

Altadena's Disappearing Legacy



Above: Altadena Nursery about 1925. The picture was taken from the east side of the property, looking west toward Lake Avenue.

If you've driven down Lake Avenue lately you know that Altadena's landmarks are slipping away one after another. Along with the loss of Scripp's a few years ago and Altadena Federal Savings and Loan building last year, Altadena Nursery closed it's doors in late 2009 and we lost Ronnie's' this year.

Altadena Nursery 1906–2009

Located on the east side of Lake about a block north of New York, Altadena Nursery was organized in 1906 by Clyde Colby. According to an article in the 1925 booklet Pasadena and Pasadenans (AHS collection), the nursery ranked second to none in the entire Southwest. "The stock of this nursery consists of ... row upon row of trees, shrubbery, vines and plants of every description, waiting to be transplanted to the grounds that will surround the many beautiful homes now under construction (p. 40)." Some of those saplings shade our neighborhoods today, but the nursery is gone after 103 years in business.

Ronnie's Automotive Services 1923-2010

Ronnie's, the longest operating business in Altadena, looked like a small gas station in any town USA along Route 66. It was used in numerous movies just for that reason. After being alerted by Altadena Heritage president Mark Goldschmidt that the pumps had been surreptitiously removed from the recently shuttered station, *Altadenablog* reported on Friday, July 2, 2010, "The old Gilmore gas pumps, which haven't functioned in decades, but starred in countless movies, commercials, TV shows and music videos, were hauled off who knows where. Another bit of Altadena's heritage has disappeared." The moral of this sad story is: Keep Altadena vita. Shop local.

Below: Ronnie's in 2005, photo courtesy of Rod Holcomb



President's Message

By Jane Brackman

	2007	2008	2009
Visitors	94	96	82
Research Requests	36	69	55
Volunteer Hours	206	221	484
Archivist Hours	593	612	476
New Accessions	25	15	95
Income	\$12,296	\$17,580	\$12,907
Expenses	\$17,016	\$16,490	\$16,027

Thanks to Altadena Heritage (and volunteer Kathy Hoskins) for opening the Heritage office every Tuesday morning. Overlapping AHS and AH office hours enables both organizations an opportunity to provide more in-depth details when answering research requests. Whereas Historical Society is more like a museum, gathering and preserving information as well as educating the community, Heritage is dedicated to protecting and preserving our architectural, environmental and cultural history. Our organizations are separate, each with its own membership. Please support both !

Each year we tally significant numbers then compare them to past years so we can take stock of AHS growth. Information comes from monthly reports prepared by our archivist. The numbers in the table above compare years 2007, 2008 and 2009 in seven categories.

Visitors: Any person (besides volunteers) who comes into archives. This includes for instance, visitors who have simple questions, are dropping off items of interest or taking tours.

Research requests: Inquiries related to Altadena history that require more extensive research. Many requests are standard such as obituaries; others are quirky and fun to work on. Last year someone was looking for information about a legendary haunted tree in the backyard (none found). Requests are submitted three ways. Of the 69 research requests submitted in 2008, 35 were through e-mail, 20 via telephone, and 13 were walk-in visitor inquiries.

Volunteers Hours: Volunteer hours are logged weekly. Since 2007 the number of hours has doubled.

Archivist Hours: Sherry Cavallo who oversees the collection works an average of 12 hours a week except in August when we are closed.

New accessions: Donated items relating to Altadena history, from books, photos and journals to Mt. Lowe memorabilia. We even archive legal documents pertaining to Altadena related court cases such as trail usage controversies.

Income: Money comes from memberships, book sales, donations and events. On average we bring in \$12,000 each year. The spike in 2008 was due to the well-attended McNally house tour.

Expenses: About two thirds of costs are for our part time employee. The rest is for computer support, supplies, and event expenses. Although we've reduced our expenses by almost a thousand dollars since 2007, we continue to tap into our reserve.

You can help us get back in the black by remembering AHS during your year-end charitable giving.

Jane Brackman
President
Newsletter Editor



The Altadena Historical Society
and
The Friends of the Altadena Library Present:

KATHLEEN TUTTLE

Will discuss her book

ALTADENA TOWN & COUNTRY CLUB: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY 1910-2010



Monday, October 25th
7:30 pm

Join Kathleen Tuttle, Altadena resident, author and attorney, as she tells the story of the Country Club, which was founded 100 years ago by wealthy Altadenans & Pasadenaans, and has been the hub of recreation, social, family and community life. This story of 20th Century Altadena and Pasadena – both good and bad times – is seen through the prism of the Altadena Country Club.

Five years in the making, the Altadena Town and Country Club book is a detailed history of the club's first one hundred years. The book includes hundred of photos (many from the AHS collection) and stories about the club and surrounding community including struggles during the great depression, post war growth and current times. Please join AHS, our program partner Altadena Library and author Kathleen Tuttle who will be autographing books (\$45) on October 25, 2010, at the Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive, at 7:30 pm. As always, our programs are free and open to the public.

(Photos below courtesy of Altadena Town and Country Club.)



Chicago Cubs' pitcher Jimmie Esposito (Hopper) (Hopper) (Hopper) and the legendary Green Cleveland Allstar, with Charlie Chaplin, on the club grounds in 1921.





Archives Notes

by Sherry Cavallo

Altadena Archives has been built with 80 years of generous donations, each item researched and cataloged by volunteers who've logged multiple thousands of hours. From newspaper clippings and flyers to collections of many different types, AHS members have helped to record the history of Altadena. And as well, monetary contributions continue to help provide archival containers and supplies that preserve these precious items from the past. We continue to seek donations of both types to provide Altadena citizens the opportunity to learn about the history of our foothill community.

One of our goals is to reach out not only to the community as a whole, but also to the children of Altadena. We look forward to sharing with them the history of their surroundings and in 2011 will seek grants that would further this intent.

If you are an avid collector of items related to Altadena's past, please consider the Archives as the recipient of your interests and labors. Cash contributions that will assist the preservation of donations are always welcome as well. Many thanks to all of you who continue to contribute to the Society's future. Our most recent acquisitions are listed below.

Dorothy Thorman donated newsletters and related material from the once-active *Altadena West Organization*, a neighborhood improvement group that met from 1969 to early 1970's. The organization concerned itself with the area east of JPL, between Altadena Dr. and Woodbury Rd. The members encouraged a "harmonious racial balance in West Altadena" and encouraged residents to beautify their homes and properties within this area as well.

Two Participant Plaques from the Old Fashioned Days Parade of 1973 were

donated **by Ben McGinty**. Thanks, Ben, such a rare find!

A 2002 Showcase House brochure, which features an Altadena home and a 2009 Altadena Guild Tour brochure were given by **Laurie Kinsinger**, a volunteer at the Society.

Heinz Ellersieck has supplied us with several photos of the different fire engines used in the Station Fire as well as a news clipping about Mary Coulter (who lived in Altadena) and her work outside of California.

The **Altadena Chamber of Commerce** added a 1970 volume to our collection of city directories, filling in one of the few gaps we have in this well-used source.

Two new books are now on our shelves, courtesy of **Lake Hopatcong Historical Society**. The *Illustrated Guide to Lake Hopatcong and Lake Hopatcong, Then and Now* help paint the picture of Colonel Green's family vacation spot in Landing, New Jersey.

Steve Rodriguez donated a set of *Peaks of Altadena*, minus the first edition. If there is anyone who has the first issue, we would greatly appreciate having it to complete the collection.

A cash donation, which will help in housing some of our new acquisitions, was most graciously given by **Barbara King**, who came in to conduct some research on the water tank built for the Cobb Estate.

Thanks to all of you.

Volunteer! It's Fun

AHS volunteers not only give back to the community but have fun as well. In early 2010 volunteers were treated to a VIP tour of Caltech campus. Designed by architect Bertram Goodhue in the Spanish mission style, campus buildings feature elaborate and often overlooked details such as Saturn ceiling lights, 1930 aircraft and other "contemporary" deco icons on building facades, even busts of historical scholarly figures on top of columns holding up the wisteria pergola that shades the sidewalk. For more information about tours: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~archtour/Site/Welcome.html>

More recently a special tour of La Canada's Lanterman house was arranged by volunteer Mary Lou Langedyke. Built in 1915, the reinforced concrete bungalow was the design of architect A. L. Haley. It retains its original interiors and furnishings (un-restored wallpaper, curtains and rugs!) as well as many of the family's treasures reflecting life in the San Gabriel Valley during the first five decades of the 20th century. To schedule a tour: <http://lantermanfoundation.org/>

Interested in volunteering? Our next orientation is in October. Please call 626-797-8016 for more information.

Photo below, left to right: Caltech docent Gloria Mullendore, Paula Wegner, Eric Dreizen, Mary Gandsey, Kathy Hoskins, Laurie Kinsinger, Tim Gregory and Mary Lou Langedyke.



From Our Files

The Chamber of Commerce touted Altadena as “the land of dreams, beauty of scenery, mixed with sublimity. Altadena is “beauty personified. It is charm converted into convincing masterfulness.” Playing the role of community booster, the Chamber published pamphlets that often featured grand Altadena homes such as those depicted in the photographs to the right.

Dr. J. E. Minney, “a student of nature, a retired physician of note, thankful and thoughtful to God, faithful to the Golden Rule,” owned the Craftsman home in the top right photo. The Egyptian revival home (lower right) belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick T. Griffith. The opening of King Tut’s tomb in 1922 flamed an interest in exoticism and all things Egyptian, a trend that did not bypass Altadena.

Both houses, like so many treasures in Altadena, still stand in near original condition, looking very much as they did when they were featured in the Chamber’s 1926 publication, *Altadena the Beautiful*. The gardens remain relatively unchanged as well. The deodar to the left of the Minney house, along with the manicured shrubs at the curb are still there. The two palms in the Griffith garden now tower over the house shading most of the front yard.



OF TYPICAL ALTADENA CHARM AND STATELINESS



Paul F. Johnson (1874-1946) expert on ventilation "made a name for himself in the realm of *temperature regulation*, the Johnson system being one of the best known in the country, and the company has offices in nearly every large city in the world." (*Pasadena Star News*, November 14, 1917).

Johnson's father "invented thermostat heat control but his son invented perfections of it, including important adjustments."

Johnson also participated in early experiments in radio. "He owned the first wireless [radio] station west of the Atlantic Coast ... and later owned and operated a small station, KGO, in Altadena." (*Pasadena Star News*, March 21, 1946)



Photo above from pamphlet - *Altadena the Beautiful*, published by the Altadena Chamber of Commerce, 1926.

Johnson set up KGO in 1922 and operated it from Sagemont, his Altadena home, located, according to a 1917 issue of the *Pasadena Star News*, "about as close to the Mount Lowe incline as it is possible to get." The 12 room estate, now demolished, was situated on 14 acres near the south east corner of Maiden Lane and what is now Rubio Canyon Road. He built another house, still standing at the corner of Maiden Lane and Dolores Road, for his son Seymour Johnson, who subdivided the property sometime after 1934 (*Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 2002).

The elegant gates are all that remain along with giant trees that still shade the site of the historic "ranch," now dotted with an array of mid-century homes.



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FIND US ON THE WEB:

abacus-es.com/altadena/history/

Altadena Historical Society (AHS), a non-profit organization, was founded to gather, preserve, and make available information about the people, places and events that have shaped the community in the past. The Altadena Historical Society is proud of its history. Founded in 1935, we are one of the oldest volunteer organizations in the community.

Please join or renew today!

Name_____

Address_____

Phone_____Email_____

_____ \$25 Membership

_____ \$50 Premium Membership includes a copy of Altadena's Golden Years by Robert H. Peterson.