



Smoke Signal

CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth, CA 91311

(818) 882-5614

chatsworthhistory@gmail.com

www.chatsworthhistory.com



Co-Presidents: Linda & André van der Valk

April 2025, Issue #2

Editor: Ann Vincent

Co-Presidents' Message

By Linda & André van der Valk

Spring is here and there is a lot going on at the acre. Ann and her volunteers are getting ready for the Vintage Fashion Show by going through our collection of hats and clothes. She also makes sure that the clothes are properly stored so that they will be there for the future.

Last week we had a field trip from Chatsworth Park Elementary Urban Planning Magnet 4th grade students. They toured the museum and the cottage. They really liked the case that had pictures of their school and what it looked like in the past. It shows how important printed photographs are to preserving history. We find that in the museum tours, photographs from the past are what people enjoy the most. Our photographs on the wall open up questions and discussions about our past. It is fun to tell the kids that newspapers were delivered on horseback as one photo on the wall shows two boys in the fifties delivering the paper. We tell them that now delivery is done by cars or people get their news on the Internet. I know times have changed but it would be nice if we had more photos that are printed and not only on phones and computers. It is always a thrill to look at a genuine photo from the late 1800s or 1900s and I worry that future generations will not have that opportunity because all they will see is photos online.

We are happy to report that our own Dottie Acker has been selected as Chatsworth's Outstanding Citizen of the Year along with Terry Tanner. Both are active volunteers for the Chatsworth Historical Society. Dottie is one of our valuable docents who participates in cottage tours for our Open Houses and our school tours. She and Terry are also active with the 3rd grade hikes for the Foundation of the Preservation of the Santa Susana Mountains. Our Garden docent Kathy Perger will also be honored with a Service to the Community Certificate for her outstanding work with our roses at the acre.

We hope to see you soon at the Acre for either our Vintage Fashion Show or Open House on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Happy Spring...

Linda and Andre

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	Kathy Perger
Smoke Signal Editor.....	Ann Vincent
Research Director.....	Ray Vincent

Upcoming Events

OPEN HOUSE

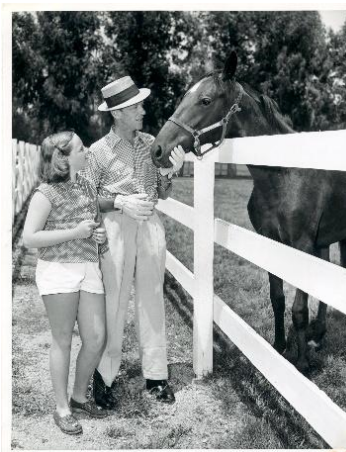
1st Sunday of the month from 1 to 4pm

Sunday, April 27th ANNUAL GARDEN FASHION SHOW

Tickets available until April 15

chatsworthhistory.com/Events.html

April General Meeting Chatsworth Celebrities: Fred Astaire April 15, Tuesday 6:30pm



Join us for the story of the Blue Valley Ranch in Chatsworth, a 20-acre thoroughbred horse breeding farm, just east of today's Winnetka Monterra Estates north of Devonshire. The address was 10901 Melvin Ave.

[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

Or go to: www.Zoom.us/join

or Dial: (669) 900 9128

Meeting ID: 848 4323 4310 Passcode: 100200

Garden Update

Kathy Perger, our new Garden Director, has been tending all of the roses and plants...doing a great job! Kathy is fertilizing and starting a project to identify the roses with new markers for each. Have you noticed that this time of year our Calla Lily's Garden inside the front entrance is in bloom.



Painting Projects

A big Thank You to Gary Standke who has been touching up the cottage and several other projects on site! Thank you, Gary

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 August 1, 2025

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

Included in this newsletter:

- Annual Garden Fashion Show
- CHS Birthday
- Chatsworth Celebrities: John Brandeis
- Chatsworth Celebrities: Val Kilmer

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.

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.

Member passings:

William R. 'Bill' Spurrier born Sept 30, 1924, passed away January 25, 2025 age 100 years and nearly 4 months! Bill grew up on the 1924 Spurrier Poultry Ranch on Chatsworth Street. His story is in our [Smoke Signal 2024-07](#). Sadly, he passed away following a brush with Covid and other health issues.

Cash Vandervort born Nov 2, 1938, passed away Feb 13, 2025 he was 86 years old.

Cash was an active member of our Chatsworth Historical Society who rarely missed a program on our community history, and more importantly he enjoyed sharing his knowledge of Chatsworth history with us.

He became a member of the Volunteers Cleaning Communities family immediately because of his engaging smile, bright blue eyes and fun-loving personality.

He cleaned the streets with VCC every day for over 3 years which kept him engaged, getting his exercise and doing something good for the community.

A Mark Hovater/VCC tribute to Cash is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwphewyuuns>

**Now is the time to buy your tickets before April 15
to guarantee a seat for the Annual Garden Fashion Show,
just click on the link in the box below or use the QR Code**

**Annual Garden Fashion Show
April 27, 2025 12:30-3pm**



Pre-Paid Admission/Donation \$35 per person by April 15
Gates open at 12:30 pm to enjoy harp music in the Garden, along with desserts and beverages.

Our Vintage Clothing Fashion Show featuring Vintage Clothes and Hats will begin at 1pm under our spectacular walnut tree.

Prepaid Tickets are available at:
chatsworthhistory.com/Events.html

Seating is limited.

The cottage and museum will be used for staging the Fashion Show and will not be available for tours.
HOMESTEAD ACRE 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth, CA 91311
Located just inside the entrance to Chatsworth Park South.

Parking available at Chatsworth Park South, please carpool as space is limited.
For more information contact: chatsworthhistory@gmail.com
or 818-882-5614 and leave a message.



We are having lots of fun gathering students and community members to participate and help us display or model these items found in our storage. Cataloging all the items with photographs has been fun! We now have complete listing of over 150 hats to go with our clothing, gloves, handbags and wigs. It is fun to have a fashion show to share them.

**Please come enjoy a Sunday afternoon in the garden
with a fun show highlighting fashion and history.
If you have a hat, wear it, join the fun and enjoy the refreshments!**

Below are a few highlights of our 2023 show on Fashion through time...last year we did Wedding Dresses and had fun...but Fashion through time is back due to requests. There are new models and a new grand finale!



Chatsworth Historical Society celebrates 62 years

This issue of Chatsworth Past & Present features our own Chatsworth Historical Society and how it has evolved to become caretakers of the Hill-Palmer Historical Cottage, Gardens, and the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum, all located on what is called the Homestead Acre. The Acre is located at 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, at the west end of Devonshire within Chatsworth Park South.

It all started in 1963. In February of that year, the Pioneer Church was declared a Historical Monument by Los Angeles, based on paperwork submitted by Katherine Johnson, a member of one of Chatsworth's pioneer families. This step postponed the pending demolition and provided the time needed to create an organization that would be responsible for the Church.

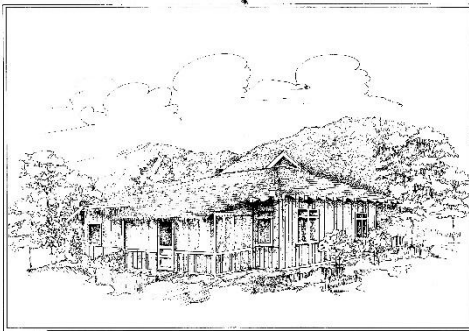
As the story goes... on April 17, 1963, according to the minutes of the first meeting, Virginia Watson, Katherine and RL Johnson, Art Honey, Evie Bowers, Keith Watts, and Charles and Eileen Janess all gathered at Katherine Johnson's house. The Historical Society was established that evening as a community organization to save the church and eventually use a portion of it as a museum to contain historical memorabilia. Charles Janess was elected president, Arthur Honey as treasurer and Sheila Watts became secretary.

Saving the pioneer church was the first order of business. A few months later Lila Schepler stepped in as president replacing Charles Janess due to illness. She led the group through the challenges of finding a home for the church at Oakwood Memorial Park. Virginia had already begun collecting Chatsworth photos from pioneer families including the Williams family and Minnie Hill Palmer, storing items temporarily at her home and the Schepler's home as needed.

During this time, Virginia began to prepare slide presentations to give at Chatsworth Park Elementary school and wrote articles under the column "Out our Way" about Chatsworth and its history. Virginia was not the only one sharing Chatsworth History. Bill Schepler, who grew up as a boy in Chatsworth, created a slide show called "Grizzlies to Caterpillars" depicting the early Pioneer life and how it evolved into Caterpillar tractors bulldozing our area to make way for tract homes.

In January of 1965, the Church was moved from its site on Topanga Blvd to Oakwood Cemetery. The goal was to restore it to its original condition; however, vandalism and the October 1967 fire scorching the building created additional problems. The Church sat on stilts, boarded up, as more funds were raised for work to be done. They had managed to move the Church with donations of money and services for \$2,500, but by the time the restoration project was completed the total expenses were almost \$20,000.

At this point, the organization focused on raising funds to restore the church. They held garage sales and bake sales...anything they could do and slowly reached their goal. During this time the Historical Society met at Chatsworth High School or at members' homes, and would occasionally have meetings or functions at the church.



Minnie Hill-Palmer was active in the community during this time.. She had sold off the farm land and retained a Life Tenancy agreement with the Department of Recreation and Parks for the 1911 cottage and 1 1/3 acre of land surrounding it. In 1970, the golf course that surrounded her property closed. The Pro Shop building was offered to Minnie and it was moved on to her property. In 1978, after Minnie had moved to a retirement home, the Historical Society, with Minnie's approval, worked out an agreement with the Department of Recreation and Parks and became the conservator of the property. The Golf Pro Shop building eventually became the Chatsworth Museum.

Later in 1979 the Hill Palmer House was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The docent program was created by Lila Schepler to help educate volunteers so that public tours could begin in 1980. Local schools continue to arrange for tours for their classrooms to hear about the local history and visit the museum and cottage.

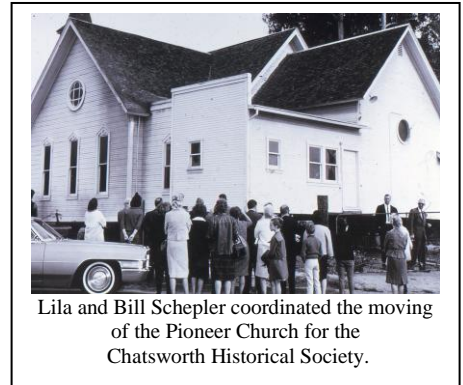
In 1988 the museum and grounds were the focal point of the Chatsworth Centennial event. In 1990, the society began hosting Pioneer Day, with the Garden Festival added in 1992. Bea Berman, Fundraising Chairman and Past President, coordinated both fundraisers for many years since they began.

Huell Howser visited Chatsworth and filmed the Homestead Acre in 2003 for his California Gold television series. The program is can be viewed on YouTube at this [link](#).

In 2007, the Chatsworth Museum was renamed the Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum.

The Historical Society is still going strong after 62 years. It just held its 32nd Annual Pioneer Day in October, and will host the Garden Festival fashion Show on April 27th. Our open house for the cottage and museum is the 1st Sunday of each month.

It's your community and your history. Come Join Us!



Lila and Bill Schepler coordinated the moving of the Pioneer Church for the Chatsworth Historical Society.



Virginia Watson Chatsworth Museum sign with Historical Society Docents and Past Presidents, Lila Schepler, Virginia Watson and Lillian Schepler in 2007

Chatsworth Historical Society April 2025

Chatsworth Celebrities – John Brandeis

John Brandeis was a millionaire playboy who bought the old Johnson homestead property. Several fun stories were discussed at our March 15th program and are available online at [Chatsworth Celebrities: John Brandeis](#)



1932 John Brandeis and wife Claire Blavette at the Johnson Homestead he purchased in 1929



Below is a summary of E. John Brandeis (EJB), (1895-1974), a wealthy businessman, big-game hunter, and heir to the J.L. Brandeis & Sons department store fortune, focusing on his life, marriages, and the history of his Open Diamond Bar Ranch in Chatsworth, California.

Early Life and Family Background

Origins of the Brandeis Fortune: EJB's grandfather, Jonas Brandeis, immigrated from Bohemia to the U.S. in 1856, eventually establishing J.L. Brandeis & Sons in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1885 with his sons Arthur, Emil, and Hugo. After Jonas's death in 1903, the business became the largest department store west of Chicago. Emil died on the Titanic in 1912, Hugo passed shortly after, and Arthur died in 1916, leaving EJB, Arthur's son, to inherit the fortune at age 20.

EJB's Early Life

Born in 1895, EJB grew up privileged, describing himself as a "spoiled kid." He became vice president of J.L. Brandeis & Sons by 1917 but delegated management to his cousin George Brandeis, focusing instead on his passions for hunting, polo, and adventure.

Marriages and Personal Life

First Wife, Madeline Frank (1917-1921): EJB married Madeline at 21, and they had a daughter, Marie Madeline, in 1920. The couple divorced in 1921 due to EJB's "indifference and harsh words," with Madeline receiving \$400,000 in alimony. Madeline became a filmmaker and author, producing works like "The Little Indian Weaver" (1928), and died in 1937 from a car accident.

Second Wife, Emily Marie Ryan (1922-1923): EJB married Emily in 1922, and they hunted together in Alaska and Africa. Their marriage ended after 17 months when Emily sued for divorce, citing "extreme cruelty" upon

returning to civilization. She received \$8,000 annually and a \$250,000 settlement. Tabloids sensationalized their African trip, alleging EJB had her tied to a tree and tortured by natives.

Third Wife, Claire Blavette (1927-1938): EJB married Claire, a 20-year-old Parisian, in 1927. They faced marital issues by 1932, with mutual divorce filings for mental cruelty and “vile language.” They reconciled briefly but divorced in 1938 after Claire accused EJB of an affair with Marjorie Gordon. Claire received a property settlement.

Fourth Wife, Marjorie Gordon (1948 or earlier): EJB married Marjorie, an aspiring actress, sometime before 1948. They lived at the Open Diamond Bar Ranch and a Brentwood home on Tigertail Road. Marjorie outlived EJB, passing in 1993, and they are buried together at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale.

Open Diamond Bar Ranch in Chatsworth

Purchase and Development (1929): EJB bought 140 acres of the 160-acre Johnson Homestead in Chatsworth in 1929, later expanding it to 525 acres. He built the Open Diamond Bar Ranch, a luxurious estate costing \$500,000, featuring early Californian architecture, a trophy-filled living room, a polo field, tennis court, swimming pool, dance pavilion, and a miniature lake. The 20-acre Fern Ann Falls was reserved for Johnson descendants.

Hunting and Conservation: The ranch reflected EJB’s love for big-game hunting, with a trophy room showcasing animals from Africa, India, and Tibet. In 1938, he imported a bison from Montana to hunt but shot it on the truck when it refused to leave. By 1962, the ranch became an exotic animal preserve, housing species like Corsican mouflon sheep, Indian blackbuck, and Tule elk, reflecting EJB’s growing conservationist interests.

Hollywood Connection: The ranch served as a filming location for Westerns from 1936 to 1955, including “The Singing Cowboy” (1936) with Gene Autry and “The Last Bandit” (1949). The Western street, dubbed “Hickeyville,” was a key filming spot, though the main house remained private. EJB hosted Hollywood elites like Walt Disney, Spencer Tracy, and Will Rogers, and in 1939, the Chatsworth Women’s Club held a barbecue at the ranch to inaugurate Marian Marsh as honorary mayor.

Later Years and Legacy

Social Events and Lifestyle: In the 1950s and 1960s, EJB and Marjorie hosted lavish events at the ranch, including a 1965 Western-style anniversary party attended by Ronald Reagan, Clark Gable, and Art Linkletter. The couple continued their hunting expeditions, with society columns noting their African safaris.

1970 Clampitt Fire: The fire destroyed all ranch buildings, requiring a \$750,000 reconstruction in 1971. The rebuilt house at 22637 La Quilla Drive, now 12,298 sq ft with 11 beds and 15 baths on 16 acres, is [listed on Zillow](#) today for \$10 million, featuring a wine cave, Japanese garden, and tennis court.

Death and Estate (1974): EJB died in 1974 at 79, reportedly from complications of a water buffalo goring. His estate, valued at \$12.7 million, was split between his wife Marjorie, grandchildren, and the E. John Brandeis Foundation (later the Alan and Marcia Baer Foundation), supporting charitable causes. His headstone at Forest Lawn quotes Rudyard Kipling’s “If”, emphasizing resilience.

Development of the Ranch: In 1977, Eugene Kilmer bought the ranch, planning to develop it into Indian Springs Estates, a 160-acre subdivision with 365 acres of open space. The project, marketed as the “Bel-Air of the San Fernando Valley,” began in 1984 but faced setbacks, including a bankruptcy filing in the 1990s. The 365-acre Indian Springs Open Space remains undeveloped, and a ram statue on Santa Susana Pass Road commemorates the Brandeis era.

Cultural and Historical Impact

EJB’s life epitomized the blend of wealth, adventure, and Hollywood glamour in mid-20th-century America. The Open Diamond Bar Ranch, once a hub for animal conservation, filming, and elite gatherings, has largely been overtaken by suburban development, with the Ronald Reagan Freeway cutting through the area. However, its legacy endures through historical records, the preserved open space, and the modern estate at La Quilla Drive, reflecting EJB’s larger-than-life persona.



E. John Brandeis inherits the
Brandeis fortune
1916-06-11 Omaha Daily News

Chatsworth Celebrities: Val Kilmer (1959-2025)

Val Kilmer, born Dec 31, 1959, passed away on April 1st, 2025, he was 65 years old.

Initially a [stage actor](#), he found fame as a leading man in a wide variety of films of all genres. Some of his prominent roles were in Top Gun (1986), The Doors (1991), Tombstone (1993), and Batman Forever (1995).

The Eugene Kilmer family lived at the Roy Rogers estate in Chatsworth on Trigger Street. The boys - Mark, Val and Wesley, enjoyed making home movies in the hills and all around Chatsworth.

A story from a member, Steve Allen:

"I took over a Valley News and Greensheet delivery route from my friend Jim's older brother (though I hadn't met Jim at that time).

It's possible that Jim's brother actually delivered to Roy Rogers, but I delivered to, and collected payment from, the Kilmers, who had bought the house. I believe I started my route around 1970.

Joanne and I (both Class of '76) were brief acquaintances of Kevin Spacey, Val Kilmer, Mare Winningham, and Julie Gillette (all Class of '77).

I shared a semester of Performing Arts class with them in 1976 (to get out of PE). The exceptional drama teacher, Bob Carelli, was a draw for the thespians and recruited Spacey, while Val and Mare, as best as I know, were locals."

Val Kilmer, as a student at Chatsworth High School, was a standout performer in the drama department. At Chatsworth High he performed alongside Kevin Spacey and Mare Winningham, also future stars, in productions that left an impression on peers. Kilmer was also a multi-sport athlete, excelling in football, basketball, and baseball, which highlighted his competitive nature. His high school girlfriend was Winningham, marking an early personal and professional bond in the Chatsworth drama scene.

In 1997 Kevin Spacey created a production company, [Trigger Street Productions](#). The name "Trigger Street" is a reference to an actual street in Spacey's boyhood home of Chatsworth, where Roy Rogers and Dale Evans (and Roy's horse Trigger) had their ranch. Spacey and his childhood friends dreamed of opening a neighborhood theater where they could stage their own "Trigger Street" productions.

Additional information about Eugene Kilmer, Val's father has been provided in our [Chatsworth Celebrities - John Brandeis](#) program.



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



DIGITAL ARCHIVES online at
<http://www.chatsworthhistory.com>

facebook

CHS FACEBOOK PAGE
www.facebook.com/HomesteadAcre

CHS YouTube Channel
youtube.com/chatsworthhistory1/videos

Can we email our newsletter to you?

Please email us to provide your email address.
Thanks! chatsworthhistory@gmail.com

Wondering if your Dues are Due?

Your dues are due one year after the last time you paid your dues.

For those receiving email only newsletters, we will advise you by email when your dues are due.

For snail mail, if you have an asterisk at the end of your name on the mailing label, your dues are due.

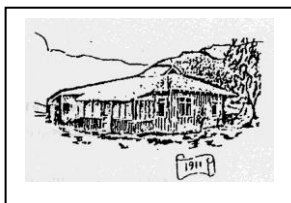
Please use the form below to renew by mail or the link below to renew by **PAYPAL or Credit Card:**
<http://www.chatsworthhistory.com/membership.html>

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
	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 125.00		

NAME _____ Phone: _____

STREET ADDRESS: _____ Email: _____

CITY / STATE / ZIP: _____

Special Interest / Expertise: _____

Reminder: If you got this mailed to you, an asterisk on your label means your dues are due!