



# Smoke Signal



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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President: John Thorpe

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Editor: Zena Thorpe

The plans for the special California Sesquicentennial commemoration are progressing. We have booked a number of speakers and events, plus we have applied for grants and other financial help. However, we are still looking for help - physical and financial, so if any of our members want to get involved then please attend our next meeting on August 25th, 7pm at the museum. Please call 882-3572 if you have any questions.

John Thorpe

## Chatsworth Historical Society Board 1999-2000

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## JANE MATTHEWS

We must sadly report that Jane Matthews, a timeless soul with indomitable energy, died July 24th 1999 in Williamsburg, VA. Many members will remember Jane as president of the Chatsworth Historical Society for two terms from 1979-80 and 1988-89. She presided over the society when the Hill-Palmer Cottage was named to the National Register of Historic Places and was a prime mover in the restoration of the cottage spending countless hours painting and doing other chores. Jane moved often but would always come back to visit from her various homes. Chatsworth seemed to have a special pull for her.



## MUSEUM NOTES

We have had a lot of publicity lately - the Homestead Acre has been in the newspapers several times lately within the last few weeks. We were mentioned in Dennis McCarthy's column in the Daily News in reference to the Metrolink Station and the planned "Museum of Transportation and Entertainment" already begun in the lobby of the station.

Also R. A. Kahlenberg of the Los Angeles Times wrote a nice story about The Acre in his column called "Jaunts". That article came out on Friday before our Sunday, August 1st Open House and we had the biggest crowd we have ever had for a regular Sunday. More than 80 people attended. The visitors were delighted with the house, museum and gardens. They took the tours, asked questions, sat in the gardens and really seemed to enjoy themselves. We took in \$36 in donations. It was Betty Summers' team with Betty, Pauline, and Virginia working. Lillian Schepler worked an extra Sunday to help out and Candy graciously gave all the garden tours.

We also got a brand new docent to help us in the Museum. She is Connie Sue Ager who grew up in Chatsworth! Connie has already shown up for work on Wednesday morning and helped Evelyn, Pauline, Marilyn, Lillian and Candy finish stuffing the 5000 new brochures that the executive board recently ordered. Marilyn comes regularly on Wednesdays and has been a welcome worker along with Pauline and Evelyn. That group will start next week working on organizing the collection of Smoke Signals. Donna Afflerbach and Virginia started working on them but didn't quite complete them. When they are organized into years we will have

them bound and make them available for people to read.

So many people have questions about Chatsworth History and telephone us or stop by on Wednesdays. Nearly every week we get telephone queries, many of them from far away - we have had several from North Carolina, New York and from Northern California.

The week of Aug. 4th, Troy Anderson of the Daily News stopped by and interviewed several of us about the days of the Manson family and how they affected Chatsworth. That story hasn't appeared yet.

The Homestead Acre is getting better known thanks to all the wonderful docents who have helped us tell the story of Chatsworth and of course, the story of our own Minnie Hill Palmer. We also have many friends and "Old Chatsworth Neighbors and Pioneers" who have contributed so much to our knowledge of the past. Maybe you will meet some of them at our "Old Timers Reunion "on Pioneer Day, Oct. 3rd, 1999.

Virginia Watson, Curator

## GROWING UP ON THE HOMESTEAD ACRE IN THE 1920's AND 30's

*In 1986 Dean & Candy Craig interviewed Minnie Hill Palmer's children, Edith Palmer Butler (b.1910) and Leroy E. Palmer (b.1912) and Minnie's niece, Ruth Manny Hill Rider. Following is the second in a series of a recording of the interview.*

When we asked what their Uncle Lovell's personality was like, Leroy said he was outgoing and managed everything and Edith



added that he was the best looking of all the family members. "He was handsomer than any of the women were pretty." Their father, Alfred Palmer, was described as quiet and easygoing.

Edith also remembered lots of wet winters when the ditch would overflow and combined with the sheet flooding of the area the water became so high that the house was threatened with high water. Edith said there were many times she took off her shoes and waded home from school.

The family grew all sorts of vegetables for their own use in the area west and south of the house. In the twenties they planted a large asparagus bed with plants obtained from a Chinese-American farmer who grew the asparagus commercially. The vegetables were irrigated with drainage water from the train tunnel that flowed through a ditch to the property. It was a regular chore for the children to clean out the ditch to keep the water running. Unfortunately, the drainage water was not potable due to high levels of natural arsenic so drinking water had to be obtained from the hydrant on Devonshire Street.

Everyone washed and bathed in the kitchen using a tin pan or tub until the bathhouse became available. Edith told of an incident of youthful fury that took place in the bathhouse in the mid-twenties. At the time, her cousin Lillian, Aunt Calla's daughter, was living at the ranch and attending school. The two girls were about the same age and were expected to be

friendly, but Edith resented Lillian because she was allowed to do her homework and studying after school while Edith had to help her mother. Only after the dinner dishes were done was Edith allowed some free time. One evening after dinner, Edith prepared for a nice bath by carrying many pails of hot water to the bathhouse tub, but she had forgotten something so had to go back to the house to get it. When she came back Lillian was in the tub. Edith was furious and yanked Lillian from the tub and attacked her. The fight was ended when Minnie, hearing the yelling and screaming separated the two girls.

The children did not have many toys, but there were always lots of things to do when they had free time. Leroy hunted rabbits. Edith played the piano and took lessons from Mrs. Johnson that Minnie paid for by crocheting.

With no electricity or radio the family made its own entertainment. They often played card games, cribbage and pinochle. Edith said, "We played lots of pinochle!"

In the early 1920's Edith and Leroy watched a motion picture company shooting scenes for a silent movie on a hill behind the house. The hill had been covered with piles of salt to simulate snow and a trapper or mountain man character was filmed hiking up and down the mountain. The piles of salt being used to look like snow were a source of great amusement.

Edith and Leroy remembered how much both their mother and father liked to knot, knit, embroider, crochet and piece quilts. A quilt



frame was suspended by ropes from the living room ceiling and by means of a pulley and rope was let down to be worked on. Alfred Palmer knotted and crocheted two beautiful black handbags that Edith showed us. (Alfred Palmer was born in Minnesota and had a twin brother, Albert. Alfred Palmer died in 1946 at the age of 63.)

Furniture Edith remembered from her childhood included her Uncle Lovell's roll-top desk that held a black stick telephone. The telephone generator and ringer were mounted in an oak wooden box attached to the wall. The family owned a dark-finish, upright piano and the usual tables and side chairs. The living rooms had room sized dark-patterned carpets. (The lamp that hangs in the corner of the museum may have hung in the house at one time. Minnie gave this lamp to Edith about 1952 and Edith gave it to the society in 1986.)

*More of the interview next month*

### **AUGUST GARDEN NOTES**

*from Candy*

Rest up in the "dog days" of summer. In Chatsworth it's too hot to garden *except* in the early morning or late evening, but fall and cooler weather are on their way.

Make sure all your roses are well watered and deadheaded regularly. Late August or the first week in September is the time to apply a liquid "boost" in the form of *PETERS* or *MIRACLE-GRO* applied with a hose-end sprayer. Your roses should respond with a "mini-spring" wealth of bloom in October.

*Gardening is an exercise in optimism.*

*Marina Schinz*

### **NINE MAJOR PROJECTS ALMOST FINISHED**

These include: removal of the trailer, grading of the new garden area and installation of decomposed granite in the center section, resurfacing & re-contouring of the asphalt driveway, installation of safety lights, replacement of the museum doors, installation of new chain-link entry gates, major tree pruning and the installation of a new 2 inch water supply to the Acre.

Only the new chain link entry gates await installation. The other projects have been completed.

Due to Dean Craig's repeated requests, persistence in writing letters, making countless phone calls and meetings with department supervisors, the Department of Recreation & Parks has accomplished the above projects within the past two years.

The construction of the Sheila Watts memorial stone planter was begun by Dean's and Candy's son and grandchildren, and was finished by a crew hired by the Society.

Candy Craig designed the new garden area. It includes a collection of historic California native plants on the north side under the trees. She hopes to begin sprinkler installation and planting of the new, raised stone planter this fall.



## EDITOR'S CORNER

*What was happening in Chatsworth 43 years ago?*

From the August 23rd, 1956 issue of:

### THE CHATSWORTH GRAPEVINE,

Roy Rogers & Dale Evans & their 7 children left via plane for personal appearances in Columbus, Ohio and Des Moines, Iowa.

A representative of the Chatsworth Chamber of Commerce was in Los Angeles protesting a proposed dump on the Spahn Ranch for which a permit had been applied.

Shopping Cart Market at 21360 Devonshire St, (southeast corner at Canoga Ave) advertised:

Seedless grapes...10c / lb  
Romaine lettuce....7c  
Ground beef.....3 lbs for \$1  
and a bunch of radishes was 2c!!

From the September 13th 1956 issue:

Roy Rogers, as Honorary Mayor of Chatsworth, proclaimed the week of September 17th - 23rd 1956 as Constitution Week and urged "All citizens to pay special attention during the week to our Federal Constitution and advantages of American Citizenship, honoring the US flag and especially emphasizing the purposes of Good Government as set forth in the Preamble of our Constitution and the duty of all persons in our Republic to protect our Constitution and our Bill of Rights, so it may continue to protect us and our posterity in 'This Nation under God'."

## UP-COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Sunday, Sept. 5th, 1-4pm **OPEN HOUSE**

Sunday, Sept. 12th, 5-7pm **1998-99  
SPECIAL FRIENDS POTLUCK DINNER**

Please join us in the garden as we honor friends who have made extra special contributions of service and gifts to the Acre and the Historical Society. Meat and drinks will be provided. Please bring salads, side dishes or desserts and personal table service. **All members are invited.** RSVP 882-5614 or 341-4461

### 1998-99 SPECIAL FRIENDS

Ramon Avila	Irene Nalbandian
Lillian Baker	Jackie O'Reilly
Chatsworth Florist	Lois Orr
Patricia Halpern	Kim Rupert
Dan Huffman	Chris van Schaack
Valeta Koller	Jim Summers

Sunday, Oct. 3rd, 11-4pm **PIONEER DAY**

October 3rd is the date for our annual PIONEER Day to be held at the Homestead Acre from 11:00am to 4pm. There will be "Old Time" fun for everyone including a chili cook-off, entertainment, games for children, petting zoo, prizewinning quilt display, bake sale, refreshments, white elephant booth, old time chores, many other displays and a new added attraction this year, panning for gold. Keep the date open and tell your friends.

Bea Berman, chairman