



Smoke Signal



CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Co-Presidents: Linda & Andre van der Valk

January 2001

Editor: Zena Thorpe

We hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday season. We especially did with our new granddaughter this year. We are looking forward to another successful year at the Acre. We are planning our Garden Festival in May and Pioneer Day in October. These fund-raisers are necessary to pay the bills that occur in the upkeep of the house, museum and gardens. At the same time, by opening the Acre for these events, new people discover us all the time and hopefully want to join us in our preservation efforts.

We wish you a very Happy New Year
Linda & Andre

Chatsworth Historical Society Board 1999-2000

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PROGRAM MEETING January 16th, 7pm

Mr. Jim Gulbranson, curator at the Campo de Cahuenga Historical monument , will speak about the history of the Campo and the role it played in the establishment of the state of California.

Mr. Gulbranson is a very knowledgeable and interesting speaker. Don't miss this informative program.

Refreshments will be served

WHAT'S NEW AT THE ACRE

By Virginia Watson, curator

Here it is, the NEW YEAR ALREADY!

Seems like we just started planning our sesquicentennial - but that is only an illusion.

We have had a very good year but it seemed to go very fast. Perhaps that is because we were so very busy and planned so much more than we had ever planned before in order to stage the fabulous 150th birthday party for our state and to celebrate the 112th birthday of our own little part of the state, Chatsworth. It was such a success and we did a fine job - plus we have money in our treasury to do many of the projects we have wanted to do.

But let's get down to the present and think of what's been happening over the holidays.

Two big events took place within the last few weeks. Our November program featuring Abraham Lincoln, (AKA Warren R. Palmquist from Simi valley Historical Society) was a big success - he did an excellent job. Other historical societies called and requested information about him for programs in their group. Good work! John Thorpe, our immediate past-president and program chairman for 2000-2001. Our speaker for this next

meeting, Jim Gulbranson, is a familiar figure to history buffs. He is a member of the San Fernando Valley Historical Society and is curator of the Campo de Cahuenga.

I received a call from Lori Bales recently. She was the person who started the Canteen Club for the Chatsworth Business and Professional Women's Club. The Canteen Club was a program designed to give our local servicemen and women a lift. It was to let them know that the community was behind them, that we hadn't forgotten them.

The BPW put together a list of the men and women from Chatsworth that were in the service and kept track of them. Once a month the servicemen and women were sent a package and a newsletter. The BPW was in charge of the procedure but the whole community participated in the shopping, collecting, packing, mailing of the boxes. Packing was done at the Docia Conley Paradise Gift Shoppe owned by Phoebe Chenard and her son Leonard. The company made jams and jellies etc. and shipped them all over the world. In fact the gift shop was Chatsworth's oldest continuing business. In the 1920s it was a well-known destination for people in Los Angeles who "motored" out from Los Angeles to have tea and jam in the tearoom.

The Canteen Club boxes were packed with personal grooming items, cookies, pencils, and paper etc. Lillian Schepler, who was president of the BPW at this

time, remembers buying a large number of pencils and having her husband, Frank, cut them in half with his electric saw so they would fit in the boxes.

Local citizens and other interested people, as well as the families of the servicemen and women, donated items and came to help pack. Lori Bales edited a monthly newsletter full of news about local people and events and sent it with the packages. The project lasted from 1968-1973 and Mrs. Bales had retired before the project was finished. Others carried on. The newsletters were filed in a notebook and the photographs of the servicemen and women were placed in a notebook, (in alphabetical order), and given to the Chatsworth Historical Society.

I got out of the storage the two items for Mrs. Bales and she looked through the notebooks, reminiscing and reading excerpts from the newsletters. While helping her I found a familiar face in the photographs and discovered that Les Himes, immediate past-president of the Chatsworth Chamber of Commerce, was one of the recipients of the boxes from home. He has lived in Chatsworth since 1962, he said later.

Daniel Howard Gray, the great grandson of Nelson A Gray, found our CHS web page and wrote to us. He has a four-month-old baby boy named Frank Daniel Gray. Later, Daniel's wife, Antoinette Gray, sent an e-mail with the family's address so that we could keep in touch. I sent them an e-mail telling them a little of

what we know of the family. We will keep in touch and I will send them a Smoke Signal.

Nelson and Minerva (Minnie) Gray came to Chatsworth from the Pasadena area. They built a big house on Lassen St. in 1890. We believe that Mr. Gray is the one who planted the olive trees along Lassen Street and we think that they were cuttings from the olive trees at the San Fernando Mission. The young couple had thirteen children, (two sets of twins), and they farmed the land from Lassen Street to Devonshire and from Topanga Canyon Blvd. to the Simi Hills.

A very civic-minded man, N.A. Gray was president of the Chatsworth Chamber of Commerce and was active in the Chatsworth Methodist Church. He donated the land for the school, the church and for the first fire station.

Our docent group is still meeting almost every Wednesday from 9am to 12 noon and really getting a lot done. Currently, Elaine Campbell is working on the snapshot collection of our CHS activities putting them in envelopes by occasion and by year date. Connie Ager and Evelyn Kanouse are putting the library in order by author. Gerry Ager helps clean and put things back where they belong. Marilyn Frump does our telephoning for meetings and reminders and does clerical work. Pauline Aue assists different people each week. She works often when the museum is open. She sits near the door and gets people to sign in, she greets visitors,

works in the gift shop selling and keeping track of what she sells. Keli Jacobson also works with the snapshots and sometimes the library, does clerical work and also does a lot of garden work. Candy comes on Wednesdays when she can get away and Betty Summers helps in the museum as well as taking care of the cottage. She is training Elaine to be assistant curator and showing her how she numbers and photographs all the furniture and knick-knacks in the house. Our president, Linda van der Valk, comes often and helps us with our projects.

We are planning on writing a letter to the schools telling them of our tours that continue on Wednesdays from April 30th through October 1st. We are going to try to keep our tours on Wednesdays when the docents are there anyway.

You can see how busy we have been and how much more we have to do. If you would like to come by on Wednesdays and help we would love to have you.

The Sheila M. Watts Memorial Garden

From Candy Craig

In January, 2001 the raised planter garden that was made in honor of our Past President, Sheila Watts, will be one year old. Planted in the English style of mixed flowering plants with abutilon, euphorbia, lavenders, penstemon, salvias, roses and

annuals, the garden has something in bloom throughout the year.

Sheila was born in England and came to the U.S. as a war bride after W.W.II. On her death in late 1998 many donations to honor her memory were made to the historical society. Sheila had spent much effort during her last term as president trying to get the Park Dept. to remove the old trailer at the front of the Acre. Just a few short months after her death this was accomplished and her husband, Keith and children suggested a garden be made on the site in her memory. Her daughter Heather, for many years a New York City Ballet principal dancer and now editor for Vanity Fair Magazine, generously contributes so that seasonal annuals can be planted.

In the spring we hope to have a garden dedication with a marker installed bearing Sheila's name.

What's In A Name?

By Candy Craig

In the large rose garden in front of the Homestead Cottage a beautiful salmon-pink, fragrant hybrid tea rose is often in bloom. One of our unusual roses-"Mrs. Lovell Swisher" - 73 years after her introduction by the famous Fred Howard Nursery of California is still a rose well

worth growing but she became rather rare shortly after she was introduced.

The history of this rose's name is very interesting. In the 1920s the Los Angeles Garden Club was an exclusive group limited to men only whose president was a man named Lovell Swisher. At that time many roses were named for the wives of wealthy and prominent men, but only the lady's married title was used and almost never the name of the woman herself.

Mrs. Lovell Swisher was a very beautiful woman many years younger than her husband. When the great rose hybridizer, Fred Howard, introduced his 1926 rose creation he offered to name it for Mrs. Lovell Swisher whose husband reportedly paid a fee for the privilege.

The rose was presented with much fanfare and, being beautiful as well as healthy, proved to be a big seller especially in Southern California. Very shortly after the rose was offered for sale the real Mrs. Lovell Swisher eloped with the family chauffeur.

Subsequently, her husband tried to buy up every plant available and burn the lot. Of course, a few escaped and we have our own beautiful "Mrs. Lovell Swisher", thanks to the Huntington Botanical Rose Garden.

Board Meeting Business

A bylaw review committee has been appointed and the society bylaws will be reviewed in the near future.

Plans are going ahead for the May 6th Garden Festival & Tea.

Editor's notes

The holiday get-together at the home of our co-presidents, Linda and Andre, was a most enjoyable evening. Their home is like one giant Christmas tree with decorations abounding. Thank you Linda and Andre for a great jump-start to the holidays.

Canoga-Owensmouth Historical Society invites you to a reception honoring Catherine Mulholland on the publication of her book, "William Mulholland and The Rise of Los Angeles"

It will be held on Sunday afternoon, January 14th, 2001, 2pm - 4pm at the Canoga-Owensmouth Museum, 7248 Owensmouth Ave., Canoga Park

Catherine will sign copies of her new book as well as her earlier one, "The Owensmouth Baby"

Many of our members will be attending. We hope to see you there.