

# Smoke Signal

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

November 2015, Issue #5

Editor: Ann Vincent

## Co-Presidents' Message

By Linda & André van der Valk

Where did the year go? It is already November and we are looking forward to the holidays. It has already been a month since Pioneer Day but I just wanted to thank everyone who was involved in making it a record breaking Pioneer Day. Ann Vincent did a great job as the Event Chairman and everything went well. Her expanding on the Chores of Yore has really contributed to the success of the day. We were a little worried in the morning the day of because of the rain. Of course we are in the middle of a drought and we had to worry about rain. Once it was decided the day was a go we never looked back and it was a record breaking crowd. Thank you to the Pioneer Day Committee for a great job.

A letter has been sent out to the community concerning the remediation of Chatsworth Park South from Councilmember Englander. It states that the project has received all necessary permits and the approved contractor has received a Notice to Proceed for the cleanup of the park. Of course there always is a "what now" and the letter proceeds to say "due to the potential adverse impacts of the severe rain expected this winter in conjunction with El Nino, the City of Los Angeles and the contractor have mutually agreed to delay the start of construction until the spring. The adjustment will prevent major cost and timeline overruns while still allowing us to open the park by next fall". As I mentioned before I can't get over that we are in the midst of a four year drought and now we have to worry about El Nino delaying the opening of the park.

We hope that everyone has a wonderful holiday season.

Linda and André



Chatsworth Historical Society  
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## Upcoming Events

### General Meeting

**Tuesday, November 17, 2015 7pm**

### Silent Movie Sets at Iverson Ranch

Film historian Dennis Liff will guide us through the magnificent and unique silent movie sets that were developed at the Garden of the Gods.

### Chatsworth Historical Society Christmas Party - Members Only December 15th, 7:00 PM – Tuesday

Please join us as we celebrate the holidays at the home of André and Linda van der Valk.  
10524 Eton Avenue, Chatsworth  
*the Christmas Party is limited to MEMBERS ONLY.*

### Open House

The Homestead Acre is open to the public the first Sunday of each month from 1 to 4 pm.  
The next two will be Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup> and Sunday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Save the Date for Rose Pruning:**  
Saturday January 23, 2016 9-noon

## Pioneer Day 2015 -Thank Yous and Recap *(more than you want to know)*

Our 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Pioneer Day held on Sunday, October 4, 2015 came together with tremendous results. In spite of weather predictions of rain which actually occurred in the eastern area of the valley, Chatsworth remained raindrop free with a hint of blue sky, and we opened our event with a record number of vendors and nonprofit organizations participating.

Hoping our visitors would not be deterred by the threat of rain, we were delighted as families came throughout the day to take the "Pioneer Challenge". The change of weather was a nice break from the heat of the previous weeks, but regardless of the reasons everyone came, we enjoyed having a record turnout that led to a very successful fundraiser for our Historical Society.

These events don't happen without a lot of people stepping up to make it all come together. Councilman Englander provided our shuttle bus, allowing parking at the Depot. Our parking area at the Acre is limited, and fills quickly in the morning due to vendor parking. Setting up and supervising the parking lot was handled this year by

Tom Nachtrab, John Luker, Dr. Mishra (recruited on the spot) and Ray Vincent to help keep the traffic flowing, refer the guests to the Depot for more parking and to assist the shuttle bus arrival and departure. Students from Lawrence Middle School also assist us in the parking lot throughout the day.

Long before the event, preparations are made for publicity, flyers and much more. Thank you to Linda Dunham for helping to get the word out and coordinate over 4,000 flyers that were distributed to schools in the area. As the event approaches we appreciate Facebook posts and reminders that go out from our members, vendors and friends. We thank our Chatsworth Honorary Mayor Chris Burrows for spreading the word on KTLA encouraging everyone to join us.

Our event setup takes place on Saturday morning with help this year from JNROTC El Camino High School Cadets, who set up all



of our tables, canopies, equipment and plants under the direction of a team of adults who make that happen efficiently. This makes it easy for us to arrive early Sunday, fresh and ready to do the final preparation with another team that has been recruited to get our canopies raised and to assist our vendors in transporting their goods to their assigned locations. Wendy Gladstone and Donna Nachtrab made the vendor and non-profit check-in for location assignments go smoothly. The changes this year in layout were due to the additional vendors and groups participating. They really added to the event and we appreciate our vendors who share their wares with our community.

Admission to the event is \$5 for adults, \$1 for ages 6-12 with kids 5 and under free. These donations are the major fund-raising source for the Historical Society. Our goal is to have a fun, educational and family friendly event just as it has been for the last 25 years. Once inside the gate all activities are free for parents and kids. The non-profit groups who provide our PIONEER THEME activities are amazing and make this possible. It was truly an educational family friendly event.

As our guests entered they were offered our Pioneer Challenge card with a list of activities to try and a Chatsworth Pioneer badge. Keene Engineering donates real gold dust for the gold panning, and brings a crew of experts to help the children. Dr. Standke our blacksmith donates the materials for the miniature horseshoes the young apprentices make. His wife, Nita Standke, donates all the cornbread she bakes that day. The Rotary club and the Nachtrabs donated cream for the butter making activity (next to the cornbread of course). The Foundation for the Preservation of the Santa Susana State Park provided a Native American sand painting activity with all costs donated by Wendy Gladstone. The Native Plant seed collecting opportunity was provided at the Santa Susana Mountain Park Association booth with seeds and materials donated by the Vincent family.

### PIONEER DAY CHALLENGE



- Blacksmithing
- Baking
- Butter Churning
- Gold Panning
- Sand Painting
- Spinning Wheels
- Seed Collecting
- Quilting
- Coffee Grinding
- Tape Loom Weaving
- Fishing game
- Bean bag game
- Sack Races
- Darning Socks
- Paper Dolls
- Braiding
- Washboard Laundry
- The Telegraph
- Corn Husk Dolls
- Wood Carving
- Rock Polishing
- Leatherwork
- Bee Keeping
- Stick Puppets
- Knot Tying

October 2015  
Chatsworth Historical Society





Jack Wilson

This year there were lots of quilting activities to participate in. For kids, the Quilting for Others group provided fabric squares for children to make a miniature quilt on paper. They also donated a quilt that was raffled off in a drawing. The drawing was eligible to those who participated in the craft that day. The winner of the quilt was Jack Wilson age 3.

Additional quilting activities (a must to know how to do if you are a pioneer family) included the opportunity to assist in finishing quilts - tying the fronts and back panels together. Finished quilts were donated as a community service activity for the Chatsworth DAR Chapter.

The San Fernando Valley Historical Society joins us each year sharing some of their pioneer toys to touch and display. This year they brought a Tape Loom and coffee grinder for everyone to experience.

We were happy to have Boy Scout Troop 307 on hand this year to teach knots and lashing techniques needed by early pioneers. The Daughters of Union Veterans joined us providing balloons for kids and adults. More Pioneer activities included the leather craft with staff provided to teach by Wayne Christensen of Standing Bear Trading Post. The materials were sponsored by the Chatsworth Historical Society. We welcomed Cliff Cox with his demonstration and display of wood carving and The Valley Hive who represented our early days of Bee Keeping by our homesteaders. Bee keeping was important as it provided wax for candles as well as honey to be used as a sweetener.

The members of the St. Mary the Virgin Anglican-Rite Catholic Church, who are the caretakers of the Pioneer Church, were there representing the volunteer work done for the community in the early 1900's which still continued today. In addition we had information displays by Ride On Therapy, The Chatsworth Porter Ranch Chamber of Commerce, and the Chatsworth Neighborhood Council.

You could not have attended without being drawn to the western display and Charityville Jail run by Sheriff George Lightbody and his crew of characters roaming around arresting people if a warrant was taken out. Bail received for the event was donated to the Historical Society.



Our Pioneer Challenge included learning something from all the activities provided along with our Chores of Yore and Games of Yore. Games including horseshoes, sack races and tug of war were supervised by Bill Updegraff. The Lawrence Middle School students took charge and ran all of our other activities, providing help where needed throughout the event. Additional crafts were added including corn husk dolls under the supervision of Carol Lucas.

And yes, more community groups participate as well. The Historical Society always has a Bake Sale with goods donated by

Loretta and Rod Sandavol and Bea Berman. Members of the Chatsworth Womens Club, Pam Perram and Beverly Manasse served as our hostesses with fresh coffee and dessert treats at the Bake Sale table. Our White Elephant Sale is handled by Connie Ager and Eric Salazar, with help from Bea Berman and Michelle DeGaetano. Our front gate entrance was run by Irene Nalbandian and Janice Heiden. The information booth where we sell our printed copies of various Chatsworth history books was supervised this year by Elaine Campbell, while tours of the museum were provided by Dianne Kartiala and Jelena Csanyi. Our cottage tours were provided by Gloria Bennedetti, Dottie Acker, Jan Gruenwald, and Zena Thorpe. The snack bar is managed through the Historical Society by our own co-presidents Linda and Andre van der Valk and their family members, who donate the food as a contribution to our fundraising, with Gary Bercow cooking the hot dogs.

Our plant sales both at Pioneer Day and Garden Festival are due to the hard work of Annette Campbell and Nadia Harding who cultivate plants for our sales. Becky and Randy Mineo of Chatsworth Landscaping donate plants and all of their sales from the day to the Historical Society.

Last but not least are the results of our Mini-Chili Cook-off sponsored by the Munch Box and coordinated by Linda van der Valk. The winner was **Peter Espiritu**, with his "Pete's Outlaw Chili". **Fire Station 96** placed 2<sup>nd</sup> and **Tim Imel** took 3rd.



Bea Berman sponsored the Fire Department entry known as Bea's Team.

*A special thank you to Bea Berman and her family for their continuous support of our Pioneer Day over the last 25 years!*

## Docent Doings at the ACRE:

Our docents keep busy with projects throughout the year.

**OUT IN THE GARDEN:** Annette and Karyin can be found dead-heading roses and hand watering plants as needed every Wednesday morning. If you need some outdoor fresh air therapy, come join them. Our annual Rose Pruning Day is Saturday January 23<sup>rd</sup> from 9-noon.

**IN THE MUSEUM:** Linda van der Valk is continuously working with the items donated to the museum by our members. The Iverson collection has grown based on items provided by Carla. Sorting, organizing and preserving are skills that all take patience. Thank you to Elaine Campbell for continuing to help with these projects.

**IN THE COTTAGE:** Ann Vincent, Donna Nachtrab, Martina Turner and Linda Dunham have started an update of the cottage inventory. This project has been slowing taking form over the last year and is now in full swing. This provides an opportunity for our docents involved to learn more about each of the pieces that have been selected for display in the cottage and the history behind them. In our first workshop, it was noted on a form that the piano stool at the organ had claw feet with glass insets. Of course we all had to go look and see. The feet on the stool were indeed beautifully carved bird claws each holding a round glass ball that set on the floor. Sometimes, it is fun to have a good reason to take a closer look to appreciate the craftsmanship of these older antique pieces.



If this type of project sounds like fun to you, come join us. Usually we meet on Wednesday morning from 9-noon unless holidays get in the way. Confirm dates by emailing [chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com)

## 2015 CHS Fall Programs

We started the year out early with a Tuesday night program in September instead of our usual Sunday Roundup barbeque. The weather year after year has finally convinced us that September is still too hot to meet in the afternoon for a barbeque.

### Chumash Program for State Park

On September 15, Lorie Lawrence presented the Chumash Educational Materials used for 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade interpretive hikes at the Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park. Lorie took on the challenge of learning the ways of the Chumash culture to teach it to others. Her efforts provided a variety of carefully crafted items that she was able to share with us. If you missed this program you can see it on November 14<sup>th</sup> in person at Trails Day in the State Park.

Link: <http://fpssm.org/hikes-and-events.php>

### Robert Winckler - Child Star

On October 20<sup>th</sup>, Bill Winckler presented his father's activities in the movies and radio, it was a great time. For those of you fascinated about the golden age of Hollywood, this was a great insight into the busy life that Bobby Winckler led shooting Western movies by day at Iverson Ranch and performing on live radio shows at night. Bill will be speaking again about his father on **Wednesday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 12:30 pm** at the Autry as part of a group discussion called **Sons and Daughters of the West**, featuring children who grew up with Western Movie parents. Cheryl Rogers is also scheduled to attend to represent Roy Rogers and Dale Evans.

Link: [Sons and Daughters of the West](#)

For those that missed it, we showed this short Robert (Bobby) Winckler video at our meeting in October. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Er5u0JM1RU>

### Upcoming November Program Reminder

Tuesday - November 17, 7pm

## IVERSON MOVIE RANCH SETS IN THE SILENT MOVIE ERA

As mentioned on the first page, we have a special program on the Iverson Movie Ranch Garden of the Gods that will show examples of how spectacular sets were created during the silent movie era in and around the rock formations that are still standing there today. Dennis Liff will discuss the movie stills and publicity photos used from these early times. The presentation will include some very entertaining short video clips from the 1923 Buster Keaton silent movie "Three Ages".



## Stories from our Members: The Saint Francis Dam Disaster at Storke Ranch –

*Personal account written by Alex Summers, father of Jim Summers, a long time resident of Chatsworth and member of the Chatsworth Historical Society. The collapse of the St. Francis Dam is considered to be one of the worst American civil engineering disasters of the 20th century and remains the second-greatest loss of life in California's history, after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. Jim Summers was the baby in the story below.*

At about 12:30 A. M. on March 13, 1928, my wife Jessie and I were awakened by what we thought was rain. If it hadn't been for a few things (like our darling baby) we would surely all have been drowned by this disaster.

Jessie asked me to get up and close the window that was open just a little. When I pushed back the curtains to close the window, I saw floating in our yard her modern washing equipment - wash tub, wash board and boiler. I yelled to her to "get up quick and get the baby wrapped up". Many things went through my mind and the first and main one was not to go floating away with the house! I ran to the telephone to call my boss, Frank Dent, and just as I did the complete telephone line and pole went down. I ran and got the baby and told my wife to come with me to the porch on the South side of the house. There was a walnut tree in the southwest corner of our yard. With the water rising every second, I told Jessie to run for the tree should the house go. Just then another house came around and hit ours, raised up and floated away. I yelled for Jessie to "jump as far as you can". I ran for the tree and looked back for her as she came floating by. I reached out and caught her hand. This was just lucky! We were in a tight spot for a few minutes. We were standing on a big drift. My arm became very tired so I told Jessie to climb up in the tree and sit on the low branches and hold the baby. She tried but was so exhausted she couldn't do it. I then picked her up with my right arm and sat her up in the tree. When I attempted this some time later I couldn't do it. Jessie's muddy clothes left her brand on the limb of the tree for a long time. The roots of the walnut tree supporting us were popping and cracking. I thought this was it. Luckily, it held and we were there for about an hour.

I could see a man over at the next house. I thought this was my cousin, Doc Scurlock. However, it was my boss's oldest son, Floyd Dent. He risked his life, trying to get to us. I finally made him understand that we would need a rope to throw over to me. He left to get the rope but before he could return the water went down and though knee deep and swift we were able to wade out.

There were cars waiting when we got out. They had blankets for us and then took us to Mr. & Mrs. Dent's house. They had a fire in the fireplace and put our baby on a blanket in front of the fireplace. He kicked and played and didn't ever know how close to death he was.

We lost everything. Our new 1927 Model T. Ford, our home and all our belongings and clothing. I had the pair of Levi's I wore (which sure weren't very warm). The next day when we were looking for our house, I found the body of about a 5 month old baby. I also saved a man's life. His name was Mr. Serena. He was buried alive and I dug him out. George Dent and I also found a girl probably about 14 years old wandering dazed and without clothes. We gave her our shirts (mine borrowed) to cover her and walked her out and some one took her to town. I never knew who she was.



We lived to raise a beautiful family. We have our son, James and his wife Betty and our 3 grandchildren. We have a daughter, Janet and husband Hubert Loedter and two grandsons.

We are among the lucky ones who survived that terrible disaster. I could continue on and on and write a book about the experiences.

Alex and Jessie Summers,  
1500 Richmond Rd., Santa Paula,  
CA 93060

*Shown on the tractor in Chatsworth is Alex Summers (seated), son Jim (standing) and daughter Janet on his lap.*

## Johnson Family photo donations provide rare find:



Original photo size above.

Photo on right shows teams of horses pulling equipment and wagons. Stoney Point is visible on the right. The photo below right shows equipment with a derrick moving rocks. The Santa Susana Pass Road (that still exists today) was built in 1917.

We have been able to keep in touch with many of the Johnson Family members and we were fortunate to have Richard Johnson recently share his collection of family photos. Richard is the grandson of Norman Johnson, the ninth out of ten children of Ann and Neils Johnson. His collection of letters, family photos and much more, also included this never before seen photo which shows the Santa Susana Pass Road under construction in 1917. The photo was only 2 x 4 inches showing what appears to be two photos in another photo album. Once scanned and enlarged, the images are more easily recognized below.



Richard and his wife Sue also provided the genealogy records that they had on the Johnson family. In their collection are letters to and from Ann Johnson and her mother written in the 1890's and a collection from 1907 to 1920 to various family members about the community and activities going on within the family.

Having our pioneer families share their research, and being able to help future generations connect, is a great resource to our Chatsworth History.





## Stories from Chatsworth Past:

We would like to thank Gene Herst for the donation to the Chatsworth Historical Society of his memoirs titled "Child of the Greatest Generation – A WWII Home Front Memoir". The last few chapters include stories about two caretaker jobs his father took. One placed the family at the 5 acre Desi and Lucy Arnez ranch on Devonshire at Corbin. The second was Rancho de los Cerros, the Guy Wolverton ranch at the north end of Lurline (today's Sierra Canyon High School before the Rinaldi cut-through to DeSoto), that included an 82 acre orange grove extending down to Chatsworth St. Gene attended Chatsworth Park Elementary school during 1944-1945.

The book is available at <http://www.amazon.com/Child-Greatest-Generation-Gene-Herst/dp/1495314588>

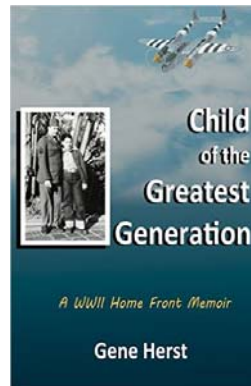
*In exchanging emails with Gene, he shared a remembrance of Brandeis Ranch, once the Johnson Homestead, and today's Indian Springs, just north of the 118 freeway at Iverson Road...*

*By Gene Herst: My Dad took the job of handy-man and Mom became the cook at the Brandeis main house shortly after Wolverton died. This is where my book ended.*

Mr. Brandeis was young, single, and rather wealthy. I remember he drove around the ranch in a surplus Army Jeep. He told us the Government had an excess of military equipment, and they were selling brand new jeeps right off the railroad cars.

Brandeis lived in the house with his girlfriend, a very pretty young lady. Mom said the woman insisted that her morning coffee be served in a white cup, and the coffee should be brewed in a manner that enabled her to look down through the coffee and see the bottom of the cup.

I can't tell you too much about the exterior of the main house, except that it was large, white stucco, with a red Spanish tile roof.



One day, when Mr. Brandeis and his lady friend were gone for a few days, my dad took me for a tour of the main house. If you can picture a mansion combined with a natural history museum, you'll have a reasonable visual.

The living room had a large stone fireplace with a tiered mantel that held numerous silver trophies. One wall consisted of large windows of stained glass that depicted Mr. Brandeis on safari hunting trips. The rest of the walls, (including those throughout the house), were decorated with trophy heads of game animals. It was an assortment of various species from all over the world. Even the bathrooms had trophy heads on the walls.

The living room had a grand piano, the top of which was covered with a white polar bear hide, including the bear's head, its mouth agape. The floor covering consisted of various hides. There were stuffed birds perched on furniture, one of which stood on top of the polar bear hide. (If my memory serves me correctly, I believe it was a pheasant.)

Part of the ranch had a large section of land set aside for Mr. Brandeis's private game preserve. Included within the compound was a rustic log cabin. The roof of the cabin had antlers and animal skulls strewn about. The cabin's interior was rather cozy. There was a stone fireplace, a gun rack, and Indian blankets on the bed and window. I remembered the cabin because it made quite an impression on me. Dad told me that when Brandeis felt in the mood to hunt, but didn't want to go out-of-town, he occupied the cabin, and pursued his own game animals.

I hope this may be interesting to you and perhaps of some use for the Historical Society.

**Later, Gene**

**WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY --** If this and other stories that we are able to share motivate you, then please take the effort this holiday season to sit and write down or record your memories growing up. A collection of your short stories on various subjects can be priceless to future generations of your family. Some of our best historical documents are those short stories written by everyday people sharing their memories.

**How to get started: Start with something fun...** Pick a subject like: My best memory growing up. What we used to do in elementary school. A funny thing that happened at school or during an outing. Describe the house you grew up in and the games you played with the neighbors. Or write about your favorite uncle/aunt...grandparent and the stories they told you. In the process add just enough detail (like dates and years with locations) to let future generations tie your stories together.

Write down your stories today, and share them with your family first, and then with us. If you want more suggestions or have a special story to share....contact Ann at [chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com)

# Chatsworth Historical Society

## Virginia Watson Museum & Gift Shop

The following items are available for sale at our Gift Shop. To arrange to purchase items other than the first Sunday of the month, email [chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com) to make arrangements for shipping if necessary.

CHATSWORTH HISTORY by Virginia Watson	\$10.00
CHATSWORTH PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL The First 100 Years by Ioline Cleveland	\$10.00
WINDOW INTO THE PAST by William Schepler	\$10.00
QUIET ON THE SET by Robert Sherman	\$25.00
OUR PIONEER MOTHER As told to Lenora Johnson MacDonald	\$10.00

### Can we Email our newsletter to you?

In an effort to reduce costs, save paper, and provide you with a color copy, we now email newsletters to those of you that have given us an email address. However, we also continue to send you a snail-mail copy until you advise us not to. Please email us at [chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com) to stop future newsletter mailings and save us some money. And also please email us to provide your email address. Thanks!

Please use the form below to renew your Membership. And if your neighbor is not a member yet, pass this newsletter on to them and invite them to join.

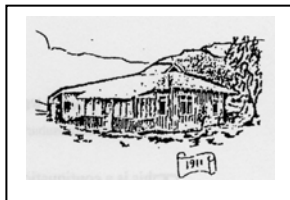
### Wondering if your Dues are Due?

For those receiving email only newsletters, we will advise you by email when your dues are due. With a life membership there is no code on your address label. If there is a code on your address label, then this is what it means:

- The first digit represents membership type, 1 – individual and 2 – family/organization.
- The next two digits represent the month that you last paid your dues.
- The last two digits represent the year that you last paid your dues.
- If the month and year on your address label is over one year old, then your dues are due!

## CHATSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Membership Form



Your membership helps support our Homestead Acre and the educational and historical programs we provide for our community. Members receive our quarterly newsletters, and receive invitation reminders regarding our monthly programs and annual events – Rose Pruning, the Garden Festival, Membership Roundup, and Pioneer Day. Please mail this form with your annual membership dues and/or contribution made payable to:

**Chatsworth Historical Society**, 10385 Shadow Oak Drive, Chatsworth, CA 91311  
[chatsworthhistory@gmail.com](mailto:chatsworthhistory@gmail.com) 818-882-5614 [www.historicalsocieties.net](http://www.historicalsocieties.net)

**Yearly:**  New Member  Renewal  
 Individual \$15.00  Family \$20.00  Organization \$20.00  
**Life Membership:**  \$ 125.00

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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CITY / STATE / ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Interest / Expertise: \_\_\_\_\_