

Chatsworth Historical Society

Box 102, Chatsworth, California

Smoke Signal

June '79

President: Jane Matthews

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends:

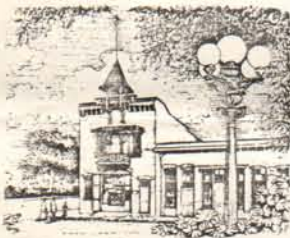
Kudos to Virginia Watson for all her work this past year. She will continue as curator of Homestead Acre, and will be asking for our assistance to restore and furnish the house, plant the gardens, and plan for accommodating the public at the Acre. It is an ambitious project, but, with luck, it won't be too long before we will have the Acre ready for tours. It will be so nice to have a place to meet and a room for our museum.

We had a marvelous tour of the Mentry house led by Carol Lagasse and her docents. She mentioned the importance of visiting historical sites. Some could close if the public does not support them. Betty and Tom Woodard are planning other tours in the area. We can learn more about local history and visit with other historical societies. (Carpooling, of course.)

Please search your garages and closets for Thrift Sale items. We need more merchandise. Ask your neighbors. Also bring paper bags.

I hope to see you at the June 19 meeting. The program will be good, and we will have brief reports of the year's progress from the committees as well as reports on the seminar at the Ventura Museum, Mentryville, the Associated Historical Societies, and the San Fernando Valley Arts Council. This will be the last meeting of the year. We will assemble again in September. If summer tours are planned, you will be notified.

Jane Matthews
President



JUNE 19 PROGRAM

George D. Morris, Curator of the Old Plaza Firehouse in El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park, will show photos and artifacts and tell about the history of the early fire fighters. 8 p.m. Glendale Fed. Savings & Loan.

The 25th Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies will be held June 21-23 at Sonoma. The theme: Homecoming to the Bear Flag Birthplace. Host: Sonoma Valley Historical Society. Headquarters: Sonoma Mission Inn.

HOMESTEAD ACRE

Progress Report - On May 12 Boy Scout Troop 226 of Chatsworth, under the direction of Ray Blanchard, scrubbed the walls, woodwork and linoleum in the kitchen, pantry, bathroom and back porch. On May 19 and 20 the Northridge Troop, directed by Sid Blum, removed the carpeting, nails and linoleum and swept the house as part of their Eagle project. Both troops did weeding around the house. Virgil Heumann's son, Kevin, mowed a fire break around the property with a power mower.

The committee members for Homestead Acre are Iolene Cleveland, Lila Schepler, Betty Summers and Celia Woodman.

-- Virginia Watson

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Lila Schepler will serve on the Board of the San Fernando Valley Arts Council (as representative for historical museums), and as Secretary of Associated Historical Societies of Los Angeles County during 1979-80.

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An unpremeditated omission:

I accidentally left out a part of the annual over-view that Virginia Watson wrote for the last Smoke Signal. So sorry! If you still have the May Smoke Signal, please place the following article after the first page and before the top of the second page.....

" In December, we burned our \$3000 note (which we had paid back to Lillian and Frank Schepler); that was the money we borrowed to finish the church.

In January, we had our walking tour of the Brookfield Tract, telling all the new residents about the Olive Trees along Lassen St. and the Gray Ranch which used to be where they live now.

Our trip to UCLA was enlightening (and fattening--the dinner was good!) We also enjoyed our theatre trip to see "The Christmas Carol"--it was a little treat for a group of dedicated workers.

But it was back to work again for our part in the "World's Largest Book Sale" at Topanga Plaza with everybody again in action.

Probably our most ambitious and one of the most successful projects was the mini-museum we set-up in Chatsworth Park's Elementary School Bungalow 19. Again a group of dedicated workers making it successful.

The 91st Birthday Celebration for our community was exciting and a big success. And our part in the "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree" was sheer fun--but a lot of publicity for our society and a big help toward getting the ordinance passed (we hope) to save the oaks. WE filled about 20 petitions from our Open House at the Mini Museum."

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO: Chuck Janess, Kelley Watson, Betty Woodard, Gertrude Cook Frank Schepler, Kellie Spangler, Nancy and (belated) to Milton Parsons.

NEWS:

Current status of Saving the Oaks and other Native Trees -- "The coalition is now working with the City Planning Dept. on re-wording and re-writing the ordinance to save the trees. This is slated for June 6th at the City Council. On June 5th it goes before the planning committee." The Friends of Heritage and Native Trees are very anxious to have as many of us go in person to these meetings - if you are interested in going or if you didn't have an opportunity to sign a petition, please contact Helen Treend - 883-9701, or Melissa Lovelady - 360-6587.

TELEGRAMS were sent by us for SANTA SUSANA PARK ASSOCIATION.....

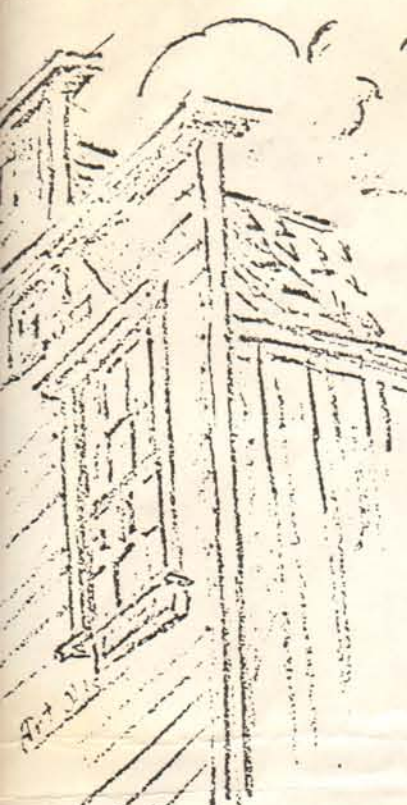
Re: AB 949, sponsored by Assemblyman Robert Cline, has passed every committee and has been signed by the governor. The check for the property should have been signed by the Public Works Board on May 21st that meeting has been changed to May 31st. Therefore, the money would not be available by the June 1st deadline -- other last minute arrangements are being made.

Frank and Lillian Schepler have just returned from a delightful cruise on the ship Veendam, through the Panama Canal. The highlight of their trip was visiting the Island of Haiti and seeing the Cuna Indians and viewing the handicraft from those primitive peoples living on that San Blas Island.

Jim and Celia Woodman and Burrell and Tricia Pluckett spent 3 memorable days at the Lions Club Convention in Newport Beach - May 18-21.

Window Into The Past Vol. $\frac{X}{2}$ No. 2

A RED HOT FOURTH !



Even in their hey day fireworks (and especially fire crackers) weren't popular with everyone. Dogs and cats and small children especially were terrified by them. But, for the most part, boys- tomboys-fathers-grandfathers enjoyed them immensely. Yes, they were dangerous. Burns were more than common, injuries were too common perhaps, but deaths just about unheard of. Nothing like the numbers caused by swimming pools, motorcycles, skiing or even motor cars- all of which are still with us. As for fires, I am sure smoking is the cause of more in two months every summer than fireworks caused in the century and one half that they were legal. Even mothers and grandmothers enjoyed them from a safe distance. But enough soapbox; what was the Fourth really like ?

If you were brought up in Los Angeles you have to be over sixty to be able to recall legal personal fireworks. And I say personal fireworks because attending a public fireworks display compared to firing your own is like watching someone else cavorting in a swimming pool when you want to cool off.

Every boy, and just about every father, had been saving up for many months to put in a supply of fireworks for a glorious fourth. Colorful booths started to appear overnight a couple of weeks ahead, in vacant lots and empty stores all over town. And especially at the beaches in those pre-air conditioned days, many right along the so-called boardwalk. They had a fascinating display of extremely colorful stock, mostly red, which included firecrackers, pin wheels, torpedoes, flowerpots, sons-of-guns, Roman candles, rockets, cherry bombs, house-a-fires, caps and cap pistols- and the list can go on.

They were taken home and stored to await the day. Parental control was better then, you heard few firecrackers before the fourth. But by day light on that hot, hot day (and it was always hot!) it really sounded like a battlefield. All of the dogs and cats usually spent the day under the house, and for good reason, children being the sadistic creatures most of them are.

The firecrackers came in a variety of sizes and shapes, though by the time I came on the scene the do-gooders had eliminated (and rightly so!) the really big ones that could almost have replaced a stick of dynamite. There were the lady fingers that even girls could hold in their hands when they went off; very small and cheap. In fact, they were the only kind most boys ever set off a package at a time. Most firecrackers were 2 to 4 inches long but size didn't denote how much power they had in them (something like the candy wrappers of today). Not many held them in their hands to go off, but when you did you had a couple of numb fingers for a few minutes, maybe even a burnt one. But- it did impress that little blond with the big ribbon in her hair. There were cherry bombs, the most powerful we had. No one ever held them, for I'm sure they could take off a finger. They were very expensive, 3 for a dime as I recall, so they weren't wasted. You put them under things; they could flatten the side of a coffee can and send the bottom over a hundred feet in the air. Torpedoes were little paper barrels filled with caps and rocks that you threw on the sidewalk, and they went off with a satisfying bang and showered your legs with the little stones. Or they were fun to toss at walls. But, best of all, we would place a half dozen or so on Wilshire Blvd. and wait for someone to hit them with their tires. That helped make the time pass before the crowning event when night was to arrive. No child could afford enough firecrackers to keep going all day.

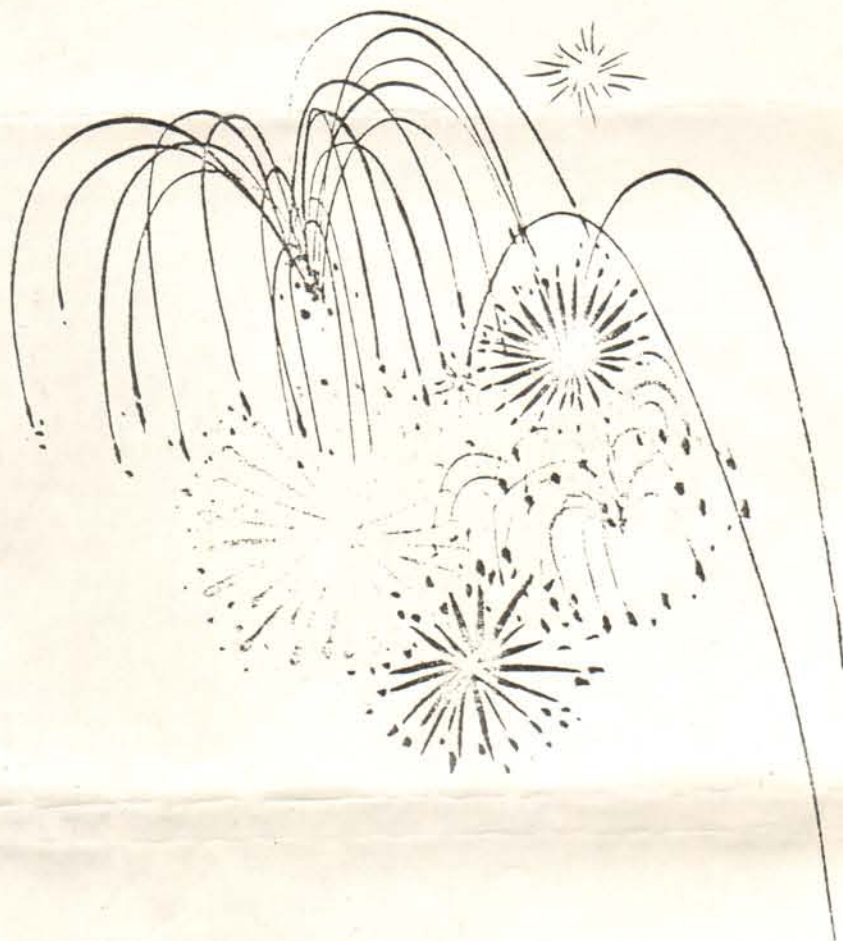
An idea that I thought up after we moved to Chatsworth was to put a fire cracker in a cull orange. It made it look like a kids idea of a bomb. When it was tossed high in the air it burst like a real bomb and after half a dozen went off a light mist of orange juice drifted down to make every thing sticky.

The sons-of-guns were a special favorite of mine. They were some form of phosphate, red in color, that were broken up and ground into the sidewalk with your heel. They did a lot of popping in the day time and at night put on a little tiny fireworks display, besides. Also, they could be used to write your name on the sidewalks in glowing letters.

The nightly fireworks display of each family depended on what they could afford and probably a bit more. They were just what you see at public displays only on a smaller scale. The little kids running around with sparklers writing in the air and maybe burning each other with white hot steel rods. If your father thought you were old enough (maybe seven or eight) he might let you hold a Roman candle while it shot off balls of fire. The evening almost always ended with a pin wheel that didn't, I'm sorry to say, always work.

It really was a Glorious Fourth! There must have many ships involved just to bring fireworks from China, where almost all of them were made by hand. It's interesting that today in Los Angeles you can't legally buy firecrackers, or sparklers or even cap pistols: that is, unless you are Chinese. Then it is part of your heritage! You Americans don't really have a heritage; America is only two hundred years old.

William F. Schepler
June 1979



Fourth

of July