

# The Grapevine

Published by the San Marino Historical Society

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

**SPRING 2008**

## In Memoriam Ben Salvaty April 12, 2008



### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

29 April 2008

The very sudden death of Ben Salvaty is not only a personal loss for many of us, but also a loss for the entire San Marino community. The Historical Society was hit especially hard as Ben was our newly elected President. We had all looked forward to working with him on a number of projects currently before the Society.

Last night at the meeting of the Board of the Historical Society I agreed to serve as President for the balance of this year. There are several additional initiatives that the Historical Society will be dealing with in the coming months and I will need the continued support and involvement of all of you. We have an adobe project to resolve. We have an Oral History Project that needs people who are interested in listening to and documenting the many interesting stories in our city. We have a book to write celebrating the unique story of our city. And we have a 100 Year Birthday Party to plan.

There is much to do and there is room for all of you to be involved. I look forward to working with you more closely in the coming months

Ave Maria Bortz  
President

### SAN MARINO HISTORICAL SOCIETY PROUDLY PRESENTS

"Its 1940 in San Marino, and You Are There!"  
By Dr. Ken Veronda



Kenneth Veronda, Headmaster of Southwestern Academy, has been a resident of San Marino for over 70 years and has grown up with San Marino. He is a student of history. In his talk, to be illustrated by pictures, he recalls the San Marino area as it was some 67 years ago. He puts the audience into the context of that period, and tells us why and how San Marino has evolved to its present configuration and status.

**The Meeting will be held at  
Southwestern Academy  
2800 Monterey Road, San Marino  
Monday, May 19, 2008 at 7:30 PM.  
Public Invited -- Admission is Free**

### San Marino's First "One City—One Book" Event

An historic first for the City of San Marino! To continue celebrating our new Crowell Public Library the Trustees are launching a new "community reading" program. A selection committee of eight dedicated readers voted for "The Samurai's Garden." to be our first One Book. The author, Gail Tsukiyama, who has a

*(Continued on page 2)*

**San Marino Historical Society  
Officers 2008**

*President	Ave Maria Bortz
*Vice President, Membership	Bill Ferry
*Vice President, Programs	Gene Dryden
*Treasurer	Greg Thompson
*Corresponding Secretary	Emilie Ferry
*Alternate Secretary	Marlene Elliott
*Parliamentarian	Paul Crowley
*Artifacts and Resources	Marilyn Peck
*Librarian	Judy Carter
*Historians	Peggy Winkler
	Kenneth Veronda
*Centennial Book	Ave Maria Bortz
Curator of the Michael White Adobe	James Elliott
Newsletter	Chris Datwyler
	Gene Platz
Newsletter Assistants	Judy Carter
	Paul Crowley
City Representative	Betty Brown
Project Development	Dennis Kneier
Legal and Bylaws	Shahen Harrapedian
	Ben Salvaty
SMHS Scholarship Committee	Sander Peck
	Robert Almanza
	Emilie Ferry
Communications	Carolyn Waldo-Holmstrom
Stoneman Mural	Marilyn Peck

**Historical Collections and Architectural Survey**

Sander Peck, Marilyn Peck

**Docent Chairmen**

Mary Payne, Peggy Winkler

**Docents**

Graziella Almanza, Mary Payne, Dorothy Ohlson, Marilyn Peck, Peggy Winkler, Ave Maria Bortz, Jim Elliott, Carolyn Holmstrom

**General Assistants**

Gene Platz, Sander Peck, Marlene Elliott, James Elliott, Alan Weirick

**Adobe Restoration and Preservation**

Dennis Kneier, James Elliott, Paul Crowley

**Website**

Chris Datwyler, Gene Dryden

\*Board Officers

**Society Presidents (1974-2004)**

Midge Sherwood .....	1974
Mary Smith .....	1976
Jack Sherwood.....	1978
Ed Ford .....	1980
Graziella Almanza1 .....	1982
La Verne Smith .....	1985
Jeanne Imler .....	1989
Gary Fleming.....	1991
Lillian Campbell.....	1993
Marilyn Peck.....	1995
Paul Crowley .....	1999
Gene Dryden.....	2004
Benjamin Salvaty .....	2008

**From the Archives**

by Judith Carter

Beginning in April, the Historical Society has held the Thurner House open to visitors on Tuesdays and Fridays.

New signs posted on the front and back gates encourage visitors to Lacy Park to visit the house and view the exhibits. Docent John Ryan welcomes visitors from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Fridays. On Tuesdays, the volunteers who are working on the archives show people through the Thurner House. Friday, April 25, was a very busy day. Visitors were served refreshments in honor of the 95th birthday of the city of San Marino.

The exhibit of photographs and memorabilia from World War I through the Iraq War has been taken down, cataloged and stored. The display on history of Lacy Park and photos and information about early San Marino History has been reinstalled. On an easel in the main room of the Thurner House is a memorial to Ben Salvaty whose able leadership is missed by all the members of the Historical Society.

We continue to answer reference questions. A recent caller sought information on Beverly Saunders who was, for many years, the San Marino Library's Children's Librarian. We were able to provide a photo and a copy of an obituary. Nat Reed, who consulted our archives when he was researching his book on Benjamin Wilson, was so kind to mention the Historical Society in the acknowledgements section of his new book. Don Benito Wilson: From Mountain Man to Mayor, Los Angeles 1841-1878 is now available in bookstores. Microfilm of the San Marino Tribune and the San Marino Directory are consulted regularly by the staff and members of the community to answer a variety of questions.

On March 2, Ben and Pat Salvaty, Ann and Gene Dryden and I staffed a table at a Heritage Days event at Heritage Square off the Pasadena Freeway. The day provided us with the opportunity to promote the San Marino Historical Society and its activities to the people who attended the Sunday afternoon event. We welcomed visitors and handed out information about San Marino history and encouraged people to join the Historical Society. We also had an opportunity to meet people from two dozen other historical organizations around the greater Los Angeles area and learn about their mission and activities.

**OPEN HOUSE** If the sign is on the front door, the Thurner House open. Hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesdays, except May 13, and on Fridays, 11 a.m. to p.m.

*SAN MARINO'S FIRST "ONE CITY, ONE BOOK" EVENT*

*(Continued from page 1)*

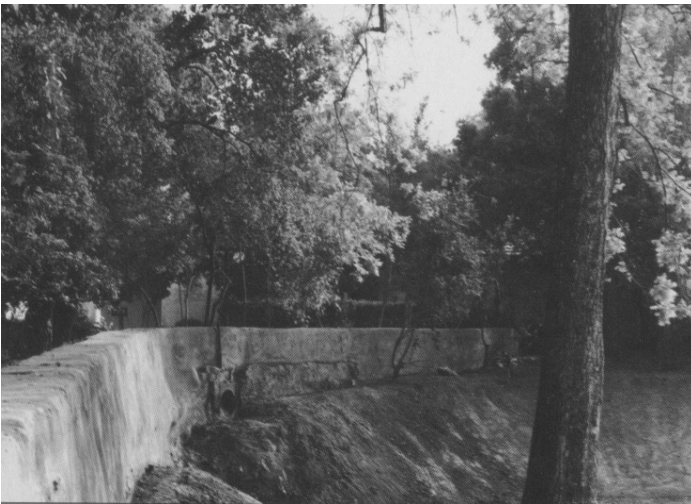
Chinese mother and Japanese father, arrives from San Francisco to talk about this book and her other four books the evening of May 21st, 7:30 PM. A book signing follows in the library's Barth Community Room.

Also plan to attend Book Discussions in the Thornton Conference Room, one led by Jeanne Cornwell on May 8th at 10:30 am, the other led by Councilman Dennis Kneier, May 13th at 7:30 pm. Get involved in this history-making event; read the book - the library has multiple copies, join the discussion groups and hear this popular author.

# Early Waterways in the San Gabriel Valley

By Gene Dryden

The "La Presa" Dam is the oldest portion of the irrigation system in the San Gabriel valley to which the Sunny Slope Water Company fell heir upon its organization in 1895. Though the dam is no longer used for its original purpose, it remains carefully preserved in the midst of a xeriscaped garden, adjacent to the water company's roofed-over reservoirs and modern, ranch-style general office. It is fitting that this historic structure now is partly owned by the Sunny Slope Water Company, a mutual water company which, itself, is one of the oldest surviving water supply institutions in Southern California. Sunny Slope is the inheritor of an irrigation system first built in the days of the old missions, that subsequently was modified and expanded to irrigate crops on some of the San Gabriel Valley's most productive farmland.



LaPresa Dam-- today

It was a beautiful place of flowing water, abundant tules and a forest of native trees, nestled in a small canyon at the foot of a short but steep rise. The Shoshonean-speaking Native American tribe who had lived there since at least 1200AD called the place Acurag-na, from their word akura, meaning "wood". Translated into English, the name of their village was "Woodville", and the people who lived there were known as the "Wood Clan". Many years after their tranquil lifestyle in close touch with the land and the seasons had been destroyed by successive waves of European immigrants, an ancient survivor recalled of this verdant place that it was a place having plenty of firewood. It was the wood that the Native Americans respected and used in moderate amounts for their needs, but the wood existed because of water.

The area of Acurag-na lay astride a geologic feature later known as the Raymond fault, which threw up an underground barrier to southward-flowing subterranean water, causing springs to percolate to the surface, forming marshy ponds. Even during the long dry season when the surrounding plain was brown and dusty, the pools of

Acurag-na remained full, supporting extensive plant and animal life. No wonder the "Wood Clan" settled in this place! The pools and surrounding ecology provided them with food, refreshment, building supplies and raw materials for many of their cultural artifacts. This verdant area today is the home of the Sunny Slope Water Company, which is there for the same reason the Indians once were there. Where artesian springs nurtured plants and animals, water wells today bring forth the life-giving liquid for modern residents.

The "Wood Clan" was but one family of a tribe ultimately known as "Gabrielinos" because of their eventual association with the Mission San Gabriel; no one today knows what they called themselves. Comparatively few in number, the "Wood Clan" and their compatriots left few traces of their occupancy. Their generally tranquil way of life was quickly disrupted and eventually eradicated by the arrival of Spaniards in the 1770s. The attractions of Acurag-na were not easily forgotten. However, as late as 1861, native laborers were hired from a small village or "rancheria" located at the site of "Woodville" (La Presa and Huntington Drive).

Although Spain long had claimed the lands inhabited by the Gabrielenos and the remainder of Alta California to be within her New World Empire, she paid only the briefest attention to this remote land of little apparent value until the second half of the eighteenth century. The Madrid government finally was galvanized to occupy distant California from fear that other European powers would take the land for themselves. The primary instruments of Spanish dominion were Franciscan friars charged with the establishment of six new mission settlements in Upper California. Mission San Gabriel Archangel was the fourth to be founded.

On September 8, 1771, Fathers Pedro Cambon and Angel Somera conducted services in a wooded bower beside a great river in the mouth of a vast and fertile valley. As this was the feast day of the Archangel Gabriel, they named the site and the surrounding valley, "San Gabriel". The original site of the mission church (near the present intersection of San Gabriel Blvd and Lincoln Avenue in Rosemead) was subject to frequent flooding by the nearby river, and so the church was moved five miles northwest to its present site in 1775. By 1791, work had begun on the familiar stone church that still stands in the heart of the community of San Gabriel.

Upon its completion in 1805, the church became the center of a large and prosperous settlement. Surrounding it were dormitories for unmarried individuals, houses for lay professionals and married couples, and workshops which crafted wood, iron, textile and leather goods for the community. Adjacent fields produced bumper crops of corn, wheat, barley, beans, olives, apples, limes, figs, grapes and oranges. Surrounding the mission and settle-

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Early Waterways in the San Gabriel Valley

*(Continued from page 3)*

ment were thousands of acres of land upon which roamed huge herds of cattle. Blessed with a fine site on rich lands having ample water not too far away, San Gabriel soon became the richest of all California's missions.

Fertile though the lands around the church were, an uninterrupted water supply was essential to continued prosperity of the community. Surviving records indicate that local wells around the San Gabriel Mission had water levels too deep to produce water in sufficient quantities for irrigation purposes, but water flowed in abundance a short distance to the north, where a line of hills and ridges bisected by gullies marked the escarpment of the Raymond Fault. The padres directed their Indian neophytes to build a system of dams and irrigation zanjias (ditches) to bring water from the vicinities of Los Robles or Mission Canyon and Wilson Lake down to the mission settlement to be used for domestic and irrigation purposes.

The first water systems were crude, consisting of brush and dirt dams and unlined ditches, but in the 1790s, as master masons and skilled potters arrived from Mexico, substantial structures were constructed of stone or fired tiles set in mortar. In 1816, Father Jose Maria Zalvidea directed construction of a water-powered grist mill in a canyon on the Raymond escarpment. Believed to have been the first water-powered mill built in California, this is El Molino Viejo in San Marino. Water collected from Mill and Los Robles Canyons was carried in tile-lined zanjias to the mill, where two stones ground the bumper crops of wheat and corn routinely grown at the mission. The water then exited the mill and flowed into a large swampy area later known as Wilson Lake, the site of Lacy Park. Zalvidea also dammed Wilson Lake and used the outflow to operate a sawmill, a wool-washing works and a tannery, all of which were located close to the mission.

Although the mission Fathers used it until 1823, El Molino Viejo proved to be less than satisfactory because water splashing up from the mill wheel routinely dampened the flour on the grindstones. Father Zalvidea resolved to build a new mill closer to the mission, and in 1821, he requested Joseph Chapman to come to San Gabriel to design the new mill and its water system, and to superintend its construction.

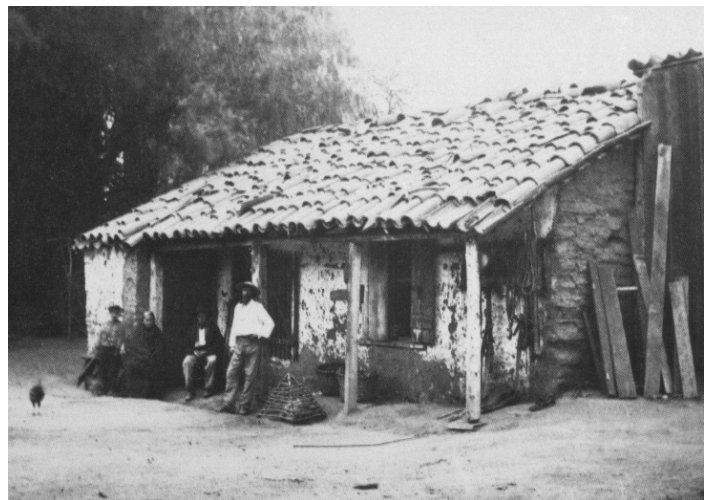
Late in 1821, Chapman began work on this new grist mill at San Gabriel Mission, on a site just south of the church, itself. Chapman's mill employed technical improvements. The water wheel was of the efficient, verti-

cally aligned undershot design to make use of the low head or fall of water available at the site. To power this new mill, a greater flow of water had to be secured than was available from the mission's traditional sources near Wilson Lake. Chapman surveyed the ground around the old Gabrielino rancheria at Acrag-na near what later would be known as Eaton Wash, and determined that the flow of water from springs on the fault escarpment would be sufficient for the new mill..

On a small side canyon at this site, Chapman designed and superintended the construction of a stone and mortar dam to impound water. Countless stones were collected by Gabrielino laborers and carted or carried in nets to the site of the dam. Limestone chunks from the Puente Hills and Arroyo Seco, and seashells from the distant ocean shore, were gathered and burned to make lime for the mortar. The dam, about ten to twelve feet high at its apex and extending two hundred and twenty five feet across the cienega, formed slowly under Chapman's watchful eyes. Day after day, Indian laborers mixed mortar, cut stones and fit them in place in the growing structure. When the dam reached its final size, a thick coating of lime mortar was spread over the entire structure to seal it; into this coating the Gabrielenos, otherwise unidentified to history, pressed their hands, leaving palm print "signatures" for posterity.

These palm prints can be seen to this day in the dam on the Sunny Slope property on La Presa Avenue, just North of Huntington Drive.

Excerpts from "Ranches to Residences: the Story of the Sunny Slope Water Company" by Willam A Myers – with permission



Early Indians at LaPresa

### 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.

### WEBSITE

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

[www.smnet.org/comm\\_group](http://www.smnet.org/comm_group)

then click on San Marino Historical Society