



# The Grapevine

Published by the San Marino Historical Society

**SPRING, 2018**

**SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PROUDLY PRESENTS**

**The "Old Spanish Trail",  
The Old Spanish Trail Association, and  
The Old Spanish National Historic Trail".**

**By**

**Alexander King**



Alexander King is presently a Director at Large of the Old Spanish Trail Association and has previously served as its California Director. He is an eighth-generation Californian and also an accomplished historical and genealogical researcher, specializing in New Mexican immigration to California in the early 19th century. He was an early and now honorary member of the Genealogical Society of Hispanic America, Southern California Chapter (GSHA-SC); and a former board member of the Los Californianos heritage association. He is also a member of the Culver City Historical Society and a lifelong resident of the La Ballona Valley.

"This year is the 50th anniversary of the creation of the National Trails System. The historic 19th century pack-mule trade route between Los Angeles, California and Santa Fe, New Mexico labeled the "Old Spanish

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## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

May 2018

I hope that all of our members are doing well and enjoying the spring season. The San Marino Historical Society has had a busy and eventful new year. At our February program, San Marino High School freshman speaker Hunter Modean gave a fascinating account of his interest in the Michael White Adobe. His program focused on how his interest in its history inspired him to build a scaled model of the adobe made from Legos. We are appreciative to Hunter for his impressive contribution to our society that evening. The docents continue to provide visitors and groups with tours of the Thurnher House at Lacy Park on Sundays. This past April marked the tenth year that the Thurnher House has been regularly open to visitors. On Sunday, February 4th, Oskar and Bert Thurnher and their families returned to the house that they both grew up in. The family had lunch and revisited their former home all while it was open for visitors. It was a happy and enjoyable afternoon for everyone involved and was an honor and privilege for our society to host the Thurnher family that day. Archivist Judy Carter and the volunteers are working on many projects and keep the Thurnher House open every other Tuesday.

For the spring program, our society will provide you with what should be another interesting program on Monday, May 21st. The speaker will be Old Spanish Trails Association Director at Large and eighth generation native Californian Alexander King. He will speak on the history of the Old Spanish Trail which was the 19th Century route between Santa Fe and Los Angeles, its status as a National Historic Trail as well as the history of the association.

On April 25th, San Marino became 105 years old. Our city founders envisioned a city that would be exclusively residential made up of only single family homes without apartments or industrial businesses. The city has mostly remained this way and is unique in the San Gabriel Valley and the southern California.

I would like to express my thanks to those who contribute to this organization in many ways. They do this by

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**Monday, May 21, 7:00pm**  
Crowell Public Library  
Barth Community Room  
1890 Huntington Drive, San Marino  
Public is Welcome, Admission is Free



# San Marino Studio Theater

by Dr. Linda Mollno

*"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players"  
As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII, William Shakespeare*

A select group of people arrived at the home of Henry Lee on the corner of Old Mill and Monterey Roads in April 1934. Although the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, thoughts of economic woes disappeared as the crowd experienced the first production of the San Marino Studio Theater. A theater had been constructed on the property especially for the occasion, the premier production of "Four for the Undertaker," by Dorothy Maris Davis. Many who gathered there that evening became charter members, patrons of the San Marino Studio Theater.

The support of patrons encouraged the theater group to search for a more permanent home and they soon settled on the former Pony Express museum at 1160 Kewen Drive. The directors of the organization took an active role in redesigning the structure, even lending a hand in the actual construction. A scene captured in a grainy old photograph in the San Marino Historical Society archives. With the strength of community spirit one has come to expect in San Marino, many others joined the work party a theater quickly emerged.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, October 13, 1936 the San Marino Studio Theater hosted a tea. Everyone was welcome, members of the troupe, patrons, friends and the community-at-large. This was the first opportunity for many to see the renovated building. The theater group honored the newly formed San Marino Women's Club that day and they provided guests with entertainment. Mary Peters, formerly of the San Carlos Grand Opera sang. There was a fashion show with patron members modeling gowns from Roxanne McNeill's smart new dress shop on Huntington Drive.

The company's second production was "Peter the Great," by Wilfred Pettitt. The author not only provided the script but also directed the play and performed as the adult Peter. The holiday season of 1936 saw the company's third production, "The Golden Key." President Margaret Bent Hopkins called this tale of storybook characters come to life and performed by San Marino youth "a dream come true." Enid Hart, local resident and daughter of Frank Hart, one of our city's founders, reviewed the play. Hart's report in the local paper highlights how much the community was involved in the production.

"Sally Eckert trained the graceful dancers. The young singers were drilled by Elizabeth Lownes and Alice Moore. Much praise to John Garver, Arthur Parker and electrician Dick LaFreniere for the beautiful lighting and stage effects. Elizabeth Shackford with Sally Eckert and Mrs. Hopkins designed the costumes (bouquets to the mamas that made them). Our old standbys Peggie Gillette and Louise Liebhardt attended to all production, program and publicity."

Enid Hart, who was ten-years-old at the time not only reviewed the play but performed in the role of first Page. "Every child in San Marino must see this darling play,"

she said. Hopkins remarked in the play's program how she enjoyed working with the young people. "Who would have realized what a bounding amount of energy there is here in our fair city, and yet what a well controlled energy it is – willing to cooperate with all the enthusiasm in the world."

In the fourth season Rosalind Metcalf starred in "A Murder Has Been Arranged." Metcalf previously performed at the Pasadena Playhouse and the Federal Experimental Theater. A newspaper clipping from October 1939 claimed it was the best play yet offered by the Studio Theater – the quality of the play, the set, direction and casting. Reportedly, many Hollywood studio people attended the performance. Of note in the program was the tremendous increase in the number of patrons.

Programs for the Studio Theater productions contain advertising for local businesses. Does anyone remember "Bow Bells" located at 932 Huntington Drive? They claim to have had "delicious food daintily served." Las Tiendas Market, Oak Knoll Pharmacy and Fortner & Loud Ford Dealer advertised, as well as Sally Bohannon, books and gifts and Hazel Fuller, corsetiere. Much can be gleaned from old local publications about a city's early days and ways.

In 1936, Louise Liebhardt, business manager for the Studio Theater made her feelings about small town theaters well know. She decried the failings of professional theater and urged San Marino patrons to also attend small theater groups such as the Mexican players at Padua Hills in Claremont. She particularly liked their annual Las Posadas production. "Glimmerings of hope for the American stage is to be found in our many little theaters throughout the country," claimed Liebhardt. The little the-



San Marino Studio Theatre presents "Peter the Great" by Wilfred Pettitt. January 1935.

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## President's Message

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volunteering their time and energy by serving on the board or performing many other necessary duties. The San Marino Historical Society appreciates those who make these contributions.

The Thurnher House at Lacy Park is open to visitors for tours from noon until 3:00 PM on the first and third Sunday of every month and by appointment on Tuesdays. This is the former Park Superintendent's home and the docents look forward to having visitors.

If any member is interested in volunteering with our organization, please contact us at 626-304-9375 or [info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org)

I hope to see many of you at our next program or at the Thurnher House.

John Ryan  
President

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## San Marino Studio Theater

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ater movement in America began about 1912 in Chicago and spread across the country over the next few decades.

Margret Bent Hopkins should be credited as the force behind the San Marino Studio Theater. In programs and newspaper clippings held by the San Marino Historical Society she appears as president of the organization from 1934-1939. She was instrumental in the move to Kewen Drive and the redesign of the building, as well as writing some of the plays they produced.

Additionally, credit must also be given to Stanley Arndt, a patron of the organization from the beginning. Arndt taped articles and photos of Studio Theater productions from 1934 to April 1939 to a black poster board and wrote captions by hand. It is unclear how this board came to be in the archives of the Historical Society but by piecing together a few programs and the clippings Arndt preserved we are finding out more San Marino's rich cultural past.

### WEBSITE

Visit our website to learn more about your Society's programs and activities as well as viewing current and past issues of our newsletter – the "Grapevine":

<http://sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org/>

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## From the Archives

May, 2018 by Judith Carter

Recent acquisitions include an early poster from the Huntington Library, two posters with maps of the Spanish and Mexican ranchos and a rectangular dish printed with a map of the Spanish and Mexican Ranchos of Los Angeles County. These items were donated by past president of the San Marino Historical Society, Jean Imler who visited the Thurnher House on a recent Sunday. Charles Thornton sent a copy of *Iconic America* from the National Trust for Historic Preservation announcing the inclusion of the Thornton Gardens among the National Trust's protected properties. Several stunning photographs of the home and its gardens illustrate this gem in the heart of San Marino. Charles Thornton sent a copy of the book *Iconic America*. Timothy Crist donated several newspaper articles covering the Kathy Fiscus rescue attempt in 1949. Docents have protected them in acid free sleeves and added them to the extensive Fiscus Collection.

We are pleased to welcome Joyce Gatsoulis Batnij as the newest archives volunteer. Joyce grew up in San Marino, attended Valentine and Huntington Schools and returned here with her husband and son. She has been active in PTA and the San Marino Garden Club. Her background includes a career in business journalism which included many years working in Greece. Her interest in local history and her computer skills will enable us to accelerate our work in processing and recording materials in the collection.

Members are encouraged to visit the archives by appointment. We can be reached at 626-304-9375 or [info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org). The collection includes photographs, postcards, paintings, posters, maps, flags, oral histories, military uniforms and letters. A selection of books about local history or those written by San Marino authors are available for browsing. We house the archives of the San Marino Garden Club and the San Marino Women's Club. Videos of past Historical Society programs are available for viewing. Real estate records and information about local architects makes up one of the largest collections at the Thurnher House.

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## Calendar of Events

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|------------|---|
| May 21     | Monday 7.p.m., "The Old Spanish Trail" by Alexander King, San Marino Historical Society Program Presentation, Crowell Public Library, Barth Community Room, 1890 Huntington Drive, San Marino.            |
| October 22 | Monday 7.p.m., "Grand Dame Hotels of the Gilded Age" by Bill Warren, San Marino Historical Society Program Presentation, Crowell Public Library, Barth Community Room, 1890 Huntington Drive, San Marino, |