



# Smoke Signal



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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SUMMER, 1995

## FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Sorry I didn't have the time to publish the June Smoke Signal. First a vacation trip to New York City and Lake Waramaug, Conn., followed by many chores and busy meetings. The months of May and June in Chatsworth are hectic for all the volunteers.

On July 1st Virginia Watson retired as curator of the Society but will remain an active member. The executive board reluctantly accepted the retirement but we know it won't be possible to replace her. Virginia's accomplishments are extensive and you will enjoy reading of them, in her own words, on another page of this edition. Just last week she purchased a new IBM computer and is now surfing the net!

We shall honor Virginia at the September 19 quarterly meeting of the Society and the details will appear in the August issue. For those living close by, please circle the date and plan to attend.

I hope all of you are enjoying a pleasant summer -  
Sheila

## LILA SCHEPLER NAMED "CITIZEN OF THE YEAR!"

At the annual awards banquet of the Chatsworth Community Coordinating Council, Lila was one of two volunteers named Citizen of the Year. Brother John Crowe, director of Boys Town of the West, was the second recipient.

Lila was nominated for the honor by the Society and many friends and relatives were on hand to congratulate her. Lila has been a community worker since she moved to Chatsworth in the 1930's. She has continued her steady influence in the community and

the shaping of its cultural life even into her retirement. Lila is an early day member of the Chatsworth Historical Society and has served six terms as its president; and continues to serve on its executive board and as a guide for tours of the Homestead Acre.

Lila has devoted time to both the fields of recreation and the arts, serving as an expert lecturer and member of local and statewide boards, including her membership on the planning committee for the California Historical Societies' 1993 Spring Conference and as an organizer of the Junior Historical Society for that conference.

She is active in her church, is a life member of the PTA, has served on the executive board for the Girl Scouts and has been a continuing volunteer in support of the annual San Fernando Valley Fair. She additionally devotes one day per week in support of FISH. The title was awarded to recognize her continuing contributions over sixty years.

## PIONEER DAY & CHILI COOKOFF

Sunday, October 1 will be the annual Pioneer Day and this year will include a chili cook off. Each year the board tries to stimulate interest in the event by adding a new attraction and this year's chair, Bea Berman, has decided to put the chili event as the newest attraction. We are anticipating about 40 entries with cooks selling samples of their fare together with cornbread sold by the Society.

The Los Angeles Dept. of Water & Power will have a booth regarding a history of L.A.'s water and has taken an advertisement in the day's program that will enable us to offer three cash prizes for the top ranked cooks - so dig out grandpa's recipe and enter, 3rd prize \$25, 2nd prize, \$50 and 1st prize, \$100.00!



There will be an entry fee of \$10 for the cookoff. Other Pioneer Day attractions will include suitable displays in the museum and cottage; hands-on laundry, baking and other chores for the youngsters, story reading etc., and the very popular White Elephant Old Curiosity Shoppe!

Please save your near new discards that are in clean condition for the White Elephant lady. Jewelry is the most popular item at every sale! It's extremely possible that a new White Elephant lady will be needed this year as Sheila & Keith's daughter, Jennifer, is expecting a baby on that date in New York. All of the merchandise for the booth will be priced so, any volunteers?

We shall need a lot of help for the annual Pioneer Day and I hope people who live in the area will come give a helping hand. There's just a handful of workers left so please call Bea and volunteer 341-5449. We need set-up and take-down workers. The event will be open from 11 a.m., to 4 p.m.

#### **FEMA FUND DONATIONS**

Several more individuals have donated \$40 to help repay the earthquake repair loan. It is most generous and we appreciate the help.

--Nanci Oliva Bond sent in checks to cover the month of February, (the month she moved to Chatsworth and Feb. 26 when her son, Jim, was born); and September for meeting her husband, Robert.

--Joyce Ower sent a check to honor her mother, Betty Summers, on Mother's Day and her father, Jim Summers, on Father's Day. Joyce is now living in Cahlamet, Wash.

--We recently received a donation from Dorothy Hammond who honored Dr. Ruth Boak who has been unwell. Ruth is a past president of the Society.

#### **MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

Long time member Ruby Swan has purchased a Life Membership. Thanks so much Ruby.

The following couples have renewed membership: Dean & Candy Craig; Joe & Dottie Sammartano and Mike & Donna Afflerbach.

Those who renew annually will receive a Post Card with this newsletter reminding them that the fees are now due and payable.

Keith Watts

**Watts' What....**Lila and Bill Schepler have been entertaining their former neighbors, Barry & Paula Wheeler and daughters. The Wheelers now reside in Texas...John and Zena Thorpe have visitors from Sheffield, England. Des and Joan Hinchcliffe are Zena's brother and sister-in-law.

The new branch library in Woodland Hills is asking West Valley Historical Societies if they would care to place small artifacts of local historic importance in a display case at the branch. We'll probably place something there to boost interest in the Homestead Acre.

REMEMBER, the Acre will be open for tours on Sunday, August 6th from 1 p.m., to 4 p.m. and Donna Afflerbach's team will conduct the tours.

#### **FROM THE DESK of Virginia Watson:**

I began collecting Valley history soon after I moved to Chatsworth in 1952. I lived on Chatsworth Street near the intersection of Canoga Avenue. We had the title on the six acres searched as part of the escrow and to my surprise our property history went back to Rancho Ex-Mission San Fernando. I hadn't realized that the mission boundaries went that far and I was surprised that I didn't know that fact.

So I became aware and curious about Valley history and in particular Chatsworth history. I made notes and collected newspaper items, I asked questions, read books and collected a lot of data. I soon began collecting artifacts, then photographs and interviewing older residents. Along about this time I also began writing for the "Green Sheet" or Daily News as it is known today. I began writing stories about Chatsworth and local people. My discoveries led me to decide to write a book and I started it in 1960. I also started taking my artifacts to the schools to show to the children and inform them of their heritage.

Another early coincidence happened after I started to work as a school secretary at Chatsworth Park Elementary School (1953). I worked for Mrs. Lee and she told me all about the Johnson family and gave me a book about them.

One day when we were cleaning out the office storeroom, she and I found an old diploma from the school and Mrs. Lee gave it to me along with the book. From then on I was really hooked on local history. (continued)



Later on (1963) when we formed the Chatsworth Historical Society, I gave most of my collection to the new society. I went on keeping the collection at my house for many years. We had at first hoped to have a museum to display the artifacts in the Pioneer Church, but that didn't work out. So when we acquired the old golf pro shop along with Minnie's homestead acre, we at last had a place to put our collection.

Jane Matthews was president when we convinced Virgil Heumann that using the building was part of our rental agreement and a group of us spent several hot, hot, days clearing it out. It had been used for storage by the Heumanns and there were smelly rabbit cages inside along with old, musty boxes, tools etc. Kevin Heumann had kept his motorcycle in there and there was grease and oil and parts to be cleared out, but we did it. Working on it was Jane, of course, and I was there. I also remember Everett Cleveland, my husband, Hank, and Linn Stuckenbruck working. There were others, I don't think Bill and Lila were there for that, but they may have been--it seems likely they were on a trip. For appeasement Jane bought Virgil the little shed that is still at the side of the museum to store some of his things. They also used the closets in the house and left their refrigerator--I think we finally bought it.

The first showcases we had (we are still using most of them) came from Equine Emporium, the name of the business that my husband and I had. We started the giftshops at the California racetracks and when we went out of business we gave the cases. I think Lila was president when we improved the inside of the building. She and Bill designed the library and made the little office for me. Bill did most of the carpentry as I remember it and Lila's brother Gene also worked on it.

As curator I kept track of the house and its possessions as well as the museum and the collection. For a long time I was also in charge of the grounds, getting Boy Scouts and Pierce College to keep up Minnie's garden and then later I got volunteers to have individual gardens. That's where we got Candy and Dean Craig for members, they had a garden. Later then they put in the rose gardens.

Later Betty Summers became a Board Member at Large and the job became that of assistant curator. Betty has done a magnificent job of cataloging and marking the furniture in the house. She has a snapshot file and detailed information about all of the CHS possessions in the house.

Since the last renovation of the museum, I have had the big desk and office space, the shelves etc., to work with. They have been such a big help. Our collection information is not all up-to-date, but I hope it will be before the summer's end.

As curator I have identified and listed the items in our collection, created displays in the museum for events such as the church's anniversaries, the opening of Stoney Point Park, Chamber and community events. I answered mail in reference to the library and the collection, listed us with directories, gave lectures, tours, dusted, vacuumed, filed, and generally kept track of our historic possessions.

When I was president the last time I had the idea to have weddings to make money to keep up the Acre. I approached the City and got approval, got board permission and approval, planned the advertisement, wrote up a brochure, got an answering machine and put a message on it. Since that time I have been in charge of the machine, picking up the messages, routing the calls to whomever they were for, calling back some. When we had weddings we would send out brochures for the people who called wanting information.

I started the docent program by deciding to see if we could keep the Acre open one Sunday a month. I did it by doing it myself. I figured if I could do one day a month it wouldn't be too hard to get others. It worked out and others volunteered after that. Lila really got the program organized and got it going. She made it into what it is today. Now Donna is in charge and we need to make changes to bring it up-to-date.

I finally did write a book on the history of the area. Dr. Frederick Braun, Marlys Stuckenbruck, Ioline Cleveland and other teachers at Chatsworth Park Elementary School thought the book should be written for children to use at school when they study My Community and California History in the third and fourth grades. So I put the adult book aside and wrote the children's book. The first time it was published it was the Chatsworth Women's Club and the Junior Women's Club that jointly published it.

Only a few books were sold, the books were given to libraries (there is a copy in the Huntington Library) and to the third and fourth grades in all Chatsworth schools. The second and third editions were printed by "angels" from the Chatsworth Historical Society and all of the money collected from the sale of the books



goes to the CHS. The book brings me around to talking about my retirement as curator. I kept the copyright to the book and I intend to write the adult book I postponed and possibly a biography I have had in mind for a long, long time.

I'll still be a life member of the Society and can attend many functions where I will enjoy all the beautiful people in our group. I'd like to use the library and I'd like to keep representing the CHS on the Santa Susana Pass Historic District Committee as we are working to have the important historic sites in our area included in a state historic park.

I shall miss Wednesdays-at-the-Acre, an idea I never had time to do right. The idea was to be so organized with tasks that other people could do such office jobs as filing,

working on a display that was already planned, cataloging items, pasting into scrapbooks, binding the Smoke Signs etc., available so that volunteers could come in and work for a few hours at a time.

Thanks to everyone who has helped with all our CHS projects. The one outstanding attribute of our group is the amazing variety of talent we have. We have engineers, gardeners, handymen and women, horticulturists, rosarians, carpenters, speakers and lecturers, people with management skills, teachers, typists and computer-compatible people, historians, writers, fashion experts, craft people, and all interested in our Society. They, and those who come after them, assure the future of our 32 year-old Chatsworth Historical Society.