



The Grapevine

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The San Marino Historical Society
Thurnher House at Lacy Park
Post Office Box 80222
San Marino, California 91118-8222
Tel. 626-304-9375

FALL 2009

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 2009

Welcome back from what I hope were relaxing summer months, filled with events that will create memories for your own family stories. The Historical Society has been busy over the summer with continuing discussions about the San Marino Centennial, the History Book to commemorate San Marino's 100th birthday, the Oral History Project, and the fate of the Michael White Adobe.

The School District released the Draft Environmental Impact Report in August and the Historical Society Board responded with our comments in September. The Project has been renamed from SM Pool Project to the Michael White Adobe Project and this project is now described as the "demolition of the Michael White Adobe". The Historical Society remains committed to the preservation and restoration of the Michael White Adobe. Discussions between the School district and the Historical society continue over how to resolve this issue to our mutual satisfaction. The public is encouraged to comment at a public hearing on October 27. Please call SMUSD at 299-7000 to confirm the date and time.

The Historical Society's Centennial Book Committee presented our Centennial Book Project to the Centennial Steering Committee. They were both enthusiastic and supportive. On September 14, Judith Carter and Elizabeth Pomeroy presented our Book proposal to a City Council Study Session, along with a request for financial support. A separate fund Raising Committee, chaired by Wayne Carter, is working on securing funds for our book.

The Oral History Project has also moved ahead quickly. I have completed interviews with Florence Born, a life-long resident of San Marino, and Cecilia Gudemann Haupt, class of 1932 at Huntington School. Linda Mollno has agreed to lead training sessions for interviewers. The first training session will be held on Friday 10/23 at the Thurnher House. If you are interested, please contact lmollno@sbcglobal.net or adbortz@att.net. Please contact us with the names of current and former SM residents who should be interviewed.

We ended the summer with our Second Annual Summer Social at the Thurnher House in Lacy Park. That evening we dedicated a plaque to honor all past presidents of the Historical Society, as well as the new map case in memory of Past President Ben Salvaty. Honored guests included Oskar Thurnher, Midge Sherwood, and Florence Born.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the first of our lecture series on Monday, October 26, at Southwestern Academy at 7:30 PM.

Ave Bortz, President
San Marino Historical Society

SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROUDLY PRESENTS

Historic Water Resources in the San Gabriel Valley

Presented by
John Morris



Monday, October 26, 7:30pm
Southwestern Academy, Pioneer Hall
2800 Monterey Rd
San Marino

Owner and principal of Morris Water Resources Consultants, John has been professionally involved with the water industry for more than 40 years. He represents San Marino on the Metropolitan Water District board, where he is Vice Chair of the Engineering and Operations Committee

Public is Welcome
Admission is Free

**San Marino Historical Society
Executive Officers and Members of the Board
2009**

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Society Presidents (1974-2008)

Midge Sherwood..... 1974
 Mary Smith..... 1976
 Jack Sherwood 1978
 Ed Ford..... 1980
 Graziella Almanza..... 1982
 La Verne Smith 1985
 Jeanne Imler 1989
 Gary Fleming 1991
 Lillian Campbell 1993
 Marilyn Peck 1995
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 Gene Dryden 2004
 Benjamin Salvaty 2008

THE SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 P.O. BOX 80222
 SAN MARINO, CALIFORNIA 91118-8222
 (626) 304-9375

If you have personal remembrances of the Kathy Fiscus, please contact Bill Deverell, professor at USC who is researching the incident and its implications. He can be reached at deverell@usc.edu. He will share his research with us when his work is complete.

Request for E-Mail Addresses—For those of you who are interested in receiving e-mail reminders of San Marino Historical Society programs or nearby events of local historical interest, please send an e-mail to us at smhistorical@earthlink.net. We promise we will not share your e-mail with any other organization or business. It will be for our own use only.

From the Archives

Judith Carter

The summer was an active time for the volunteers at the Thurnher House.

Jason Carter completed the San Marino Tribune project, which he began in the summer of 2008. Jason cleaned, sorted and arranged a complete run of the printed Tribune in archival boxes for the years from 1972-1991. The Historical Society appreciates the time he spent completing this project. We also have incomplete files for the years before 1972 and after 1991. Our microfilm holdings are complete to through 2008.

John Ryan continues to greet visitors on Fridays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Our largest group of visitors was forty Girl Scouts who were attending the Twilight Camp at Lacy Park. By visiting the Thurnher House and El Molino Viejo, the girls were able to complete their local history badge.

Julie Fedde and Judy Newell spend each Tuesday morning working on the photograph file.

Donations:

- Sending Flowers to America: A History of the Los Angeles Flower Market, a gift from Ave Bortz
- Four original pen and ink drawings drawn by John Harris donated by his family.
- Ten picture frames and Mylar to be used for map enclosures donated by the Huntington Library
- Death Valley in '48 by William Lewis Manley, "The First Angelinos" photocopy of a photo of pre-Mission Period homes, San Marino's 50th Anniversary (booklet), Solano-Reve map #83, and "A Place called Cuati", 1894 (photocopy) donated by Peggy Winkler.
- A Queen Anne desk on loan from Wayne and Judy Carter.

Volunteers are needed on Tuesday morning to establish an obituary file. Scissor skills needed. Telephone the Historical Society office at 626-304-9375 or smhistorical@earthlink.net.



San Marino Historical Society President Ave Bortz dedicates a new map case honoring Past President Ben Salvaty. To her right is Paul Salvaty and his mother Pat. Ben was a map collector and this case will assure that the maps in the Historical Society's collection will be stored properly.

Las Tunas Adobe

The history of the Las Tunas Adobe could not be written as a story separate and apart from the history of San Gabriel Mission itself. Being built as it was on Mission property, "under the administration of the Franciscan Padres, it partakes of the environment and historic import of the fourth oldest mission in California."

While the San Gabriel Mission was founded in 1771, its first location was not where the present church now stands. Padres Somera and Cambon, following plans previously outlined by Fr. Serra, chose a site near the Rio de Nombre de Jesus de los Temblores — a river so named because of the severe earth-quakes experienced by Portola's expedition of 1769 which camped here briefly. Here on what is now called the Rio de Santa Ana a church of poles roofed with tules was built as well



Las Tunas ranch house 1889 with Purcell family and General and Mrs. Booth. —Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library

as a house of similar construction for the Fathers and another for the military escort. This complex was entirely surrounded by a stockade. Not too long after this the Mission was moved to a site on the Rio Hondo — a branch of the Rio San Gabriel where an adobe church was built and where the Mission remained for about four years.

In 1775 the Mission was moved to its present site, a location which was to place it squarely on the crossroads of all future horse and wagon traffic from San Diego to Monterey and from all points east to the pueblo of Los Angeles which was founded soon after in 1781.

The early padres chose well when they chose this particular spot. Here the land was fertile, water abundant, and there was more than adequate wood. In fact this location was chosen because of its "forest growth so abundant at that time where now is open country," writes Chase and Saunders in 1915, "that thousands of live-oaks, sycamores and elder trees were felled to give the Mission necessary elbowroom and outlook."

And it was beautiful. "The air is so clear in its purity," wrote L. J. Rose, "that Old Baldy in stately repose fifty miles away seemed but a few miles distant." And there were wild flowers everywhere. Where Altadena now stands a hundred acres of California poppies, splashed their vibrant color like a flame across the rising land glowing as a beacon to far away ships at sea.

From the years 1775 to 1791, the Mission San Gabriel struggled to establish itself. Fields were planted to wheat, beans,

vegetables and melons. Herds of cattle and sheep were started. Horses were bred and hogs and chickens raised. Vineyards — the first of the famous Mission grape — were planted. At the same time work-shops of various kinds were starting — a smithy, a carpenter's shop, a tannery, and the laundries.

Constant were the Mission's endeavors toward civilizing the Indians who from time to time threatened the Mission, making a military garrison here a necessity.

Sometime during these busy and growing years a modest three-room adobe home was built close at hand though somewhat apart from the Mission complex. For whom or for what purpose we don't know. Built in the manner of all adobes at the time it was a simple affair with dirt floors and flat roof covered with tules. Legend has it that this adobe was built for the priests to live in while the present Church was being constructed. However there is some question among historians today as to why the priests would choose to live separate from the Church itself and the activities of the compound. Also, if the priests lived here in 1776, wouldn't it have been more natural to have placed the Church close by. No one knows. However it has been stated that the tiles on the floor, laid some years later, have been found to have been made prior to those in the Mission Church, that is, prior to 1791.

To oversee this growing business development of the Mission, a mayor-domo — a sort of straw boss — was installed at the Mission and it is thought by some historians that our three room adobe, becoming somewhat enlarged as time went on, was home for this man and his family; while the grounds around it came to be used as a proving ground for plants and trees, "judging from the very old pecan trees, the California Bay tree, the olives and the Morton Bay Fig that once graced its venerable gardens." In 1806 there came to San Gabriel one who was to prove an outstanding administrator as well as priest for the next twenty years: Fr. Jose Maria de Zalvidea. It was during this priest's administration that San Gabriel came to be called Queen of the Missions. He it was who planned and supervised the building of El Molino Viejo; who developed the vineyards which became both the pride and envy of all the southern missions; and who planted forty acres of fruit trees in the vicinity of the Mission Church, enclosing this orchard with a fence of live cactus, a form of prickly pear called "tuna," as a protection against wandering cattle, wild horses and marauding Indians. It was from this cactus fence that our adobe got its name: the Las Tunas Adobe. Fr. Sanchez, report. In reporting on the building of El Molino Viejo, also wrote at the time: "Closer to the Mission they had planted protective tuna (cactus) hedges, and even a flower garden around a sundial." This "garden and sundial" as well as "orchard surrounded by a cactus fence" are the identifying landmarks by which we can hope to trace the history of the Las Tunas Adobe.

We know from the records this orchard contained orange trees, lemon, fig, banana, plum, peach, apple, pear, pomegranate, sweet lime, and olive. During these years the Mission was known as the Mother of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Vini-culture.

(Continued on page 4)

Las Tunas Adobe

(Continued from page 3)

In 1851, we find our first definite owner of the Las Tunas Adobe, one Jessie I. Hildreth. Where he came from or how he got the adobe is not known. He was doubtless a squatter. The census of 1850 shows no Mr. Hildreth living here or anywhere else, yet in 1851 he is mentioned in a deed regarding a land claim by Antonio Arana as living in this adobe. He apparently lived here undisturbed for three or four years while Workman and Reid were in San Francisco battling with the Land Commission to clear up their title and give them their San Gabriel acres. The lawyer hired by these gentlemen was Volney E. Howard who was promised an interest in their holdings could he but persuade the Land Commission to see things their way. During this time, Hildreth's granddaughter states that part of the adobe floors were tile and part were dirt according to a letter her grandmother wrote.

In 1854 James Gooch, Volney Howard's father-in-law, bought the adobe from Mr. Hildreth, paying him \$1,000.00. The deed was entered in Book IV Deeds, Los Angeles County, Page 453, May 23, 1859, reading, "the tract known as San Gabriel being the same on which I now reside and surrounded by a line fence of cactus containing 400 acres embracing my house, outhouses and other improvements," and signed by Hildreth.

Mr. Gooch then deeded this property to his daughter Catherine E. Howard, the deed dated June 20, 1859.

It was Judge Howard in 1867 who raised the roof line, putting another story on part of the adobe, shingling the roof, and building the stairway that now goes to the two second-story bedrooms. Prior to this, the south wing had a tile roof and the rest of the house was covered with crushed tile and tar.

In a literary sketch of San Gabriel published by a firm in Chicago, Mrs. Jeanne C. Carr, wife of Dr. Ezra Slocum Carr and original owner of Carmelita Gardens where now stands the Pasadena Art Museum, speaks of visiting the Howards in the winter of 1869-70. Writing of the remarkable orchard that surrounded the house, the groves of orange, lime, lemon and pomegranate, as well as the cactus fence, she also speaks of the garden and the sundial.

Judge Howard practiced law in Los Angeles and served two terms as Superior Court Judge of Los Angeles County as well as serving on the Supreme Court of California.

In 1880 the Howards sold this adobe with 672 acres for \$25,000.00, the deed reading, "gold coin of the United States," to Gervaise and Helen A. Purcell and this home remained in the

Purcell family for over fifty years. It was Mrs. Purcell who added a large bedroom to the old south wing in the 1860's. Later

in 1926 the Purcell family turned the attic into two bedrooms and bath.

According to Hugh Purcell, attractive grandson of the Gervaise Purcells, his grandfather had recently landed in San Francisco, coming from Japan where he had just finished building a rail-road. Running into James de Barth Shorb, son-in-law of Don Benito Wilson, on the street one day, he was told by Mr. Shorb of this fine piece of land and house for sale in San Gabriel. Mr. Purcell was not particularly enthusiastic at the time but Mrs. Purcell was, so the purchase was made, and Las Tunas with the Purcells and their children became a center of hospitality during these years. Mr. Purcell had become a great tennis enthusiast while in Japan and he with Gen. Stoneman started the first tennis club in Southern California. When Stoneman went to Sacramento as Governor, the club was moved to the Las Tunas Adobe and attracted the young and athletic of the surrounding countryside to spirited matches and congenial gatherings. According to Fred Shoop of the Star News, none of the members knew how to play tennis so they studied the rule books that came with the racquets and had a fine time.

In 1932 the Purcell family sold the adobe to Mr. and Mrs. Menasco. Most of the acreage had been sold off by this time and the property consisted of only five acres with the house and a barn.

In 1941 Mr. and Mrs. Edward Chiate purchased Las Tunas Adobe. As with every new owner, the old adobe was modified once more to accommodate the needs of a new family. However, time, taxes and rezoning have taken their toll. More acreage was sold off and finally on March 7, 1968, the house was sold to Dr. and Mrs. George P. Smith.

The Smiths apparently intend to restore it as much as possible to its appearance at the time the Purcell family lived here though the old adobe stands on but a remnant of its once vast acres. Hidden away from a busy world, it remains serene, still quietly guarding its secrets and guarding them well.

Excerpts from "Windows On Early California" by Florence Slocum Wilson

Colorfully decorated San Marino sweatshirts are available at the San Marino Historical Society. Check out the display in the Thurnher House and pick up an order blank for these great gifts. Call 626-305-9375 or e-mail the Historical Society at smhistorical@earthlink.net for prices.

OPEN HOUSE If the sign is on the front door, the Thurnher House is open. Hours are 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Fridays, and on Tuesdays by appointment. Please call 626-304-9375 or e-mail smhistorical@earthlink.net to schedule a tour.

WEBSITE

Visit our web page to learn more about your Society's programs and activities: www.smnet.org (Click on "Community Resources" and then on "San Marino Historical Society") or go directly to:

www.smnet.org/comm_group

Please Sign Up!!!

If you want to receive these quarterly "Grapevines", see the old photos, learn of our programs and help to perpetuate the history of our wonderful town, then return the blue envelope quickly. A membership card will follow. Chances are your name will appear somewhere in our 2013 Centennial book!

Thank you.