

Los Angeles City HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

“In Memoriam Edition”

In Commemoration of the Life of

Irene Tresun

1919-2013



VOLUME XLVI

ISSUE 1

February 2013

THE GREAT RAINSTORM OF 1938

by Abraham Hoffman



Beginning in 1877 the U.S. Weather Bureau has kept statistics on the annual rainfall in southern California. Gauges measure the rain in Los Angeles and other cities in the region. Over the decades the average rainfall for Los Angeles has worked out to about fifteen inches a year. Unlike the statistics for other regions, the year for Los Angeles runs from

July 1 to June 30. This has created some misleading impressions regarding the measurement for Los Angeles. If the region experiences major storms in December 2012 and January 2013, for example, the statistics would be included in the same seasonal period running July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2013. Other regions would place these storms in different years.

We are used to southern California described as having a Mediterranean climate and, somewhat in contradiction, being a semi-desert area. Essentially the terms mean that the *Farmer's Almanac* is useless for predicting rainfall here. If a huge storm drops four inches of rain in Los Angeles in November and hardly anything the following month, it doesn't help lawns very much. And when it rains it can really pour. Jokes may be made about the Los Angeles River running upside down in a concrete channel, but there is nothing funny about floodwaters racing the 61 miles from Canoga Park to San Pedro Harbor at about sixty miles an

hour. Stand on the overpass on Van Nuys Boulevard overlooking the river during a major storm, and you will see the river rising fifteen feet, almost reaching the bridge (the concrete banks are vertical here). Small wonder that tragedies occur when someone falls into this torrent and is swept downstream. Of interest is the fact that from start to end, the Los Angeles River's elevation at Canoga Park is higher than the Mississippi River's is in Minnesota.

Because of the uncertainty of rainfall in southern California, it usually comes as a shock when we have a very wet year, with thirty or more inches during the rainy season. Motorists can't deal with the sudden onset of a major storm; gridlock, traffic jams, fender-benders are all part of what the TV newscasters dramatically call "Stormwatch."

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UPCOMING

2013

Northrop Lectures

**“Coping and Living in Los Angeles During
World War II”**

May 4

**“The Civilian Command Center and
Everyday Life”
Speaker TBD**

June 8

**“The Effect of the War on Motion Picture
Industry in Southern California”
Mark Wanamaker**

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings,

It saddens me to have to bear sad news in our first newsletter of 2013 but I must report the passing of a lady who has been instrumental to the success of LACHS for many years.

Irene Tresun, our Newsletter Editor, passed away on Saturday, March 2nd. Irene was 93. Irene loved Los Angeles and especially UCLA. Irene started her career with the City of Los Angeles working for the Controlling Division (now the Controller's Office) but also worked for the Public Works Bureau of Sewer Maintenance (now Bureau of Sanitation) and eventually settled for many years into the Civil Service Department (now Personnel Department).

Irene was born in 1919 in the Ukraine and moved with her family to Austria, Belgium, and Germany, before moving to the United States in 1933. Irene settled in Los Angeles in 1935 and she graduated from UCLA in 1939.

Irene has been one of our longest serving Board Members and has chaired the Marie Northrop Lecture and Newsletter committees for many years. Irene left big shoes to fill, especially with regards to this newsletter, which we will strive to continue publishing. Irene was also scheduled to speak at the May Marie Northrop Lecture Series. Please stay tuned to see how we handle that.

As we face the new year and continue to strive to grow our organization I am delighted to be returning as your President in 2013. I am also happy to continue to work with all our returning Board Members and to welcome our three new members to the Board: Claudine Ajeti, Marcia Enger, and Martha Gruft. We looking forward to making LACHS the best it can be for you in 2013.

I hope you continue to enjoy the benefits of your membership and will continue to join us at future events.

Thank You,



*Todd Gaydowski
President*

Editor's Note: Articles with not byline are written by editor.

A REMEMBRANCE OF *Irene Tresun & the Thirty Niners*

by Maggie Whelan

Irene Tresun was a true treasure to the Los Angeles City workforce, particularly to those of us engaged in the human resource field. During my tenure with the City of Los Angeles, I had heard about the great scandal within civil service and I wanted to know the story of exactly what had happened and how it was addressed. The scandal took place in the late 1930's and by the time I started working for the City, there weren't too many people left to explain just what exactly had occurred. In August of 2009, I had the opportunity to read a column that appeared in the City Employees Club of Los Angeles publication "The Alive" authored by John Hawkins, the Club's CEO, where Irene Tresun was interviewed about her 9 years (1941-1949) as a city employee, with much of that time as a Personnel Technician for the Civil Service Department.



The article was fascinating and I called Irene and asked if she would come and speak to the staff of the Personnel Department and share those experiences and stories of Mayor Frank Shaw's corrupt government and how his administration violated the City's civil service system. She graciously agreed. She explained that in 1939, all of the professional staff of the Department had been fired, quit, transferred or incarcerated after being discovered for selling examinations and appointments during the Mayor Shaw regime. The General Manager of the Civil Service Department and the Vice-President of the Civil Service Commission were included among the incarcerated. Mayor Shaw was recalled in 1938 and replaced by Mayor Fletcher Bowron.

In the aftermath of this scandal, the City of Los Angeles embarked on a new beginning and in July of 1939, the first wave of new staff of the Civil Service Department was hired to "re-birth" the merit system in the municipal government of the City of Los Angeles. They referred to themselves as the "Thirty Niners." "Only the best shall serve" became their slogan. New employees of the Civil Service Department were committed to that concept. In

1941, Irene became a member of the "Thirty Niners" when she was hired as a Personnel Technician. She described the group's attitude about working in the Civil Service Department as one of "Great team spirit, great camaraderie and for the most part, good training and encouragement regarding their efforts." The group worked tirelessly to restore the trust and confidence of the residents and the workforce and they were successful.

Much to the regret of her co-workers, Irene left city service on December 31, 1949, to work for a management consulting firm. It was an opportunity she couldn't pass up, but Irene never lost touch with those co-workers nor did she lose touch with what was to become the Personnel Department. She generously donated her time to serve as a rater for civil service interviews.

A couple of years ago, Irene sent me papers that she had authored or collected from her fellow "Thirty Niners" complete with newsletters from the period when she worked for the Civil Service Department. There were also various accountings of the 1939 scandal and I think it was the group's intention to write a book but like many such projects, it never happened. It also included invitations to reunions with the "Thirty Niners" which continued into this century.

Having the opportunity to meet Irene and hear from her directly about what it was like to work for the City of Los Angeles during a time of scandal and rebuilding, I came to realize how fortunate we all have been to have someone like Irene and the rest of the "Thirty Niners" who rolled up their sleeves and put in place a system designed to prevent corruption and abuse of our City's civil service system. This is Irene's and her fellow "Thirty Niners'" legacy with the City of Los Angeles. I admired her great intelligence, her incredible sense of style, and more importantly, her sense of humor. I will forever cherish the bond we formed and am proud to have known her.

Job Interviews and LAPD Holiday Parties

An Interview with Irene Tresun for the newsletter of the City Employees Club, *Alive!*
Reprinted with permission from the editor.

Alive!: Tell us about your first days working for the City.

Irene Tresun: Okay. I was hired as clerk steno.

Stenographer?

Irene: Yes, the week right after Pearl Harbor. My first assignment was in the Controlling Division. The controlling division is now the Controller's Office.

Irene: That's right. My first day I arrived at 8 o'clock, of course, and the Deputy Controller by the name of Alexander, said that [the Controller] will be here about ten o'clock. And at ten o'clock he rolled in, drunk. He was famous for that, actually. I don't think he tried to even hide it. And Alexander did all the work.

I was there for only about a month and then I got some kind of lateral promotion to the Bureau of Assessments, which at that time was a very important department. And then I went to Public Works. I was there almost a year. When they discovered that I went to college and that I could write and talk, they said I could handle the in-service training, which I knew nothing about of course.

They wanted you to be a trainer.

Irene: I didn't do the training. I set everything up. I had an invitation to go through the North Outfall sewer in a boat, which I declined.

In a boat *inside* the sewer?

Irene: Right! Inside the sewer, which is why I declined. I said, "I really don't think that's anything I would enjoy." He said, "It's fabulous. It's beautiful." I said, "It may be beautiful to you, I don't think it would be beautiful to me." And so I never had that pleasure.



Irene Tresun, as she appeared during the period when she worked for the City of Los Angeles.

So, you were in Public Works and you were the secretary to the director?

Irene: Yes, to the Maintenance Director.

But they asked you to work out of...

Irene: Out of class.

To do more than that.

Irene: Right. And I was dating somebody in the Bureau of Budget and Efficiency, which is now the Office of the CAO. He said, "Look, there's an exam coming up for Personnel Aid, and you should take it." And I said, "No, I don't want that." I had met two or three people [from that department], and they were all brains with no personality. And I said, "Besides, I can't pass that exam. It's written for all these brains. I can't pass it." So he bet me a dollar that I could, and lo and behold I passed the written exam.

{The job interview came at an unexpected time, and she was not prepared for it.—Ed.}

And the first question they asked is that stupid question, "Why do you want this job?" And I said, "I don't know that I want it." "Then why take the exam?" I said, "Because I didn't want to lose a bet." Later on they told me they'd never had anybody give them that kind of answer,



Irene Tresun and City Employees Club CEO John Hawkins, in front of her Hancock Park home.

and they were so stunned that they gave me the highest score. But I don't recommend those kinds of answers!

And then ...

Irene: Then I started working in the Civil Service Dept., and I took some extension courses in public administration. I stayed there, was promoted eventually to personnel technician — it's called personnel analyst now. And then I got an offer to go [outside of the City] to work for a management consultant, one of the first in the country. And that was an opportunity I couldn't turn down and so I worked for him.

That's when you left the City.

Irene: Yes. December 31, 1949.

Most of your time was...

Irene: Writing exams.

What kind?

Irene: Every kind. A lot of police promotional exams, and that was probably my most important assignment. I learned how to drink in the police department at Christmastime. They had the best Christmas parties. Police Department headquarters, by the way, were on the Temple Street floor then. It's now called second floor of City Hall. At Christmastime, all the doors between all of the offices were open, and you'd start at one and you went all the way down. By the time you got through, you hoped you could still walk. How were you treated as a woman professional? **Irene:** From the time I became a Personnel Aide, I was treated like a professional. And that was very rare in those days for a woman. I never intended to be a secretary. Women had a hard time getting into the professions and being treated as professionals until way after World War II. The man sitting next to me and I were equals, not just in money but in respect.

We talked as equals.

The City treated you fairly.

Irene: Yes. It was very unusual. I got promotions.

Mayor Fletcher Bowron

Who was the mayor when you were working for the City?

Irene: Fletcher Bowron, the entire time that I was there. We all adored him. He's another one who liked to imbibe a bit. The last day before the Christmas break, everybody in City Hall was invited to come to the mayor's office for a drink. The civil service department personnel always decided we would go in the afternoon, but by that time

he'd had quite a bit [to drink]. He would be in such a good mood then. He was such a nice person. He didn't know any of us, but he'd always say hello when he'd meet you in the hallways, and always very friendly. The man had a fabulous background, too. He reformed L.A. after [Mayor] George Shaw was impeached in L.A. Fletcher Bowron was appointed to head the commission that investigated the corruption and got rid of Shaw. So the man was very capable.



Irene Tresun shares her memories with City Employees Club CEO John Hawkins.

When City Hall Was Young

Do you remember where your offices were, in City Hall?

Irene: Yes, when I first started, it was Room 11, which is 211 now. Then police examining moved onto what was then the 22nd floor, which is now the 24th floor. Scoring and examining moved up there. It was an unfinished floor, by the way, with naked bulbs hanging. They hadn't finished City Hall from the 22nd floor up. The first to move into City Hall in 1928 was seven floors of Superior Courts. The county and the City were working together and were housed together, really, until 1957, when the Superior Courts Building was built. We had elevator operators in those days. That disappeared in the 1960s, when all the floors were renumbered. That's the reason it was renumbered — the elevators became self-service rather than operator serviced.

What were your hours working at City Hall?

Irene: They had staggered hours throughout the City. We worked from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and others worked from 8 to 5. That was done for transportation as much as anything. Most of us used public transportation at that time. Most of us didn't have a car. There were streetcars on Hill Street, on Broadway, on First Street, and on Temple, or we had buses.

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Job Interviews and LAPD Holiday Parties

Continued from page 5

What did you wear?

Irene: Strictly professional. Most of us women wore high heels and suits or something like that. We would've been fired probably if we showed up in anything such as what they wear today. It just wasn't done.

Where did everyone eat?

Irene: I can't say everybody. There was no cafeteria, not even a snack bar, in City Hall at that time. Most people brought their lunch and ate wherever they could. Some of us ate across the street, in a place called Simon's. Or Wimpy's, which served hot dogs and burgers.

What was up on the 27th floor when you were working there? Where the Tom Bradley Room is now?

Irene: It was supposed to be the art gallery. But when I was there, they had a huge plan of the civic center, the way that they had hoped that the civic center would be. Sometimes, during lunch, when we had time, we'd go up there and admire it because it just looked so fabulous. And that plan still exists somewhere. Last I heard it was with the Natural History Museum, but it's not with the city. It should be with the city really.

But they didn't have receptions up there.

Irene: No, they were held off the mayor's office, if they had any.

Fears of an Air Raid

So, you started working the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. What was that like?

Irene: We were expecting to be attacked any time. Those of us who worked for the Air Defense Command *{Irene worked there at night. – Ed.}* were particularly aware of protecting the coast against air attack. The Air Corps was somewhat prepared — the Air Defense Command had its headquarters at Eighth and Flower — and was to have a dry run Dec. 11, to see whether or not they could make air defense work. Dec. 7, of course, came ahead of that.



What did the City do? Did the City have war efforts?

Irene: On the eighth floor, there was a huge open room, and that was the center of the City's war effort. The L.A. Police Department had five deputy chiefs; and one was put in charge of some sort of war effort. And what they did, we never learned. And Water and Power was probably involved, too, and Public Works. The various air raid wardens fell under Public Works.

Do you remember any air raids? I know that there were some famous air raids that happened where the City got blacked out; do you remember City Hall blacking out at night or anything like that?

Irene: It wasn't just City Hall. Any kind of sign at the rooftop level had to be extinguished or taken down. And there were several buildings, in Los

Angeles, that had stained glass ceilings, actually, at the top. Those had to be painted over. And the Lindbergh Beacon on top of City Hall [the blinking beacon at the top of City Hall] had to be extinguished, too. It's back up now, very ceremoniously.

[All the City's beacons] had to be taken down because planes flew much lower than they do today. From 5,000 feet, a pilot could actually see a match being lit. So nothing like that was allowed.

And we had to have our drapes drawn. But if that wasn't enough, then special blackout curtains had to be put up. Air raid wardens went up and down the streets. If you could see light, they'd ring your doorbell and say, "You've got to do something about this because this is dangerous."

Was that every single night?

Irene: Oh yes.

Oh, wow.

Irene: We went into war mode almost overnight.

Do you remember any air raids?

Irene: I remember the famous one we called the War Over

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LACHS Members' Events... Going Places

by Kay Tornborg

We had to assume that EXPLORER didn't *mean* to take LACHS' day, Sept. 21, 2012, at the Griffith Observatory; it just worked out that way...so we gracefully postponed our trip to January 17, 2013 and an account will be in the next Newsletter.

Although rain was predicted for October 20, 2012 a hardy group headed south for a tour of unique Watts Towers, built by Simon Rodia over 33 years, by hand, finally finishing in 1954 and since then landmarked at the National, State and local levels. They were deeded to the City of Los Angeles Municipal Arts Department in 1975 and the Watts Towers Arts Center runs myriad programs featuring world-famous artists of many genres.

Watts Towers is almost mystical in its allure, especially under scudding skies. The structure includes the towers of concentric rings, undulating walls, a fireplace (in what was once Rodia's house, which burned), walkways of all sorts, 'peekaboo' windows, a ship-like structure...all covered with neat patterns of 'found' materials: a lot of tile chips, bits of pottery and china, cup handles, whole tiles, bottle tops, bottle bottoms, whole bottles, imprints of tools (hammers, pliers, etc.), seashells...if I've left something out please go down and look around; you'll find it. It is beautiful!

The Watts Towers Arts Center, the Noah Purifoy Gallery, the Charles Mingus Youth Arts Center and Charles Mingus Gallery were also available for tourers to see *BAILA con Duende, the First Black Artist In Los Angeles Group Exhibition* which featured over 70 local and international Black artists, curated by Lili Bernard.

Leaving Watts Towers, the group drove north to Adams Blvd., where participants could follow a written guided tour of significant places along the Boulevard going west from the freeway. All then convened at Phillips Bar-B-Que on Crenshaw Blvd., where we took over the garden tables and chowed down on various combos of chicken, ribs, greens, beans and slaws. No health food.

December, as we all know, is LACHS Gala month and this year festivities were held on December 11th at the Los Angeles Fire Department Historical Society's Hollywood Museum, housed in the original Station 27.

Attendees wandered among fire engines and fire equipment displays during cocktails and then went to dinner in the upstairs meeting/dining room which had been miraculously transformed in gala holiday style featuring (on each table) small burning buildings, fire engines, small poinsettias, velvet runners, a small gift for each attendee and delicious food. A special salute to Tyson "Santa" Gaskil (who is retiring from the board, probably in exhaustion) and his Helpers: John Jackson, Giao Luong Baker, Elizabeth and Todd Gaydowski, Kathy Kolnick, Diane Kanner, Joel Fisher and Kay Tornborg.

Another special salute goes to Eddy "Santa" Feldman and his Helpers: Brett Arena, Todd Gaydowski and Kay Tornborg for coming up with a roster of recipients of the Annual LACHS Awards:

- J. Thomas Own History Award: Nick Curry
- David G. Cameron Preservation Award:
Jennifer A. Watts
- Miriam Matthews Ethnic History Award:
Arnett L. Hartsfield, Jr.
- Honorary Life Member Award: Anton Calleia
- Two Special Awards: Dr. Geraldine Knatz
The Huntington Library

A brief bio of each recipient is on Page 3 of the November 2012 LACHS Newsletter.

Councilman Tom "Santa" La Bonge, accompanied by *his* Helpers, did a special salute to Honoree and former fireman Arnette L. Hartsfield, Jr.

The evening's speaker was Steven J. Ross, USC Professor of History, who talked about his book, *Hollywood Left and Right*. His thought-provoking and powerful presentation was followed by many good questions, after which festivities adjourned.

LACHS Tours the Watts Towers October 12, 2012



LACHS Group



Close-up of a mosaic



Watts Towers



Flower pots



Base of the Towers



Walkway

Councilman La Bonge Hosts LACHS Members at the Samuel Oschin Planetarium

by Kay Tornborg



Members' trip to the Griffith Observatory, postponed from the October day of Explorer's fly-over and several thousand folks looking skyward, took place on a glorious January 17th when the view, if not 'forever,' was definitely very good. Since most of our members' outings include a "chat 'n chew" we met in the Cafe at the End of the Universe while awaiting our guides.

After lunch we wound our way up the curving ramp, along the jewel-encrusted interpretive "mural" of the heavens and were met by Isaac Burks and Mark Pine, from Councilman La Bonge's office, who coordinated the purchase of tickets for the Planetarium show.

Upstairs, the group learned about the Foucault Pendulum that demonstrates the earth's rotation by swinging in a slow, steady arc. We then took our seats for the hour-long

show in the Samuel Oschin Planetarium Theatre, for which we were hosted by Councilman La Bonge.

Out of the dark theatre and back in the daylight we all gazed upward during an explanation of the hand-painted celestial murals on the ceiling, painted by Hugo Ballin in 1934. Even the guide occasionally smiled along with us at the outlandish folk tales that "explain" some of the history of astronomy up to 1934.

We then clustered around the Tesla Coil, which is activated several times each day in an exciting display of crackling lighting released from the handled sphere at the top. The coil is plugged into a 248-volt outlet (don't try this at home!) and the coil generates the 500,000 volts of lightening in a moment that instantly reminds of *Frankenstein*.

We then joined Councilman Tom La Bonge and Isaac Burks, who changed to photographer for this part of the visit, for a "class picture" on the steps of the Observatory. Many "happy campers" then returned inside to continue their look at the wonders of our universe.

Photo courtesy of the Office of Councilmember Tom LaBonge



Foucault Pendulum, photo courtesy of Armen Meymavian



http://CafePasadena.wordpress.com

LACHS ANNUAL GALA

December 11, 2012 at the
Los Angeles Fire Department Historical Society's Hollywood Museum



LA Fire Department Historical Society's Museum at the original Hollywood Fire Station 27



Steven J. Ross, USC Professor of History



J. Thomas Own History Award Recipient, Nick Curry



David G. Cameron Preservation Award Recipient, Jennifer A. Watts



Miriam Matthews Ethnic History Award Recipient, Arnett "The Rookie" Hartfield, Jr.



Honorary Life Member Award Recipient, Anton Calleia



Special Award Recipient, Dr. Geraldine Knatz



Special Award Recipient, The Huntington Library (David Zeidberg, Avery Director)



The Port of Los Angeles



Councilmember Tom LaBonge



African American Firefighters Association



African American Firefighters Association



Hook and Ladder at the Firefighters Museum

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF TRAFFIC OFFICERS

by John E. Fisher

Traffic Officers trace their origin to sworn Police Officers. Beginning sometime in the early part of the 20th century, Police Officers were deployed at Downtown intersections to assign right-of-way to the new automobiles, pedestrians and trolleys. As automated traffic signals began to be introduced, they would change the signal timing at the controller with a hand-held switch. Over the years, they also would be used to facilitate left turns and to keep closely-spaced intersections clear.



Intersection control and aid in the 1920's

Sworn Police Officers also were used to enforce parking restrictions, beginning in 1919 with 45-minute time limit restrictions in Downtown. When parking meters began to be used in the city in 1949, they enforced meter violations, as well.

In time, it was desired to dedicate sworn officers to the more serious crime functions of investigation and prevention. Thus, civilian position titles were created within the Police Department. They included Parking Control Checkers in 1959 for parking enforcement and Traffic Control Officers in 1967 for directing intersection traffic.

During this period, the Parking Control Checkers drove three-wheeled motorcycles and most of them were female. They were often called "meter maids," a popular yet demeaning term. On the other hand, the Traffic Control

Officers were exclusively male. In recognition of these artificial barriers and gender bias the two classes were consolidated in 1974 to the new class of Traffic Officer.

Due to their role in enforcing traffic and parking regulations, they remained with the Police Department. However, the Police Department emphasis was crime fighting, whereas the Department of Transportation's emphasis was parking supply and congestion relief. As a result of this realization, Traffic Officers were transferred from the Police Department to the Department of Transportation in 1984 to emphasize their role in facilitating traffic circulation and parking. This transfer had been envisioned when the Department of Transportation was formed in 1979. The so-called Brophy Study conducted for the City in 1982 outlined a plan for consolidating on-street parking, off-street parking, parking enforcement and intersection control into a more efficient entity. This consolidated entity became the Office of Parking Management. The transfer of the Traffic Officers nearly doubled the size of the department. With the part-time crossing guard staff considered, the Department tripled in size.



Parking enforcement, circa 1950

As signals were incorporated into the ATSC system, the need for Traffic Officers to be deployed to direct intersection traffic began to be de-emphasized. At the same time, the city's success in managing traffic during the 1984 Olympic Games, Pope John Paul's visit in 1986

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LOS ANGELES CITY – A WORLD-CLASS CULTURAL CAPITAL?

by Eddy S. Feldman & Kay Tornborg



In an article appearing in the LACHS Newsletter, February, 2009, *The Birth of an Art Capital*, it was suggested that the 2006 blockbuster exhibition of works by Los Angeles artists at the Centre Pompidou in Paris was international recognition that the city was no longer to be “under-appreciated” as a cultural center. As Humpty Dumpty observed in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*:

“There’s glory for you!”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t - till I tell you. I meant “there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean a nice knock-down argument,” Alice objected.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master - that’s all.”

In examining the suggestion of international recognition further we were happy to discover that a member of LACHS Board of Directors was very much involved in administration of the G. Edward Cassady, M.D. and Margaret Elizabeth Cassady, R.N., Lewis Carroll Collection on the campus, very much in the City of Los Angeles, of the University of Southern California. Lewis Carroll, as is well known by our members, is the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson who, among other books, wrote *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865, 150 years ago in 2015!) and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871).

Dr. George Cassady, son of G. Edward and Margaret Elizabeth Cassady, graduated USC Medical School in 1955 and opened a successful pediatric practice in San Francisco. He loved the *Alice* books, read them to his sons at bedtime and incorporated *Alice* passages into his lectures at medical conferences.

This Collection was established in 2000 with Dr. Cassady’s gift of over 100 books and ephemera; it was named in honor of his parents. The following year an endowment was established by Dr. Cassady to expand the Collection and to bring national attention to the high level of interest in Carroll’s works among students on the USC campus. The Cassady Family Endowment for Lewis Carroll Studies at the University of Southern California has hosted an annual meeting of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America and co-sponsored, with the Huntington Library, a symposium on Carroll studies and their influence on modern society.

The Carroll Collection has grown swiftly and currently contains more than 3000 rare books, early pamphlets, letters and other items related to the work of Lewis Carroll. Included in the Collection are early works Carroll inscribed to friends, books from Carroll’s own library, many copies of Carroll’s work from *Alice’s* library, limited collectors’ editions and most works by major illustrators of the *Alice* stories. First editions of early translations into German, French and Italian as well as important bibliographic and biographical works, stand side-by-side with signed copies of early movie scripts, play bills from early stage adaptations, Victorian-era playing cards and pop-up books. More recently, comic books, graphic novels, manga editions, literary parodies, computer games, movies and original art work related to Carroll and his *Alice* books have joined the Collection.

A “Wonderland Award” was created by the Endowment in 2004. It is an annual multidisciplinary competition, open to students at universities and other educational institutions, which encourages new scholarship and creative works related to Lewis Carroll. This year’s awards will be announced at a reception at the Doheny Library, April 5, 2013. Administration of the competition is largely in the hands of Tyson Gaskill, Director of Communications and Events at USC Libraries, the aforementioned Board member of LACHS.

There are other smaller collections of *Alice* materials at the Charles Andrews Clark Memorial Library and at the Huntington Library, all of which allow us to share the glory of being part of a world-class culture center.

THE GREAT RAINSTORM OF 1938

Continued from page 1



Windshield wipers, seldom used or checked, may prove unequal to the task of keeping windshields clear. And when the TV weather forecaster says the snow level will be down to 3,500 feet, don't even think of driving over Tejon Pass to Bakersfield (the elevation at the summit is 4,160 feet).

We've had many terrible rainstorms in the past, storms that washed down houses from their tenuous grip on the foothills to the ones that close down Victory Boulevard in the Sepulveda Basin area. But few could match the rainstorm that lasted from February 27 to March 4, 1938, an event to be observed (not celebrated) for its 75th anniversary this year. There were other disastrous floods, property damage, and loss of life in Los Angeles, but the 1938 storm is in a class by itself.

Usually when a rainstorm hits southern California it comes from the north, with San Francisco getting the first blow. In the case of the March 1938 storm, it came from the south, pouring rain on the southland when two storms combined to form a massive rainstorm beginning on February 27. It



poured for 24 hours. San Fernando, Reseda, and Pomona recorded two or more inches, Pasadena and Monterey Park more than five inches on March 1. Many areas within the county had already had more than 20 inches for the season by that date. "Yesterday's storm was the first to result in appreciable water storage in the Los Angeles County Flood Control district, hydraulic engineers said," reported the *Los Angeles Times*. "Preceding rains were absorbed into the watersheds."

More rain was to come and, with it, extensive property damage and loss of life. The Los Angeles River rose beyond its banks and carried off 30,000 feet of lumber intended for work on the new Union Station. Roads leading up into canyons and into mountain areas were closed due to



washouts, stranding hikers and campers. Residents at a home in Laurel Canyon were lucky to escape with their lives when a sixty-foot retaining wall, six feet high, became undermined by the rain and collapsed onto their house.

Radio newscasters informed listeners of the destructive force of the storm, but allegedly exaggerated accounts of scores of people dying brought harsh criticism from the *Times* which stated that the rain created "a Roman holiday for radio news broadcasters who, spurred by their own hysteria, lost all sense of reason in their vivid descriptions." Reality proved closer to the exaggeration than the newspaper realized. By March 3 thirty people had died and floods had demolished buildings and bridges. Mudslides crushed homes, and thousands of people fled their houses as earth and floodwaters slammed into them.

On Friday, March 4 the rain lessened, but the death toll had reach 70, some 1,500 homes in the city were rendered uninhabitable, and dozens of people were still missing and unaccounted for. Los Angeles schools had been closed for

two days, but some reopened. However, the San Fernando Valley and ten other areas still suspended classes. UCLA and USC, closed the past two days, resumed classes. *Times* reporter James Bassett, later an editor for the paper, took an



airplane trip around southern California to view the damage. “Noah, peering from the crow’s nest of the Ark, must have seen water—a plentiful world of it,” he wrote. “But his low vantage point gave no perspective....From 3000 feet, a scene unfolds that groundlings never grasp. Disaster gutted farm lands and ruined roads, shattered communications, wrecked railroad lines, all leap into sharp edged reality from that altitude.”

With the return of sunny skies, southern California residents assessed the damage. The City of Los Angeles had an estimated cost of \$7,413,000 in rainstorm damage (1938 money values), a number that quickly rose. City officials considered where to get the money for repairs—loans from



the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the Public Works Administration, state funds, a bond issue. The Works Progress Administration offered assistance in cleaning up the debris. The Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the National Emergency Council, and federal agencies promised relief. Harvey Van Norman, general

manager of the Department of Water and Power, estimated a cost of \$3 million to repair and replace broken water mains. Griffith Park would require \$1,367,000 to restore it and other city parks to their normal conditions, according to the city’s Parks Commission. Other city and county agencies also weighed in with the damage estimates. The

damage costs continued to increase as more information became available. In the San Fernando Valley, the damage cost rose to \$12 million.

The storm dumped more than eleven inches on Los Angeles, bringing the season’s total to 21.73 inches. Normal for the season at that point was 11.30 inches. The storm in effect had doubled the seasonal rainfall in only five days. Damage to other areas in southern California was also extensive. Palm Springs residents, isolated by the flood waters of the Whitewater River, appealed for supplies to be sent by airplane to help marooned vacationers.

More than 32 inches of rain had fallen on the San Gabriel Mountains, causing landslides, destroying roads, and sweeping away bridges. 447 cabins were completely destroyed, and many others were seriously damaged. The floods uprooted trees, buried resort camps under tons of rock, and effectively ended the existence of the Mount Lowe Tavern. Scars from the flood can still be seen in such places as the East Fork of the San Gabriel River, where bridge pillars remain as stark sentinels of the storm’s ferocity.



The intensity of the rainfall caused the Los Angeles River to overflow its banks, resulting in widespread damage to homes and buildings in downtown Los Angeles and south to San Pedro. The work that had begun earlier to control the river clearly wasn’t enough. The Army Corps of Engineers over the next two decades would effectively turn the river into a concrete channel, ignoring any suggestion of scenic river view sites in favor of securing the safety of residents and businesses vulnerable to flooding. Nevertheless, there would be other rainstorms, and mudslides and floods would continue to shock people with Nature’s destructiveness, especially as homes invaded the county’s foothill areas.

Abraham Hoffman teaches history at Los Angeles Valley College.

UPCOMING LACHS MEMBER EVENTS

by Kay Tornborg

An e-mail 'flyer' is sent to all members and a paper version is mailed to those who prefer hard-copy. At the same time a version, with the same information, will be available on the LACHS website. Announcements are sent about a month prior to the event.

Mini-tour of Boyle Heights: February 21, 2013 @ 10 AM: led by Abe Hoffman, LACHS member who was born there. Stops will include The Breed Street Shul, Evergreen Cemetery, lunch, a drive-by the recently restored Boyle Hotel and a stop at the Neighborhood Music School.

Trip to the LA Zoo: Date TBA, probably in March. Details also TBA....

Tour of the Becoming LA Exhibit at the Natural History Museum: Date TBA, probably late June, early July. The exhibit will be opening around this time; more details later.

Special benefit of membership: Any authors, researchers, archivists or those with related interests are invited to visit, by appointment, the Watson Family Photo Archive in Glendale. This amazing collection of a million-plus archival photos, books and sundry information about Anything Los Angeles, has been made accessible by Antoinette Watson, widow of Delmar Watson, and Dan Watson, Delmar's nephew and the tenth and last of the Watson news photographers. Call her for an appointment at (818) 484-8130 or (818) 241-7973.

Wikipedia's entry on the Watsons:

The **Watson** family, known as "the first family of Hollywood", were made famous in the early days of Hollywood as a family of child actors. Family members included Coy Watson Jr., Bobs, Delmar, Harry, Garry, Billy, Vivian, Gloria, and Louise, all of whom acted in motion pictures.

When Mack Sennett's Keystone Studios, which was just about 600 feet from the Watson home, needed child actors for film making, their father Coy Watson Sr. would provide the kids. The Watson children worked with some of the big stars in those days, including James Stewart, Lionel Barrymore, Fred Astaire, Shirley Temple, Katharine Hepburn and Henry Fonda.

The Watson brothers also worked as press, newsreel and television photographers during their adult careers.

MEMBER NEWS

New board member Martha Gruft is a native of Boston with a deep love of historic preservation. "It hurts me when something is torn down," she says. She has been a legal secretary in firms large and small. She lives in West Los Angeles. Martha is pictured below with our two other new board members, Marcia Enger and Claudine Ajeti.

Patricia Adler-Ingram, Ph.D., who has been a member through the years, has made a \$500 donation to LACHS, a wonderful gesture which qualifies her to be a LIFE member. Pat is Executive Director of the Historical Society of Southern California, headquartered in the Lummis House.

Our organization's newest member is Rebecca Wells Cannon.

Diane Kanner, Membership Chair



Job Interviews and LAPD Holiday Parties

Continued from page 6

L.A. in February 1942. It was on a Monday. Around 2 a.m., all hell broke loose. We could hear what's called *ack-ack*, the antiaircraft guns. And the sky was lit up with just everything. It went on for about an hour.

Impersonating an Officer

What other stories do you remember?

Irene: Well, here's one story. Because I was so involved with the LAPD through these exams, I got to be friends with a captain. And he called me one time. This was in the spring of '45. And he said, "Would you and one of your friends like to be policewomen for tonight?" Policewomen?" And then I said, "What's the assignment?" He said, "Well, as you know, George Patton and Jimmy Doolittle are in town each with about 100 or 200 of their men." It was a morale-boosting trip but mainly selling war bonds. "And they're going to have a dinner for them, the whole lot of them, tonight at the Coconut Grove. And we're sending two policemen and two policewomen as security." Can you imagine having just four people as security with 200 people, high-ranking?

And I said, "You've got policewomen." He said, "No, they don't want them to look like policewomen." So I said, "Sure. My friend, Bunny, and I will be there." Her nickname was Bunny. She was also working on the police exams. I said, "We'll be there."

So we got there. A sergeant came out. He looked around, and he came towards Bunny and me. And he said, "Would you like to be my guests for this evening? I've got these tickets, and I'd like to take you two in." When we came in, they announced his name, "and his two wives."

The Wrong Restroom

Irene: There was another thing that I remember. Most of the people, prior to the war, who worked at City Hall were men. So they had two restrooms for men on every floor. And the alternate floors had one for men and one for women. Well, most of the clerical positions were taken over by women during the war. We complained about the restrooms. Why should we have to go up or down, when the men can just walk on the same floor?

So one summer they decided to change it so that there'd be one of each on each floor. They changed it during vacation

time, and I walked into what now was a women's restroom. There was a man there. He said, "You're in the wrong restroom." And I said, "No, I'm not. You're in the wrong restroom." He said, "Well, have you ever seen equipment like this in a women's restroom?" I said, "No, but that's going to be changed. Look at what the door says." So it was a very embarrassing moment for both of us.

And another thing – and this was disgusting. There were spittoons all through City Hall, in those days. They were just everywhere.

City Pride

Was there a lot of pride working for the City?

Irene: Oh, yes, there was a lot of pride. Government service held a lot of pride in those days.

What would you have to say to current City Employees about pride in what they do?

Irene: They should have a lot of pride, because we made history. We had a Japanese American police officer in the 19th century, the only one in the United States. We had a policewoman back in the 19th century. We've been ahead of most of the country for most of the time that the City has existed.

In 200 years, there just is no other city like us. We're the only large city in the world that didn't have a natural harbor. And we've got the number one harbor in the country now. We were totally disconnected from the rest of the country, by 3,000 miles, until the railroads came in. But everybody knows Los Angeles. We've been in the forefront of so many things.

Employees of the City help make Los Angeles what it is, on a daily basis. And from a selfish point of view, they get better pay than most places. When they make salary studies, we always come out well on top. And City Employees have benefits that are so much greater than what the average person has.

I guess you made friends working for the City.

Irene: Oh yes, very much so. They were most of my best friends to the day that they died. I'm the last one left.

Thank you, Irene.

Irene: You're welcome.

YES! I would like to become a member of
the Los Angeles City Historical Society.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Membership may also be submitted at
www.lacityhistory.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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E-mail Address _____

\$85 Sustaining

\$50 Family/Dual

\$35 Active

\$25 Senior/Student

\$500 Life (Individual)

(Check your choice of membership)

Membership Benefits Include:

- Lectures by historians and authors at the Richard J. Riordan Central Library's Mark Taper Auditorium
- Field trips to historical sites
- Advance notification of special member programs
- Tour of the Los Angeles City Archives
- Quarterly LACHS Newsletter
- Membership on committees



Clip (or copy) and mail, together with your check to:

Los Angeles City Historical Society
P.O. Box 862311
Los Angeles, CA 90086-2311

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF TRAFFIC OFFICERS

Continued from page 12



and the 1994 Northridge Earthquake demonstrated their important role in managing traffic during planned special events and emergencies. In addition, they have expanded their role in removing abandoned vehicles. Since 1969 they were allowed to impound vehicles illegally parked or abandoned on city streets. This would expand to include impounding abandoned vehicles on private property.

Today, their role is viewed less as one of enforcement and more in terms of quality-of-life. Their responsibilities in parking enforcement help to ensure the viability of business districts. Their efforts in event management help the city celebrate community, regional and nationally prominent events. Finally, their duties in removing abandoned vehicles from streets and private property help to remove blight and restore the livability of the communities.

Vineyards and Vaqueros:

Indian Labor and the Economic Expansion of Southern California, 1771-1877

VINEYARDS AND VAQUEROS: Indian Labor and the Economic Expansion of Southern California, 1771-1877, by George Harwood Phillips. Norman: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2010. 387 pp. Maps, Tables, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Hardbound, \$45.

by Abraham Hoffman

Standard accounts of 19th-century California history describe the growth of agriculture, granting some space to the rancho era and devoting considerably more to the rise of the citrus industry, viticulture, bonanza wheat farming, and fruit and vegetable production. Readers learn about the owners of farms and ranches, but the labor force remains invisible. This sort of “top-down” historical writing ignores the contributions of men and women who did the actual work of planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops, or tending cattle and sheep. Not so George Harwood Phillips. His book examines agricultural development from the “bottom-up” perspective.

Phillips offers a fresh approach to the roles of “Mission” and other Indians in southern California’s economic growth. I recall visiting Mission Santa Inez some years ago, taking the self-guided tour and reading signs written in the passive voice, as in “this building was built as a dormitory for neophytes.” As if the neophyte (converted to Christianity) Indians were sitting around waiting for someone to build their housing for them. Obviously, Indians did the construction, as they did the cultivating of crops and herding of livestock under the often stern authority of the mission padres.

Phillips explores the labor of Indians from the founding of the first missions to the completion of railroad connections to southern California in the 1870s. During that first century of European settlement Spaniards, Mexicans, and Anglos found Indian labor indispensable, so important that mission padres and rancheros competed for workers.

Among many fascinating details in this book is the acknowledgment that not only the neophytes dug the irrigation ditches, harvested crops, and branded cattle. Rancho owners employed larger numbers of non-mission Indians—the majority that has often been depicted as uncivilized. On the contrary, these Indians knew the value of their labor and what they could get for providing it.

Many learned important occupational skills. Unfortunately, there was a downside to the Indian-white labor relations. Rancheros cheated Indians, provided them with liquor, paid their fines for drunkenness, and hired them as virtual slaves to work off the fines paid for their release from jail—a vicious cycle that contributed to the decline of the Indian population.

Although violent confrontations occurred between Indians and whites, especially in the 1850s in southern California, farmers and ranchers nonetheless found the local Indians a useful, valuable, and in many ways an indispensable labor force. Without them, the herds of cattle and horses, the tending of fruit trees and vineyards, and construction of buildings would have been difficult. After the Civil War and with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the economic picture changed dramatically. Large ranches were subdivided for agricultural use; small-scale farmers needed fewer workers than did ranches; sheep raising, requiring few workers, replaced cattle. Mexican workers displaced Indians as a work force.

Phillips credits Native Americans for their importance in the region’s economic expansion. “Surprising to many might be the fact that for about a century a few thousand Indians managed by small numbers of Spaniards, Mexicans, Europeans, and Americans launched and sustained an economic revolution based on growing and stock raising that radically altered a truly vast area of Southern California,” he states (p.321). As ranch lands became cities and missions were abandoned, the contributions of Indians were overlooked. Phillips has performed a valuable service to scholarship in redressing that neglect. Teachers, students, and anyone interested in California’s rich past will find this book indispensable reading, as indispensable as the labor of Indians who played an active role in it.

Abraham Hoffman teaches history at Los Angeles Valley College.

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