the 1876 San Fernando tunnel connecting Los Angeles to San Francisco by rail.

By 1880, approximately 25% of the valley was devoted to wheat. A September 1883 article listed sacks of wheat by ranch or owner, the top 10 listed in descending order at right. Lankershim and Van Nuys purchased the southern half of the valley in 1869, and Maclay, with cousins Ben and George Porter, purchased the northern half in 1873/74. A quote from the 1883 article,

“Times are lively at the San Fernando depot... 12 to 14 cars of golden grain are loaded daily. Hubbard, Barnett & Porter will finish the last stack to thresh Tuesday next, and then a grand harvest feast will be given by the **granger**, to their friends here and in Los Angeles.”

Note: A granger is a “grain farmer”. We clarify in the presentation that the Granger Ranch that became Chatsworth in 1888 was not named after W.P. Granger of San Fernando, but no doubt was named as a descriptive term for a Grain Ranch.

Most of the names involved made fortunes from the grain harvests. In 1897 Van Nuys built the Van Nuys Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, seen at right. The building is still standing as the Hotel Barclay ([contemporary view](#)).

Alfred Workman, who started out in 1870 in Chatsworth at Baden and Shoup with mules and some wagons, retired 13 years later at the age of 40 with a mansion at the top of Boyle Heights in downtown Los Angeles.

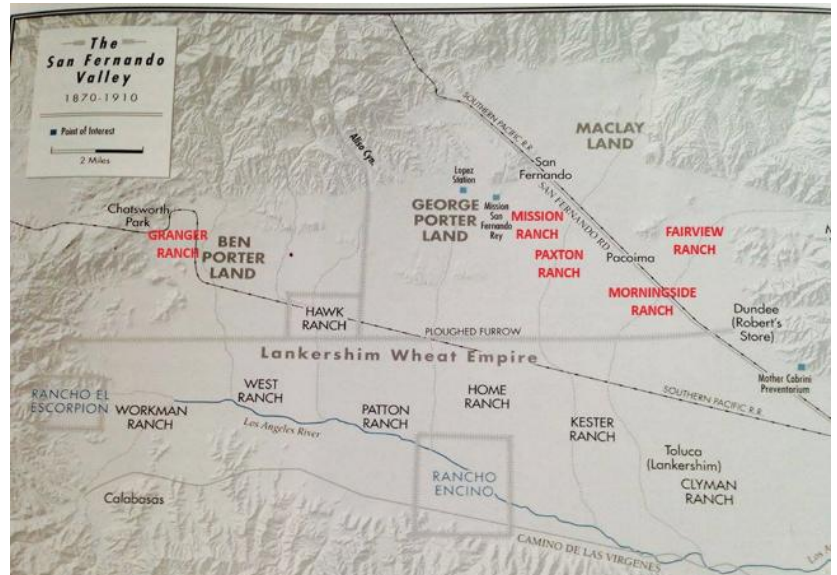
Sacks of Wheat

Kester Rancho	38,500	(Lankershim)
John Clyman	27,550	(Lankershim)
I.N. Van Nuys	22,650	
Ben Porter	21,680	
Alfred Workman	17,655	
George Porter	16,000	
Hubbard & Wright	15,500	
A.G. Patton	15,500	
Senator Maclay	11,759	
Jennifer & Barnett	11,160	



1897 Van Nuys Hotel, N/W corner of Main and 4th Streets. ([Water & Power Museum](#))

The next part of the presentation described wheat farming at that time. In May 1883, Al Workman gave a personal tour of the San Fernando Valley wheat ranches to the editor of the Los Angeles Herald Newspaper. Three editorials were published on subsequent days May 15,16 & 17, [found here](#), which include some amazing descriptions of the tour through the San Fernando Valley at that time. The ranches included were the Clyman, Kester, Van Nuys (Home), Patton and Workman, plus Hubbard and Wright (Hawk Ranch). And the last article ends with a laudatory article on the accomplishments of the Johnson Homestead.



Excerpts from the articles:

“Each ranch had from seventy-five to one hundred and seventy-five heads of horses and mules; during the height of the harvest season from fifty to one hundred men are employed, according to the size of the ranch. Harvesting teams had the capacity of cutting forty acres of grain a day.”

“Each farm is provided with a big well or wells, capable of pumping several hundred thousand gallons of water daily, run by horse power. In addition, a blacksmith, a carpenter and a professional harness-maker are as much incidents of the farming operations of the San Fernando Valley as is the ordinary gang plow. Everything is run on a scale positively Cyclopean.”

Wheat farming has been developed over thousands of years. Dry wheat farming, using sophisticated machines pulled by mules and horses, and threshed with steam engines, allowed for dramatic increases in productivity. James Williams documented his involvement in wheat harvesting with professional photographs, taken around 1890 to 1900.

Step 1 - Plowing the field - turning over the soil (usually after the first rain on October 15th)

Step 2 - Harrowing the field before planting - breaking up and smoothing out the surface of the soil, creating an even seedbed. (Williams photo 1964-06, not show here)

Step 3 - Planting. Perhaps using a Bickford & Huffman Grain Drill circa 1890

Step 4 - Reaping, cutting the wheat with a reciprocating blade, invented in 1833

Step 5 - Gathering the wheat into sheaves, to dry prior to threshing. By the 1890-1900's step 4 and 5 are combined, modifications include loading the cut wheat via a conveyor belt onto a wagon, to be taken to the thresher. (Williams photo 1964-12)

Step 6 - Threshing and Separating - Powered by a steam engine, it was pitchfork-fed into the machine with conveyor belts, a heavy cylinder “threshes” the grain, separating the seed-heads from the seed covering and stalks. (Williams photo 1964-17)

[2-minute movie of steam engine threshing](#)



A mowing machine, also called a "header".
The horizontal blades gather the cut grain, and it is loaded onto a wagon traveling next to the team via a conveyor belt.
Williams photo 1964-12



A wagon is unloaded using a huge net, and grain is pitchforked to a conveyor belt on a steam driven thresher and separator. Steam engine is out of picture at left, turning the conveyor belt in foreground. Sacks filled with grain are stacked at far right.
Williams photo 1964-17

James R Williams (1853-1931), his wife Carrie, and two young boys Elisha and Alfred, came to the Chatsworth Hills and homesteaded 160 acres in the early 1880's -- he filed for his homestead in 1884. He was a farmer in Kansas in 1880, as were his father and brothers. James was the supervisor/roustabout for the Hubbard & Wright harvesting crew.

When the family came from Kansas to Los Angeles, they initially settled in the area around what was then Westlake Park (MacArthur Park today). Los Angeles was still rural in the early 1880's, but Mr. Williams said he needed more room for his cattle and so he moved to the Santa Susana Pass and homesteaded 160 acres.

Caroline Wagman, "Carrie" was born in Sweden in 1854. She immigrated to America alone in 1870, living with friends in a large Swedish farming community in Holdrege, Nebraska. James and Carrie were married in 1876. The 1984 book "Quiet on the Set", pgs. 36-38, tells the story of Carrie moving to Nebraska, and meeting James. The story is told by Carrie's sister Augusta, who homesteaded the 160 acres that adjoined the William's family. Augusta met Carl Iverson, and that homestead became the Iverson Movie Ranch.

Google Earth overlay of the Williams and Iverson Homesteads



In 1897 their homestead was granted, and by 1900 they had purchased two 10-acre sections from Nelson Gray, and they built a new house just south of the school at 22152 Devonshire, the southeast corner of Farralone and Devonshire.

Below -- The Old Williams Home, 22152 Devonshire.

Southeast corner of Devonshire and Farralone. About 1900.

Left to right Ida (11), Carrie (44), James R Jr. "Dick" (6), Elisha M "Shorty" (23), and Mae (14)

Not in Picture: James R Williams Sr (46) and Alfred (21)



The family remained in the area and Dick Williams was able to be present in 1965 when the cornerstone of the Pioneer Church was opened just before it was moved from Topanga Canyon Boulevard up to Oakwood Memorial Park. Three generations of JR Williams are in the photo.

A color photograph of three men in front of a white building. A man in a grey sweater stands on the left, a man in a suit sits on the right, and a man in a light blue jacket sits in the foreground.

1965 Opening the Pioneer Church Cornerstone
Clockwise from left, with ages, 3 generations of James
Richard Williams
Rick (21), Jim (44), Dick (71)

Dick Williams

Exchanged Chatham P. Or
 J. R. Williams Son & P. W. Jr.
 House still standing north
 of Chatham house.

1.64-14

Virginia Watson Museum & Gift Shop

The following items are available for sale during Open Houses on the first Sunday of the month. To arrange to purchase items at other times, email chatsworthhistory@gmail.com to make arrangements for payment and shipping, if necessary.

CHATSWORTH HISTORY by Virginia Watson	\$10.00
CHATSWORTH PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL The First 100 Years by Ioline Cleveland	\$10.00
WINDOW INTO THE PAST by William Schepler	\$10.00
QUIET ON THE SET by Robert Sherman	\$25.00
OUR PIONEER MOTHER As told to Lenora Johnson MacDonald	\$10.00
GRANDMA ANN by Mary Huff	\$30.00



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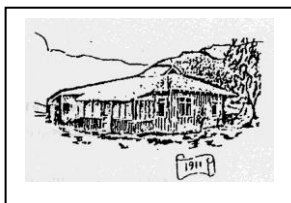
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And if your neighbor is not a member yet, pass this newsletter on to them and invite them to join.



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership Form



Your membership helps support our Homestead Acre and the educational and historical programs we provide for our community. Members receive our quarterly newsletters, and receive invitation reminders regarding our monthly programs and annual events – Rose Pruning, the Garden Festival, Membership Roundup, and Pioneer Day. Please mail this form with your annual membership dues and/or contribution made payable to:

Chatsworth Historical Society, 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth, CA 91311
chatsworthhistory@gmail.com 818-882-5614 www.chatsworthhistory.com

Yearly:	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	
Life Membership:	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family \$20.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Organization \$20.00
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