



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

October, 2022

As our lives have become more social and more active in the past few months, the San Marino Historical Society has been delighted that residents have been coming more often to donate items and documents to our collections. One San Marinar dropped off a scrapbook that included memorabilia of life in San Marino from the 1930s, including a collection of original 1937 Los Angeles Olympics postal stamps. A San Marino Historical Society Board member donated a 1940s-era child's Southwestern Academy school military uniform in pristine condition. It reminded us of the legacy of the school's leader, Ken Veronda, who passed away earlier this year. And Tom Cornwell kindly contributed his family's collection to our archive (see story, page 2).

In July, I, along with other Historical Society Board members, joined many San Marino organizations to take part in our city's annual Independence Day parade. Befitting our mission, we were driven by resident Joe Conzonire in his beautifully restored classic car of historical value. In mid-October we gave a brief history of Lacy Park, including our own Thurner House headquarters, to the San Marino Woman's Club.

We are pleased that David Judson, of Judson Stained Glass Studio, was able to reschedule with us for Monday, October 24 live at the San Marino library. We had originally planned this program for May, but we had to cancel due to coronavirus-related reasons. David Judson will join us to share the story of this famous studio that was founded in 1897 and still thrives today.

We are also pleased to contribute, once again, to San Marino's "Trunk-or-Treat" event on October 28, 2022. Look out for our table there, and have a happy and safe Halloween.

Sincerely,  
Isaac Hung, President

# The Grapevine

Published by the San Marino Historical Society

Fall 2022

**RESCHEDULED FROM MAY:  
SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PROUDLY PRESENTS**

**JUDSON: INNOVATION IN STAINED GLASS**

**By  
DAVID JUDSON**



On Monday, October 24, the San Marino Historical Society Welcomes David Judson, president and owner of Judson Studios, a fifth-generation family member to operate the legendary stained-glass company that was founded in 1897. Judson Studios has been recognized internationally as among the world's finest stained glass artistry, and their hand-crafted works have been a family tradition for five generations. David Judson will chronicle this local stained glass studio's remarkable story.

**Monday, October 24, 2022 7:00 pm**  
Crowell Public Library  
Barth Community Room  
1890 Huntington Drive, San Marino  
Public is Welcome, Admission is Free

## San Marino Historical Society Executive Officers and Members of the Board 2022

### Officers

President.....	Isaac Hung
Vice President.....	TBA
Secretary.....	Pat Salvaty
Treasurer.....	Bob Houston
Immediate Past President.....	John Ryan

### Committee Chairs

Archives .....	Christa Lakon
	Judy Carter
	Joyce Batnij
Membership .....	Wayne Carter
Newsletter .....	Chris Datwyler
Programs.....	Aaron Gill
Publicity.....	Ed Tom
Thurnher House Docents.....	John Ryan
	John Morris
Members-At-Large.....	Michael Moran
City Council Members .....	Council Member
	Gretchen Shepherd Romey
	Alternate: Steve Talt

### Emeritus Board Members

Robert Almanza  
Jim Elliott  
Marilyn Peck  
Peggy Winkler

### Society Presidents (1974-2016)

Midge Sherwood .....	1974
Mary Smith .....	1976
Jack Sherwood.....	1978
Ed Ford .....	1980
Graziella Almanza .....	1982
Laverne Smith .....	1985
Jeanne Imler.....	1989
Gary Fleming.....	1991
Lillian Campbell.....	1993
Marilyn Peck.....	1995
Paul Crowley .....	1999
Gene Dryden .....	2004
Benjamin Salvaty.....	2008
Ave Maria Bortz.....	2008
John Morris .....	2010
Judith Carter.....	2014
John Ryan .....	2016

### Thurnher House Hours

The Thurnher House is open on the first and third Sunday afternoon of each month from noon to 3:00pm. It is also open for tours by appointment. If you would like to visit the house on Tuesdays, please call 626-304-9375 or [info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org) for an appointment.

## From the Archives

The Cornwell Collection is a recent addition to the San Marino Historical Society Archives. The Cornwell family was active in the San Marino Community for decades. Jeanne and Wray Cornwell lived for many years on West Drive with their son Tom and daughter Kay. Both children went through the San Marino Schools where Kay was active in drama and Tom in Boy Scouts.

Jeanne taught private art lessons to many children. Both were active in the Friends of the San Marino Library. After Wray's retirement he frequently installed hand rails for older neighbors to make their front steps safer. As members of the San Marino Community Church, they served in various ways. Jeanne was the church librarian for many years. In 2004, the Rotary Club of San Marino recognized the couple's service to the community by selecting them as Honorary Paul Harris Fellows. Their awards were included in the donation. After this honor Wray became one of the Rotary Club's most active members.

Both Wray and Jeanne have passed away, and Tom gathered a box of items to donate in honor of their memory. Among them are three Old Mill documents, a March 4, 1977 San Marino High School Titanian yearbook, and a history of the Hill-Harbison House with a letter from former Historical Society President Paul Crowley.

Tom became an Eagle Scout and his uniform, scarves, and badges demonstrated his progress through his years of scouting, and to a larger extent exemplifies the enduring relevance and place that scouting has held in San Marino since its founding. These items have been included in the Historical Society's collection which also includes military uniforms and period clothing.

We are grateful to have the Cornwell Collection as part of our archives.

### 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.



## The Little Christmas Church: A San Marino Tradition for 70 Years

A helicopter lands in the middle of Huntington Drive across from San Marino City Hall, and Santa Claus climbs out to visit 2,000 kids awaiting his arrival at a snow-topped, festively decorated house nearby.

While this may seem like something out of a child's fantasy, it is exactly what happened in December, 1953.

No one knows whose helicopter it was, but the publisher of the *San Marino Tribune* at the time was the one dressed as Santa, and the snow-covered, decorated house was San Marino's former Red Line train stop shelter. It was the third time that San Marino had celebrated the holiday season by decorating a small house that was a precursor for what became known as "The Little Christmas Church" and later as "The Little Christmas House."

The seasonally decorated tiny house is one of San Marino's longest-standing city traditions and has been in place for nearly 70 years with the support of residents and nearly every community, civic, and educational institution in the city. It has been a holiday fixture at the corner of Huntington Drive and San Marino Avenue every year since 1951, with the exceptions of 1955, due to light signal installation, and 2020, when COVID-19 prevented gatherings.

The Little Christmas Church was created by an organization that was the predecessor of the Chamber of Commerce called the San Marino Business and Professional Association (BPA). Facing less foot traffic on Huntington Drive after the train line was removed in early 1951, businesses along Huntington Drive banded together to create the Christmas-themed and decorated house at the former train depot waiting house, hoping to create a local attraction to bring customers to San Marino retail stores.

The plan worked. In its first year, the house "attracted statewide attention and thousands of photos were taken of the scene over the holiday," according to a 1952 *San Marino Tribune* article. In its first two iterations, the little house had a wintry Hansel and Gretel theme, and another year a Santa's workshop theme.

By 1954, the former, large waiting room had become a smaller bus shelter and a more permanent design to decorate the shelter was needed. San Marino resident and Huntington Drive bank branch manager Paul Cunningham had a vision for it, and a discussion about it with a fellow Rotary Club member after one of their meetings cemented his plans.

Cunningham approached prominent Los Angeles architect and fellow resident Herbert Powell to design a small, snowy chapel with removable components to store and re-use every year. Powell was an iconic San Marino architect, having designed Stoneman and Carver schools, our city identification markers, and the original San Marino



library and high schools. Cunningham also brought in Elder Morgan of Shepard & Morgan, one of San Marino's largest general contractors. Powell's design for "The Little Christmas Church" was extremely well received by San Marino residents. It was such a hit that it was immediately suggested that it would be brought back annually. A columnist in 1954 wrote, "The Little White Christmas Church of San Marino was a work of art, a Christmas gem, a civic jewel! It was beautiful, dignified, and appropriate, not only to the season of the year but also to the character of our community as a city of homes and homemakers."

Visitors seemed to agree. Articles from the 1950s describe "thongs of children" visiting the house. Carolers, particularly school-age children, from the San Marino church choirs, San Marino Scout groups, San Marino school choirs, and other school bands performed in afternoons and evenings at the site during the holiday season. When music wasn't performed live, recorded music would be played and the police force would change the records whenever possible during shifts. The entertainment, along with periodic visits from Santa, helped the house get featured in a 1954 Los Angeles Times article. In fact, photos of the house were so popular that in 1957 the BPA produced color postcards of it for visitors. The Little Christmas Church was cited by BPA members as the organization's crowning achievement in its first ten years.

Cunningham and a few fellow BPA members and friends stored, constructed, and tore down the little house annually with the help and support of the city. As years went on, other business owners, members of churches, the San Marino Chamber of Commerce began to share the work. In later years, San Marino City Club, San Marino Rotary Club, and high school students in service clubs like Key Club and Interact have each done their part to maintain the tradition. The city took over storage and transportation of the components.

Cleaning, minor repairs, and painting touch ups were made in the late 1950s. But by November 1964, the wooden structure had reached a level of disrepair such that it couldn't safely debut at the beginning of the holiday

## The Little Christmas House, continued

season. Residents wouldn't accept this, and the Chamber of Commerce quickly established a "Save Our Christmas Church Fund" to which residents donated \$600. In a quick turn of events, the Little Christmas Church premiered by mid-December to its usual fanfare, including the snow-topped roof, stained glass windows, belfry, picket fence, spotlights and painted ornamental reindeers, noted one article.

One donor was a 7 year-old resident who had been saving up to buy a Beatles album, but instead had been moved to donate her entire life's \$5 fortune, all in coins, to help save the Little Christmas House. A *San Marino Tribune* article writing about the girl's donation was headlined: "The Beatles Can Wait." A Capital Records executive who lived in San Marino was so impressed by her generosity that he gifted several Beatles records to her. (The San Marino Historical Society contacted her in 2022, and not only did she remember this, but she still owned and treasured those Beatles albums.)

The enthusiasm of residents in 1964 to fund The Little Christmas Church repairs led the Chamber of Commerce to continue to fundraise for an all-steel and aluminum building that would stand the test of time "which can be set in place each season with little effort and stored conveniently under the eyes of city officials or their employees," according to one article. Another team of residents, architect Fred Turton and engineer George Wilkerson, took pains to replicate Powell's original design such that no one would notice the change in material, and in 1966 it debuted and was applauded for being identical in appearance to Powell's original design. "The Little Christmas Church, long the symbol of San Marino, has a new structure," heralded one *San Marino Tribune* writer at the time.

It is believed that it is this same 1966 prefab steel and aluminum structure that has been in use every December ever since. The structure, having lasted 55 years, is now again showing signs of disrepair and the city is planning to create another replica of Powell's design which it will store, maintain and construct annually.

Over the years many have began calling it "The Little Christmas House," and current plans by city officials may rename it "The San Marino Holiday House." Minor changes in materials and names have occurred over the last 70 years, but this snow-covered house's function as a centerpiece for a festive holiday atmosphere every December at the corner of Huntington Drive and San Marino Avenue has remained the same.

**THE SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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## Calendar of Events

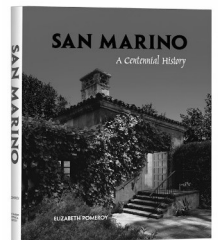
- October 16, 2022 Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent-led tours of the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society
- October 24, 2022 7 p.m., San Marino Historical Society Program, "Judson: Innovation In Stained Glass," by David Judson, Crowell Public Library, Barth Community Room.
- October 28, 2022 Friday: "Trunk Or Treat" at Lacy Park. Stop by the Historical Society's booth at this Halloween-themed City event. Pre-order \$5 admission wristbands at Stoneman from Monday-Thursday from 7 a.m.-5 p.m./Friday 7-11 a.m.) or \$15 gate price.'
- November 6, 2022 Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent-led tours of the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.
- November 20, 2022 Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent-led tours of the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society.
- December 4, 2022 Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent-led tours of the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society
- December 18, 2022 Sunday, Open House at the Thurnher House, 12-3 p.m. Docent-led tours of the historical Thurnher House at Lacy Park, headquarters of the San Marino Historical Society

### Order San Marino Centennial Book Now

\$55 per copy + 4.95 tax = \$59.95. Add \$7.50 if you wish the book to be mailed to you for a total of \$67.45.

Order on-line at:

[www.sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org](http://www.sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org) or by stopping by the Thurnher House on the first and third Sunday from 12-3 or on Tuesdays from 9:30-3. Books are also currently available for sale at San Marino Toy and Books, Julianne, Port O' Call, The Old Mill, The Huntington Store, Vromans, and the Pasadena Museum of History



### 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":

[www.sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org/](http://www.sanmarinohistoricalsociety.org/)