

Smoke Signal



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth CA 91311
(818)-882-5614

President: John Thorpe

May 2000

Editor: Zena Thorpe

This will be my last message as president of the Chatsworth Historical Society. The new board will be installed at the general meeting on Tuesday, May 16th, 7pm at the museum. Please try to attend and support your incoming board of directors. I would like to thank Linda and Andre van der Valk for taking the position of co-presidents: I am sure they will do a great job.

We will not be having a formal program at the meeting but come and enjoy the wine and cheese refreshments and view the special exhibit of artifacts loaned by Valley historical societies. Zena Thorpe's latest award winning quilt, "Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness", will be on display as an added attraction.

John Thorpe

Chatsworth Historical Society Board 1999-2000

President.....	John Thorpe	882-3572
Programs.....	Candy Craig	341-4461
Rec. Secretary.....	Barbara Pampalone	882-2395
Treasurer.....	Lillian Schepler	341-2697
Membership.....	Keith Watts	341-4489
Ways & Means.....	Bea Berman	341-5449
Smoke Signal.....	Zena Thorpe	882-3572
Museum Curator.....	Virginia Watson	341-3053
Hospitality.....	Bea Berman	341-5449
Gardens Director.....	Dean Craig	341-4461
Director-at-large.....	Linda van der Valk	882-3661
Director-at-large.....	Andre van der Valk	882-3661
Director-at-large.....	Ruth Grant	882-3990
Photog. materials.....	Bill Schepler	341-3447
Permanent member.....	Lila Schepler	341-3447
Permanent member.....	Eileen Janess	341-2828

VALLEY HISTORY DISPLAY

A special display of San Fernando Valley history, assembled and curated by Robert Marshall, Director of Urban Archives at CSUN, and Lara Bickell, Ph.D. candidate at Claremont University, has been retained for the months of April, May and June. Numerous historical societies throughout the Valley loaned some of their most prized artifacts for a commemorative display at our California Sesquicentennial event in March. It was received with much interest. Don't miss this opportunity to see this unique presentation.

The museum will be open from 1pm to 4pm on June 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th, 10th & 11th and from 10am to 4pm on June 7th.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE ACRE

By Virginia Watson, Curator

Recently we have had two interesting additions to our Chatsworth Historical Society Collection that I must tell you about. The first gift came from a former Chatsworth resident who has recently rejoined the Chatsworth Women's Club, Mary Hagen. She remembers when we first started and sent us an old publicity flyer about an event dated July 25, 1925.

It was advertising a barnstorming aviation group who were going to perform over the pasture belonging to C.A Gentry in Chatsworth, described as being about a mile north of the depot. Aerial stunts included a headstand on the wing of the "aeroplane" and standing on the top wing while the pilot did a loop-the-loop, were to be performed and rides were also being offered.

If any of our long-time Chatsworth residents and Smoke Signal readers remember any details about the event or similar events, we would love to hear about it.

The second gift came from Linda and Warren Stone who live in Twin Lakes. They gave us three boxes of material from the records of the Twin Lakes Property Owners, Inc. Warren was president of the association.

We haven't had a chance to look through the material yet but there are lots of maps and years of information.

Twin Lakes was a resort development up above Canoga Avenue on the other side of what is today the Ronald Reagan Freeway. We have a postcard from Bill Schepler showing one of the lakes with people boating. The development started about 1927 and lasted until at least the end of 1930's. Lila and Bill remember it well and I am sure many other people reading the Smoke Signal will too. Please write to us (CHS 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth, CA 91311) or call me at (818)341-3053 if you have any special memories of Twin Lakes and I will include them in next month's Smoke Signal. And speaking of Twin Lakes, our own Pauline Aue, one of our regular long-time docents, lived at Twin Lakes for many years. She recently sold her house and has moved to the Chatsworth Gardens Retirement Center. She kept the same telephone number so we can keep in touch. Our unique San Fernando Valley exhibit is an ongoing source of interest to the public. We will keep the exhibit through California Museum Week which is June 5th - 11th. Our historical society committee has planned to keep the Acre open daily for the whole week. We will be open on Sunday, June 4, for our regular Open House. Then we will also be open the whole week Monday, June 5th through Sunday June 11th. from 1 - 4pm. On Wednesday, June 7, we will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. That is the day we are usually working at The Acre and our new docents have agreed to help us with tours.

We will put out news releases and a few flyers to advertise so tell your friends. Lara Bickell has agreed to have a training session for volunteers who would like to help us during those days. Let us know if you are interested. At the conclusion of the exhibit we are having a "Thank You" reception for the participants and will serve wine, cheese and crackers. The reception starts at 4:15pm. right after we close the museum for tours and all our members are invited to come and help thank the people who made it possible. At the conclusion of the reception participants may take home their artifacts and contributions.

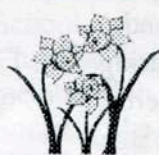
The exhibit has been a really worthwhile project and it has brought The Chatsworth Historical Society and its purpose to the attention of many new scholars, history buffs and Valley residents. Thanks especially to all our members who have supported the exhibit.

COMMUNITY AWARDS

The Chatsworth Community Coordinating Council Installation and Awards banquet will be held on Friday, May 12th and the Historical Society is honoring some of the members who have made special contributions to the society this year.

Connie & Jerry Ager, Robert Marshall and Lara Bickell will be awarded Service to Community certificates.

Thanks go to these members and also to members who have donated the honoraria for their speaking engagements to the society, Candy Craig and Bill Schepler.



GARDEN NOTES

BEFORE THE WILDERNESS

By Candy Craig

West Valley pioneers, who left written descriptions of the landscape they faced, often described it as a *wilderness*. The Valley floor is described as a "dusty weed patch" with impenetrable chaparral except for the flat, cultivated fields of wheat. The early photos we have of Chatsworth show a barren landscape around schools and houses. (City water didn't arrive until after 1915)

In the fall, fierce winds with terrible dust storms were endemic and wet winters brought devastating flooding. In the dry years winter wheat crops failed. There are few mentions of spring wildflower displays and the Valley is rarely described as being beautiful. But, it was not always so. Before European contact, the importation of cattle and the plow, it was a different place. When the Spanish arrived they realized that the area had a tremendous potential for *agriculture* and *cattle* so they began altering the landscape that had been cared for by the Native Americans for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

Much of the San Fernando Valley was oak and black walnut studded grasslands interspersed with edible, seed bearing annual wildflowers, perennials, herbs, bulbs, fruit and berries. Deer and small mammals were abundant and acorns were traded for dried fish and seafood.

California Native Americans had practiced their own form of food production called *permaculture* for centuries and their success was measured by the fact that California had the highest population density of indigenous people in the U.S. The Chumash and other tribes had a vastly varied diet, especially when compared to the poverty rations they were to experience during the Mission Period. A baptized Indian was forbidden to leave the Mission grounds without permission and was allowed to gather "wild" foods only to supplement his diet. It has been estimated from Mission food production records that the calorie level provided the Native workers was rarely more than 1,200 per day. The enforced labor of the Native Americans resulted, ultimately, in the loss of their religion, culture and most of their lives due to the European diseases of measles, smallpox and syphilis.

The Spanish had little knowledge or understanding of the native people's culture or method of food production and considered them inferior as hunters and gatherers. Rather than simply gathering what happened to grow, the Natives *managed* the production of food in many ways. After harvesting edible bulbs, (Indian potatoes) the small bulbs were

replanted. Harvested seeds were scattered in favorable areas and sections of grassland were burned at certain times of the year to fertilize the soil, keep the chaparral from taking over, and rid the cropland of disease and insects.

The Spanish prohibited burning because it temporarily removed the grasses that their horses, cattle and sheep needed, so it was no longer possible to ensure a healthy stand of grasses and without their protection certain bulbs and wildflowers can not grow and chaparral invades the land.

California grasses are different from most European grasses. They are deep-rooted perennial bunch grasses that grow from a central sheath. Periodic low-level burning and light grazing do not kill them and they regrow from their central crown. When burned, they tend to smolder, rather than exploding like European annual grasses such as oats, wheat and alfalfa. But they are no match for overgrazing by cattle and sheep who eat plants to the ground, and trample what remains with heavy hooves. Cattle considered the grasses "ice cream" plants, which led to their disappearance. They were replaced with imported annual weeds and grains, which out competed the native grasses, bulbs and wildflowers. During the Mexican period in Southern California, thousands of cattle were grazed in the San Fernando Valley and their hides and tallow exported. Then the Gold Rush, with one million cattle to feed hungry miners, rang the death knell for much of our state's grasslands and made enormous

fortunes for those Yankees and Rancheros who raised beef to sell to the 49ers.

In the 1860s-80s the pioneer and the plow completed the change. Thousands of oak trees were cut down and, over time, some were replaced with such *exotic aliens* as "California" pepper trees, eucalyptus, etc. The fields of mustard that still bloom in the spring are aliens, replacing the even more beautiful native wildflowers. To this day, more than 85% of all weeds that plague the home gardener and regrow after our brush fires are aliens, too.

It has only been in the last twenty years that we are beginning to understand what our Valley was like *before the wilderness*. Many of the newly translated, early travelers' diaries are filled with descriptions of what was almost surely, a *Garden of Eden*.

Postscript: Recently, two small areas at the Homestead Acre have been planted with California Native plants, grasses and wildflowers.

NEWS NOTES

A radiant Christina Mitchell (daughter of Luise and Eddie Mitchell, granddaughter of Lila and Bill Schepler and Orville and Lorraine Mitchell) and Robert Flores were married in a lovely traditional ceremony on Saturday, May 6th at the beautiful Northridge Methodist Church. After the ceremony guests met at Dakota's in Simi Valley for a buffet celebration followed by dancing. The newlyweds will travel to Hawaii for their honeymoon and settle in

an apartment near Chatsworth High School.

Christina was one of our first "junior members" in the Chatsworth Historical Society. She and her brother Matthew were both members and have supported and helped us in many ways. Junior members were young people (usually members' children or grandchildren) who only paid \$1 dues and assisted at events.

The Chatsworth Post Office has requested the use of some of our old photographs to hang in the Post Office. The pictures show other locations of the facility. We also gave them a list of earlier Postmasters.

Zena Thorpe has published a book of pictures and stories of her quilts. The quilts contain much historical information and she felt that they needed to be documented.. She will have the book at the May 16th meeting.

Vic & Vicki Wyant were recently in North Carolina for the graduation of their son from Duke University.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We have a few of the California Sesquicentennial souvenirs left. Don't miss out on your memento of this important event in California history.

We have a beautiful commemorative booklet with tons of information about California and local history. We have commemorative pins featuring the official sesquicentennial logo, sweatshirts, T-shirts and mugs with the official logo and posters & post-cards picturing the magnificent Sesquicentennial Quilt.