



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

October 2019

San Marino Historical Society is an integral part of the fabric of San Marino Community. We will continue to advocate the rich history of our community by sharing our mission with other local civic, school and community organizations. On October 28, we will offer the moving story of Kathy Fiscus through the talk by historian and author Bill Deverell at our next program meeting. Bill has spoken to both the Rotary Club of San Marino and the San Marino City Club and has a forthcoming book on this tragedy.

We will continue collaborate with Friends of Michael White Adobe and The Old Mill Foundation to celebrate and to showcase their stories. Boy Scout Troop 351 is celebrating its 100th anniversary on November 2, at the San Marino Center. We will be taking part in the sponsorship of the event with San Marino City Club. Another goal for this year is to work with San Marino High School on a possible internship with the Historical Society.

Our kickoff for the new membership year was a special open house for members on Sunday, September 15. All who attended toured the Thurnher House and enjoyed refreshments. Photos of the event are in the pages that follow.

Included in this issue of the Grapevine is a rodent essay by Andy Campbell and an update on the recent donations to the archives. To schedule a Tuesday visit, email [info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org) or call 626-304-9375 for an appointment.

The Historical Society office, located at the Thurnher House at the Virginia Road entrance to Lacy Park, is available for tours on the first and third Sunday of each month from 12 noon to 3 pm. John Ryan and John Morris, both past presidents of the Society, welcome visitors and share the history of the community through photographs, maps, models and items of memorabilia.

I look forward to meeting each of you personally at our program meeting on October 28, 7 pm at the Crowell Public Library.

Isaac Hung  
President

# The Grapevine

Published by the San Marino Historical Society

Fall 2019

**SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PROUDLY PRESENTS**

**Kathy Fiscus: Loss and Meaning  
in Postwar California**

by  
**Bill Deverell**



William Deverell is Director of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West and Professor of History at USC. He has written widely on the history and culture of the 19th and 20th century American West. He is a graduate of Stanford University (American Studies) and received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Princeton in American History. Previously he has taught at the University of California and Caltech. At USC, he teaches courses on California, the West, Los Angeles, the Civil War, and the history of American childhood.

**Monday, October 28, 2019, 7:00 pm**  
Crowell Public Library  
Barth Community Room  
1890 Huntington Drive, San Marino  
Public is Welcome, Admission is Free



## Writing History and Getting it Right

The following essay was found in the archives. Andy Campbell lived on Wilson Avenue his entire life, first with his parents and his brother Robin in their family home and later in a home he built for his own family. Before publication of this reminiscence, it was shared with a few longtime San Marino residents. Barbara Pearson Sargeant and Harriet Haake Plunkett swore that the man Campbell refers to was called the Gopher Man. Ken Veronda reports that the man trapped rats and gophers. "As I recall from my grandfather pointing the difference out to me, as they dangled from the handlebars of a bike ridden by a fellow who went around town collecting them for 25c or 50c bounty from the city."

So whether it was rats or gophers the man trapped, it was a good story.

### Trapping Rats in San Marino

By Andy Campbell (1922-2018)

During the 1930s, I remember that San Marino hired a rat catcher to keep the town rodent free. This guy rode a bicycle around town, caring his replacement traps on a rack on the back of his bike. His job was to set traps all over town.

On a second rack, also on the back of his bike, he hung the dead rats from his daily trap checks in a line across the back. This served two purposes: advertising and payment. We could all see the bounty of success as the rats swung back and forth by their little rat-tails. I remember being quite impressed by how many he had there every time he went by. In addition, at the end of each day, the rat catcher would take his dead catches to city hall and get paid something per rat. It looked like a good job to me.

I was just a kid back then and eager to be in competition with this guy. I was too young to get the job for pay, so I decided to practice for my future career in the rat catching business. I set some traps in our woodpile and more in the back of the incinerator.

Now, setting spring traps was a complex activity for a ten year old. You have to pull the spring wire snapper back and careful hold it while setting the holder bar under the trigger bar. And of course, once you got it, it was always fun to drop a rock on the trigger bar and imagine how it would feel if you got your toe (or tail) stuck there.

After this delicate maneuver (and I have to admit, I was pretty good at it) I would bait the trigger with cheese or smelly meat and place the trap in likely place. It was well known that the professional rat catcher would cut up his dead rats for bait, but I couldn't do that because I wasn't as lucky. I didn't seem to get many dead rats. I would also forget to check the traps on a regular basis so the ones I did catch were never considered "fresh" bait.

Being young and impatient, I got a little tired of waiting for the traps to do the work and finally started sitting outside to watch for rats. When I saw one running around the wood pile, I pulled out my pellet gun and aimed it straight. "Pow! Pow! It was great hunting, but not very fruitful. I couldn't catch any rats! They were too fast for me. Finally I want back to the idea of the trips. I decided to get some bigger ones and really get the job done. The problem there was that they didn't catch any rats either. Instead, I caught the neighbor's cat and got loud complaints for that!

These days, we have a cat at our house, just two doors down from where I grew up. I suppose the descendants of those same furry friends of decades ago are

still scurrying through our wood pile out back. And every once in a while, our cat brings in a dead rat into our house, plays with it, purrs, and seems quite proud of his hunting ability. I'm sure glad I found a better career in the end, because that cat is better at rat catching than I ever was.

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## From the Archives

Over the past few months, the Historical Archives have been the beneficiary of several donations.

- Bob Houston found a parking sign online and purchased it for our collection. Many people remember it from the John Birch Society building on Mission near Julienne.
- John Ryan found a 1945 South Pasadena-San Marino High School year book, *Copa de Oro*, at a garage sale. Inside were inscriptions by many classmates including a few notables such as Barbara Leh Maxwell, first woman to be elected to the San Marino Board of Education; John Rousselot; who represented San Marino in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1970-1975; and Pete McCloskey who ran for president in 1972, but was defeated by Richard Nixon.
- Two compact disks containing 6400 photographs from 1963 to 1968 at San Marino High School donated by Bill Wynne, SMHS Class of 1968.
- [The Art of Wealth: The Huntingtons in the Gilded Age](#) by Shelly M. Bennett; [Henry E Huntington's Library of Libraries](#) by Donald C. Dickinson; and [The Mojave Road in 1863](#), edited by Jeff Lapidés donated by Wayne and Judy Carter.
- A large framed color photograph of General George Patton that appeared on the cover of Life Magazine July 7, 1941. donated by Douglas Bauer Brutsche. The photo was enlarged and modified by the donor.

Join the San Marino Historical Society Membership Drive by renewing your membership now. If your membership has lapsed, you can rejoin now. If you have never been a member, join now via the blue envelope or PayPal on the Society website.

## Membership Celebration at the Thurnher House on Sunday, September 15

As a way to announce the beginning of the San Marino Historical Society's membership year, forty members gathered for a special open house at the Thurnher House on a warm summer to fall afternoon. Current president Isaac Hung welcomed the guests and was assisted in the planning of the event by board member Ed Tom. The event was catered by Sweet and Savory and featured docent tours. Among the guest were past presidents Graziella Almanza and Marilyn Peck. Additional past presidents John Ryan, John Morris and Judy Carter also attended.

Please send in your renewals in the enclosed blue envelopes or join via PayPal on the Society website.



### 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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## Calendar of Events

**October 6, 2019** Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent led tours the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.

**October 20, 2019** Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent led tours the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.

**October 28, 2018** Monday, 7 pm. San Marino Historical Society Program, "The Kathy Fiscus Tragedy," by Bill Deverell, Crowell Public Library, Barth Community Room.

**November 3, 2019** Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent led tours the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.

**November 17, 2019** Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent led tours the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.

**December 1, 2019** Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent led tours the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.

### Michael White Book

The Story of Michael White a California Rebel Pioneer 1801-1885 by Dorothy Jenkins Ross is a fascinating story which provides a unique view of the San Gabriel Valley's development during this notable period in California history. The book may be purchased at the Crowell Public Library, San Marino Toy and Books or by contacting the San Marino Historical Society. The price of the book is \$27.20 for a hardcover copy including sales tax and \$19.57 for soft cover.

