



Smoke Signal



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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IN MEMORIAM SHEILA WATTS 1928-1997

Long-time Chatsworth Historical Society member, Sheila Watts, 69, succumbed to a massive stroke last month and a memorial was held for her in the Pioneer Church on December 8, 1997.

Mrs. Watts was the first official secretary for the Chatsworth Historical Society soon after it was founded in 1963 and served the Society in many different capacities over the last 34 years, including being elected president three separate times. At the time of her death she was serving as editor of The Smoke Signal and had held that position for many years, even during times when she was also serving as president.

Her most memorable term of office was during and immediately following the 1994 Northridge earthquake when the cottage and museum and the contents were damaged. Under Mrs. Watts leadership, the Society took out a Small Business Association loan to complete repairs and she supervised the repairs.

Her leadership extended into the community where she served as president of the Chatsworth Junior Woman's Club and went on to be active in the Chatsworth Women's Club. She was secretary of the Women's Club and continuing her interest in history, served as History and Landmarks Chairwoman and chaired the Literature Section. She also was editor of the Club's Newsletter.

A member of the Chatsworth Community Coordinating Council since its inception, she was serving as recording secretary when her illness overtook her. She was named Outstanding Citizen of the Year by the Coordinating Council in 1975-76, an honor she shared with Lillian Schepler.

An avid reader and library supporter, Mrs. Watts belonged to the Chatsworth Branch Friends of the Library, serving on the board and participating in the Grandparent reading program.

She had been a youth leader and was the recipient of a Life Member Award from the Chatsworth Park Elementary School PTA where she had been president

She was also president of the PTA at Columbus Junior High School and helped organize the PTA at Lawrence Middle School when it was formed and the PTSA at Chatsworth High School, serving on the executive board also.

She was a writer and covered the community news through a weekly column in what was then the Valley News and Green Sheet from 1970 to 1978. She was manager of the Chatsworth Chamber of Commerce for a while and also owned a local flower shop.

At the memorial service friends and relatives spoke of the respect they held for Mrs. Watts and the gratitude for the years of community service she gave so freely. Personal memories were shared by her family and friends, speaking of her intense patriotism and the love she exhibited for her adopted country, reminding those present that she had been a "war bride" from England when she came to America. Her love of her family and her community was mentioned by most every speaker.

It was considered fitting by those attending the service that it be held in the Pioneer Church for Mrs. Watts had been one of the group that helped save and move the church. She was most proud of her involvement with the church and often served as a docent when the building was open for visitors.

Although the family had requested donations to the Historical Society in lieu of flowers, the church was filled with beautiful baskets and bouquets of fresh, sweet-smelling flowers and the Society has received more than \$1400 in memorial donations.

She is survived by her husband of 50 years, Keith Watts; four children, Mark, Heather, Kevin, and Jennifer Watts Green; a two-year-old granddaughter, Savannah Green; and a sister, Joy Broyles.

A great loss was felt by the community as they remembered the busy, productive life of Sheila Maud Watts

Gerald Jack, former member of the CHS, and husband of Fern Jack who was a very active board member, passed on in December following a long illness. Graveside services were held at Oakwood Memorial Park with a gathering of friends and relatives held afterward at the Chatsworth Hotel.

Mausoleum services were held for former member **James "Jim" Woodman**, who died following an accident near his home in northern California. Following the service family and friends met at his daughter's home in Chatsworth.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Board and I would like to wish everyone a happy and prosperous New Year. The past year was a very good one for the Chatsworth Historical Society, in that at the end of it our finances are much improved. If we can maintain the impetus this coming year, then the hard work, which everyone puts out, is worth it.

The year was marred by the sudden passing of Sheila Watts, whose cheery smile and "go for it" nature will be sorely missed by everyone. I am sure she is now sitting on some committee or panel inside "the pearly gates," just as busy as ever.

John Thorpe

PROGRAM MEETING

Marlene Merkel, will be the **speaker** for the **Program Meeting** at **7 pm.** on **Tuesday, January 20,** in the **Chatsworth Museum** at the **Homestead Acre, 10385 Shadow Oak Drive.**

Mrs. Merkel has chosen a provocative title, "**Texas, Texas. Margaret.**" a cryptic message which she will explain in her lecture. A brand-new member, who joined just before our Getty Trip, Mrs. Merkel is a recently retired nurse who is interested in history.

FEBRUARY CONFERENCE

CHS members are invited to attend, "**The Conference of California Historical Societies' Spring Symposium,**" "**History - Rebuilt,**" **Friday, Saturday and Sunday, February 21-22,** at the **AirTel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys.**

The three-day event will begin on Friday with registration and committee meetings held early and a tour to the Nethercutt Collection (formerly San Sylmar), an executive board meeting, a reception and a banquet.

Saturday will be taken up with workshops and a bus tour to several historic sites in the Valley, including our own Homestead Acre.

The CHS is a member of the Conference and several of our members are working on the tour as guides. Others will remain at The Acre that day and help show our monument. Volunteers are needed. If you would like more information or would like to help at The Acre, please call (818) 882-5614 (The Chatsworth Museum answer machine) and leave your name and number and someone will get back to you.

NEW STREET NAME

Have you noticed that we have a new street in Chatsworth? It is the street that leads to the Chatsworth Metrolink Station and one of our members won a contest to name the street. The Chatsworth Chamber/Citizens Depot Committee held the contest and voted for the winning name submitted by our own **Donna Afflerbach**. "**Old Depot Plaza Road**," is such a good, descriptive name and it looks good on the sign.

PARADE REPORT

By

Bea Berman

How nice to have a Holiday Parade in Chatsworth again! On Sunday, December 14th, The Historical Society was one of 85 entries in the parade put on by the Chatsworth Kiwanis. Their theme was, "Its a Wonderful Life in Chatsworth."

Thanks to John and Zena Thorpe, who did most of the work, and myself, we put together a float titled, "Santa's Workshop." Santa sat at a workbench with bags of toys around, his dog sitting by the fireplace and a Christmas tree with toys underneath. Granny Claus sat on the rocking chair with her little elf.

It was so good to have the community involved and kudos goes to the Kiwanis for such an organized event. Let's hope it continues.

TRAILER GONE!

The Homestead Acre has a new look! Driving past on the way to and from the park office one can now see the Hill/Palmer Cottage in the background beyond the fence and through the trees.

Thanks to the Department of Recreation and Parks, plus the continued efforts of CHS Board member, Dean Craig, and our president, John Thorpe, the unsightly, damaged trailer that used to belong to Ruth Heumann, is now gone.

Presently Candy has placed the roses she is so carefully nurturing to sell for our Garden Festival, in place of the trailer so that they may get the proper amount of light and water.

CHS members rejoiced when City workers came as promised in November and over a 3-day period the trailer was systematically demolished and hauled away. Much of the work was done in pouring rain. Yellow slicker-clad, rubber-booted workers sloshed around efficiently while the big trucks grumbled, groaned and growled about the job. Dean was right there in his rain gear, answering questions, guiding the crew and looking out for the details.

TRAILER continued.

The trailer or mobile home, had been on the Hill/Palmer property since about 1970 when the 84-year-old Minnie Hill Palmer was living alone on the 1.3 acre parcel, all that was left of her once 230-acre ranch. When she had sold off the last of the acreage, she told your editor pro-tem (Virginia Watson) that Mr. Berkenkamp had arranged for her to have a Life Tenancy agreement for the plot of land that was fenced off. That happened in the fifties. Clarence Palmer (no relation to Minnie.) who owned the golf course at that time, asked Minnie if he could move Virgil and Ruth Heumann's trailer onto her land. Minnie agreed and the Heumann's helped Minnie by going to the Post Office for her, taking her to the store, nursery, etc. Later the Pro-shop was brought in and utilized by the Heumann's for storage. When the CHS became Conservator of Minnie's property, the pro-shop became the museum.

The January 17, 1994 earthquake frightened Ruth Heumann and she left the trailer and never lived there again. For a while the City used the mobile home and several men lived there, but the earthquake repairs were never completed and the trailer became an eyesore. The Chatsworth Historical Society had been petitioning for the removal of the trailer and members were delighted with its final removal.

DOCENT DOINGS

By

Donna Afflerbach

Among the visitors to the November Open House was a group of students from Lawrence Middle School who are entering a contest sponsored by the Homas Map Company came to our Pioneer Day last October and asked the Society to participate. She spoke to individuals who were there for our "Old Timer's" group. The students are participating in writing a book, they will be writing a chapter about Chatsworth. They interviewed the docents on duty in November and asked a lot of questions.

Another guest in November was Janet Toedter, who was visiting Chatsworth. She lives in Big Bear now but grew up on the Gray Ranch on Lassen Street with her brother Jim Summers and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alex Summers. They lived on the ranch after the Spinks family took over the ownership of the land. Mr. Summers ran the ranch and planted the citrus for the owners whose realty company also owned the Pershing Square Building in downtown Los Angeles as well as much acreage on Ventura Blvd., Mrs. Toedler said.

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Docent Doings continued.

She also recalled how "Aunt Emma" (Emma Johnson Graves--the first Anglo child born in the San Fernando Valley) would take local kids for horseback rides, teaching them to handle a horse while telling them all she knew about the hills and mountains, through which she rode all her life.

Another favorite pastime for Chatsworth youth in the forties, said Mrs. Toedler, was to haunt the Iverson Movie Ranch. She got to know many stars of the time like Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels (The Lone Ranger and Tonto) said Roy Rogers, even getting a ride on Trigger himself, she remembered.

Docents for December were members of Team Two:

They are Lila Schepler, Lillian Schepler, Sylvia Oates and Vicki Wyant.

Docents for the Open House on February 1st are to be Team One: Betty Summers, Virginia Watson, Kathy Reynolds and Pauline Aue

60 YEARS OF MARRIAGE CELEBRATED

Lorraine and Orville Mitchell celebrated 60 years of marriage on Nov. 9, with a dinner party for family and friends at the Smorgasbord Restaurant in Chatsworth. The party was given by their children.

Their son Eddie and his wife, Leuse Mitchell, created exquisite porcelain baskets for everyone as favors commemorating the event.

It was a big weekend for the elder Mitchells when their only great grandchild, Larry and Risa's Lucas Schmidt Mitchell, was baptized in the same Chatsworth Methodist Church as their children and grandchildren were.

MUNCH BOX PLANS

Board member Linda van der Valk is starting a campaign to have The Munch Box declared an historic monument. She has learned that it has been where it is, next to the railroad tracks on Devonshire, since 1956 and she has been collecting information on the architecture of the fifties eating establishments. She is writing to the Cultural Affairs Department and will be asking for the support of the CHS soon.

NEW YEAR TRIP

Our long-time treasurer, Lillian Schepler, celebrated the New Year at the Hilton in Palm Springs with a tour from the West Hills Hospital Guild.

HELP! ROSE PRUNING TIME

Candy Craig needs help pruning the many roses at The Acre and she is issuing a call for volunteers to help out this month.

"You don't have to be an expert to help out," Candy said. "If you have pruned your own roses, you will be able to help at The Acre."

Just call and let her know when you will be able to spend a few hours and she'll meet you in the garden. Her telephone number is 341-4461.

JANESS GOES VISITING

Eileen Janess, one of our founding members and a busy permanent board member, took two weeks off to go visiting. She spent the time with her oldest son and his wife in Thousand Oaks.

GETTY TRIP

Members new and old climbed aboard the bus donated to the CHS by Councilman Hal Bernson's office through Jack Atlas, and comfortably traveled the short distance to the fabulous new **GETTY CENTER** on Saturday, December 20, the first weekend that the art center was open! There was so much to see! And the view of the ocean and the hills surrounding the buildings took your breath away. Van Gogh's "Irises," were displayed as well as many, many other masterpieces. Our women guests expressed delight in the Decorative Arts and the Gardens were enjoyed by all. One conclusion everyone spoke of--"We have to go again."

Before the bus came CHS members enjoyed a catered lunch at The Acre and the price was included in the \$5 cost of the trip. Linda and Andre van der Valk obtained the really fresh, tasty food for us and at the last board meeting they announced that we didn't have to pay for it--they were donating the food to the Historical Society. So we not only had fun and enjoyed ourselves but we made money. We charged \$5 per person and there were 48 people so we took in \$240. There was no cost for the bus, but we gave the driver a \$50 tip. And the food--50 sandwiches, 50 drinks and carrot cake, didn't cost anything thanks to the van der Valks. We had the paper goods on hand, and thanks to Lila and Bill Schepler we had the table covers on hand from several years ago. We didn't have to pay to park, thanks to the Getty Center waiving the \$100 fee for non-profit organizations, and we didn't have to pay to park at The Acre while we were gone. All in all a wonderful holiday present for us all.

James Alexander Summers
IN MEMORIAM

Graveside services were held for James Alexander "Alex" Summers, 94, on January 6, at Oakwood Memorial Park. Mr. Summers had been in very poor health for the past year. He is survived by his wife of 74 years, Jesse; son, James "Jim" Summers; daughter Janet Toedter; five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. In just a few months, Mr. and Mrs. Summers would have celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary.

Mr. Summers farmed the N. A. Gray ranch on Lassen Street between Devonshire Street and Farralone Avenue in the thirties and forties. Family and friends met at the home of Betty and Jim Summers after the service.

Lutheran services were held in the Chapel at Oakwood Memorial Park for **Arnold "Arnie" Hanson, 82**, formerly an active member of the Chatsworth Historical Society and a well-known personality in the community who had worked at Chatsworth Park Elementary School for more than 20 years.. He is survived by a sister, Helen Furubotten of Chatsworth; a niece and five nephews.
