

Fall 2013

The Echo

Volume 84

Altadena Historical Society Newsletter

Number 1

Leon Ricks leaves behind photographic legacy telling Altadena's story 1969-2002

This summer, AHS received about a thousand slides documenting Altadena from 1969 to 2003. Leon Ricks (1928-2013) recorded four decades of life in Altadena. His family generously donated the slides to AHS and told us this story about Leon.

A proud fifth-generation Californian, Leon James Ricks was born in Los Angeles in 1928. Asthmatic as a child, the family moved several times in the hope of finding a benign microclimate for him, finally ending up in Altadena. In 1942 they moved into their home on Maiden Lane, just north of Palm.

Leon and his sister, Louise, who was 17 months younger, attended Elliot Middle School. Leon went on to Pasadena Junior College. By the time he was 20, he had become an enthusiastic photographer. During the mid-1950's, he worked for several years as a contract photographer for the Pasadena multiple-listing realty board, taking photographs of houses as they went up for sale. Earlier, he had enrolled at UCLA, but soon dropped out, unable to concentrate on his coursework. He also worked briefly at JPL, delivering mail.

Leon was socially awkward and had various mannerisms that were eventually suggested to be symptomatic of Asperger's Syndrome. Although his father encouraged him to live an independent life, Leon lived at the family home for the remainder of his life, with his mother as his only company. After she died in 1982, Leon continued to live in the house, firm in his belief that this area was the best place in the world.

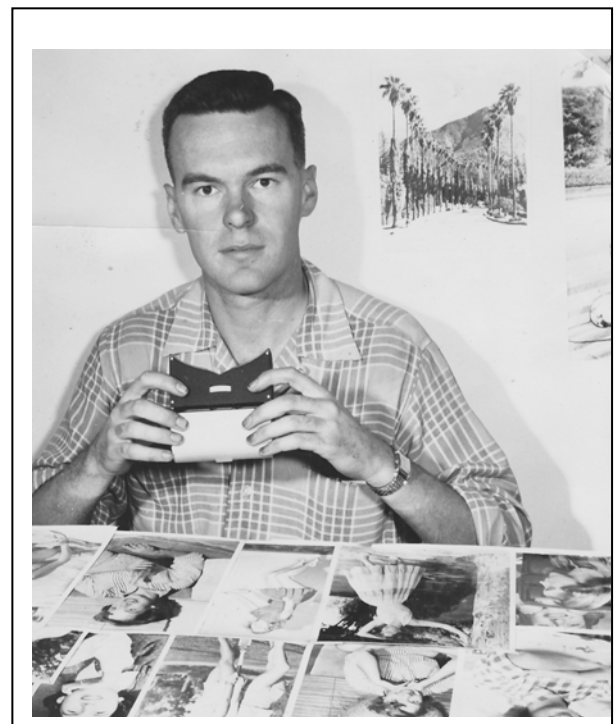
He seldom left his house without his camera, photographing everything from the most mundane traffic intersections to significant events such as fires and floods. He also photographed old buildings, especially those about to be demolished, and followed closely everything that happened in his community. He saved every page of the Los Angeles Times and the Pasadena Star-News filling every room of his house to a depth of several feet.

Obsessive behavior is a common characteristic of Aspergers and Leon's obsession was *The Pattern*. In the late 1950's, he noted on maps of his neighborhood a pattern of the streets west of Maiden Lane that to him, when viewed with the west side at the top, resembled a mountain. He somehow connected this with the Fountain of Youth sought by Ponce de Leon, associated this with his name, and for a time believed that he was the reincarnation of that Spanish explorer and would find the secret of eternal life. He spent 55 years of his life immersed in parapsychology, expanding *The Pattern* to encompass many other localities,

family members, and celebrities, and trying to persuade others of the significance of his discovery.

Though he lived alone in a cluttered house, Leon was not a recluse. Except during the worst weather, he read and took his meals on his covered front patio, waving at his neighbors as they drove by and conversing with those who lived near him. He was always very jovial, and obviously quite intelligent despite his eccentric ideas. As one car after another died from lack of maintenance, he gave up driving and walked to Ralph's Market, Webster's, and Altadena Hardware for his groceries and supplies. He enjoyed the walk downhill, but neighbors who saw him carrying groceries up Lake and offered him a ride, would always find a willing passenger. And in this way, over the years and through the kindness of his neighbors, Leon became "the mayor of Maiden Lane" and lived to the ripe old age of 85.

(Below: Leon in the 1950s)



Mt. Lowe Movie Night

October 27 More Inside



President's Message By Jane Brackman, Ph.D.

It's been a busy year at Altadena Historical Society. We've completed old projects and begun new ones. Thoughtful Altadenans cleaning out attics and basements means we've received some significant collections, including Leon Ricks' slides, described in the cover story. If you were lucky enough to attend our July program when we showed a hundred slides, you had an opportunity to take a walk down memory lane. We also acquired a rare framed photomontage documenting a daring air balloon trip gone awry. The story is on page 5.

The Mt. Lowe Digital project, funded by the Edison Company, is well on its way to being completed. Our October program will feature some new discoveries along with three short railroad films. Read more on pages 10 and 11.

A generous donation of \$5000 from a dedicated and long-time Altadena resident will revitalize and rebuild our oral history project. In the past 20 years AHS volunteers have recorded 43 oral interviews. We'll use the donation to transfer VHS tapes to discs, purchase new equipment and train volunteers to conduct future interviews. Read more about our plans on page 8.

Our committed volunteers are featured in this issue, too. Each year we take a field trip that includes a tour of an historical site with lunch afterward. In August we enjoyed an insiders' look at the Altadena Town and Country Club, hosted by author Kathleen Tuttle who wrote *Altadena Town and Country Club: A Centennial History* (2010).

We are pleased to welcome new board member, Robert Hallwachs. An Illinois native and California resident since 1985, Rob is a retired journalist and worked for many years in the public affairs department at the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Since 1994 he has lived on Marathon Road in north-central Altadena, in what he calls "a small, much-remodeled 1950's ranch house." Rob will bring his love of history and sense of community to our board.

Although archives is outgrowing its 800 square foot space, we've squeezed out a little more room that features a small exhibit area. Please come and see what's on display.

Jane Brackman, Ph.D.
President
Newsletter Editor

AHS volunteers at the Altadena Town and Country Club, front row left to right: Minna Adams, Paula Wegner, Mary Smeritschnig, Marlane Forsberg. Back row: Jean Phillips, Sherry Marsh Cavallo (staff), Lauri Kinsinger, Kathleen Tuttle, Kathy Hoskins, and Tim Gregory.



Since the beginning of the year, archives has received many donations. We wish to thank the following people:

- Altadena Junior Circle records and scrapbook donated by Sandee Hiyake
- Photo of Mt. Lowe incline railway donated by Richard Palmer
- Two color photos from Old Fashioned Day parade featuring physicist Richard Feynman donated by Jean Kalem
- 1942 Pasadena/Altadena phone directory donated by Stuart and Carolyn Clark
- Multiple books and ephemera from Marie and Don Adamson estate donated by Janet Herbert
- Women's Circle of Altadena notebooks donated by Mary Spriesterback
- 1923 graduation certificate from Pasadena High School along with 2 photos donated by Joseph Harbrecht
- Altadena Team Rescue mailer and 2012 Christmas Tree Lane program donated by Tim Gregory
- Address book, circa 1900, that profiles Altadena and Pasadena residents donated by Stephen M. Clouser
- Washington Hardware store receipt from 1925 donated by Joanne McLaughlin
- White House commendation letter donated by family of first postmistress Eileen Cardiff
- Four color postcards of Mt. Lowe donated by Jill Boekennoogen
- Numerous vintage photos of Altadena donated by family of cartographer and surveyor Don McLain
- Rare photomontage of the ill-fated Balloon American folly (1909) donated by Paul Casebeer.



Archives Notes

By Sherry Marsh Cavallo

The Mt. Lowe project is in full swing at archives and I've taken a special interest in Leontine Augustine Gachon. Who was she? Or more exactly why is she an important figure in American history and what does she have to do with Mt. Lowe? People around the world know about Thaddeus Lowe, the great inventor, balloonist and builder of the Mt. Lowe Railway. But, as they say, "Behind every great man there is a great woman", and Leontine was the great woman behind, no, actually working alongside Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe.

Leontine was born in Paris, November 30, 1835. When she was 14 years old she emigrated to the U.S. with her parents. A young woman with a great interest in science, she attended Professor's Lowes science show in New York with her parents. It was here she met Thaddeus Lowe on February 14th. Within weeks of meeting, they were wed by a justice of the peace. It was the start of a life-long partnership and for them both, a great adventure ride.

To read more about Leontine's contributions to science, and her life with Thaddeus, go to altadenahistoricalsociety.org.



*Leontine Lowe
about 1860*



TOURNAMENT PARK



CALBY'S CABIN



LEAVING CALBY'S TO SWITZER



ALYADENA



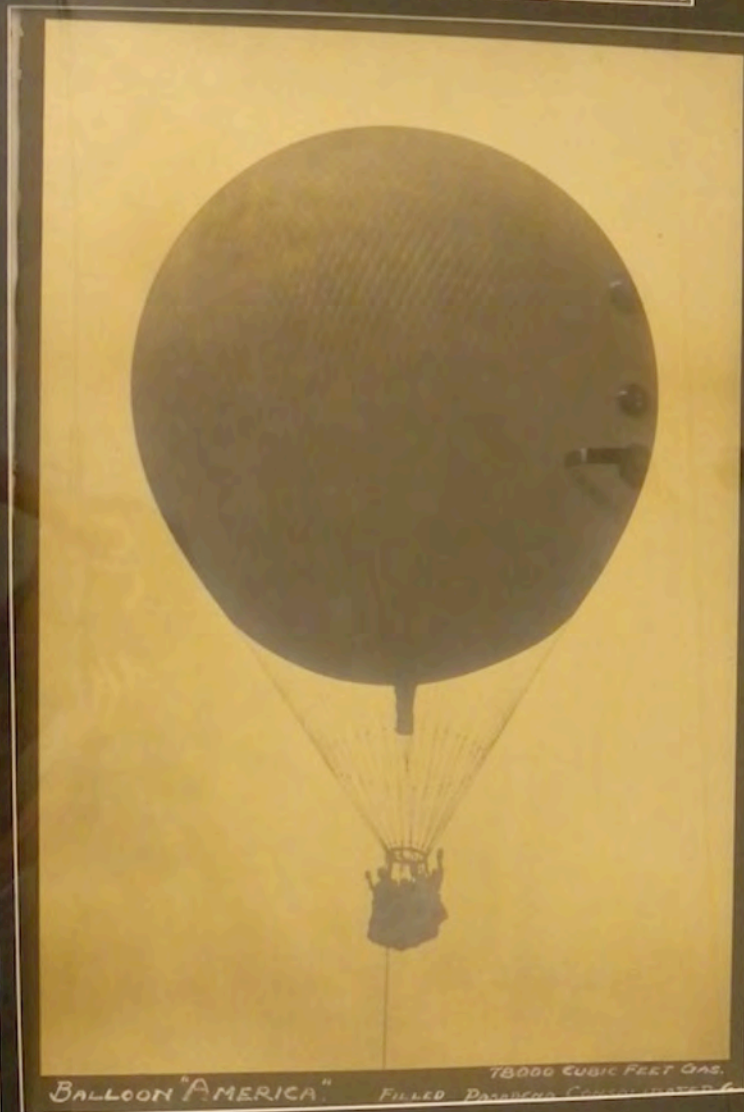
FILLING BALLOON



START



COLORADO STREET



BALLOON "AMERICA"

70000 CUBIC FEET GAS.
FILLED BARBERA CONDENSATED



CAPT. MUELLER IN SWISS



WILLIE CALBY & OTHERS



CAPT. MUELLER



LANDING



FROM RAIL Y. SWISS

The Perilous Voyage

Thank you to native Altadenan Paul Casebeer for the framed photomontage that tells the story of the perilous voyage of the balloon American. Although we didn't know the story when we received the gift, a little research led us to this amazing story, excerpted from the website Adventure- Land, Sea and Sky <http://www.e-adventure.net/sky/ballooning/whereis.html>

"The lines were cut at exactly 3:00 in the afternoon and the balloon American rose to the skies. Its flight seemed destined for trouble at the outset for just outside the fence of Tournament Park the drag rope wrapped around three electrical wires and held the balloon captive. As the crowd looked on, a ground crew came to the assistance of the American and freed the balloon for its afternoon ride. With all the commotion going on, the pilot, Captain Augustus E. Mueller, failed to notice that the windsock was no longer tailing towards the east as their trip plan required, but to the north towards the San Gabriel Mountains.

It was March 20, 1909, and thousands of people crowded the streets of Pasadena that day to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Tournament of Roses ...[later] there was to be a balloon race between the American and the United States. The owner of both balloons, Dick Ferris, was to pilot the United States in the race. Ferris however was dismayed by the weather conditions and cancelled the race.

Captain Mueller was not one to be put off by a few dark clouds and with optimism, inflated the balloon. His passengers were Lane C. Gilliam, Sydney Cray, Edwin Dobschultz, and photographer Harold A. Parker. ... Thirty years old Parker brought with him his new Kodak bellows camera. This modern wonder used roll film and was promoted as being a *vest pocket model*. As the balloon rose Parker snapped the first aerial pictures o Pasadena."

Little did Parker know that he would be documenting an incredible wild ride, crash landing, and fortuitous rescue. Although Mueller was aware that the oncoming storm was moving the balloon north instead of east, he chose to toss out sandbags and gain altitude rather than land. Consequently, the balloon was sucked into Eaton Canyon, then skirted the edge of the mountains, going along Echo mountain and the Incline, past Camp Sierra, the ropes dragging the tops of tents and cabins. As Mueller dumped sand bags, off they went, with an awkward nod to Alpine Tavern, already covered in what would be soon be more than two feet of snow. Eventually the air ship crash-landed on Strawberry Peak. The men were believed lost and perished. The catastrophe was front-page news from coast to coast.

To read about how they trekked through waist deep snow, and their rescue by Ma Colby at Colby Camp, read *Perilous Voyage of the Balloon American* by Harold Parker's son, Donald Parker (1993).



Volunteer Appreciation



Laurie Kinsinger takes a break from organizing and cataloging... just about everything.



The Mt. Lowe Committee meets every Tuesday to share what they've found during the week. It's always exciting. Left to right: Marlane Forsberg, Marc Striegel, Kathy Hoskins and Jean Phillips.

We've made some changes at archives. Volunteers are now staffing the front desk to greet visitors to help archivist Sherry Cavallo dig into the collection to get it organized and cataloged. AHS has multiple thousands of documents collected since 1935, all needing to be digitized.

Volunteer Laurie Kinsinger, who has a master's degree in Library Science, works Monday and Friday completing records for the database. To do so, she must collect information on the topic including the historical who-what-where-when-and-how that the software program requires before she can scan the document. It helps that Laurie has been volunteering for 6 years. She knows where everything is hidden.

Digitizing the Mt. Lowe collection takes a good taskmaster, so we recruited volunteer Jean Phillips, a retired marketing and project manager. Jean, who has been volunteering at AHS for two years, keeps the committee on task and on schedule. The group meets every Tuesday morning to go over what's been completed, and maps out what needs to be done during the upcoming week. On Saturdays she Skypes with former AHS volunteer Terence Kratz. Terence is designing the digitized site.

The committee includes six people. Marc Streigel, who makes time available for AHS between consulting jobs, has been an integral part of the project, especially because local history is his passion. Kathy Hoskins and Mary Lou Langedyke, both retired school teachers, split their volunteer time between research requests, and the Mt. Lowe project. Marlane Forsberg does both research and computer scanning. Although she works two part-time jobs and volunteers at the Huntington and Altadena library, she is still able to give AHS several hours each week.

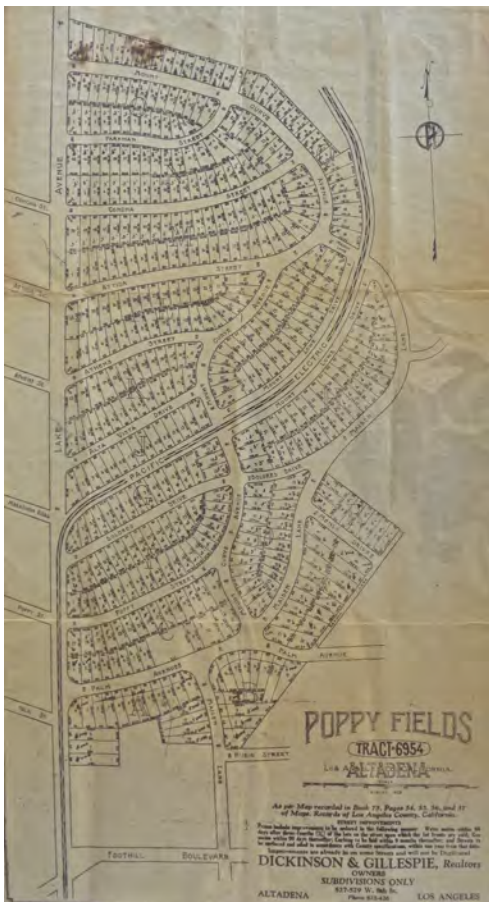
Besides working on the Mt. Lowe project, Mary Lou Langedyke is coordinating our oral history project. She has inventoried the VHS tapes and is overseeing their transfer to disc. When that's complete, she will design and coordinate a volunteer training session, and advise the board on what kind of equipment to purchase so that we can continue to collect oral histories.

Every non-profit is only as solid as its volunteers make it. AHS values all of them. Last year alone, they put in 529 hours of volunteer time.

Become a Volunteer

Altadena Historical Society welcomes volunteers. Community members with a love of history and a love for Altadena have made valuable contributions since the founding of Altadena Historical and Beautification Society in 1935. AHS has seven volunteers who do research and assist with the organization of our growing collections. As a non-profit, the growth and success of AHS relies on the time and talent of our board members and community volunteers.

If you would like more information on volunteer opportunities with AHS please contact us at altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com or phone 626-797-8016.



Our Newest Volunteer

This quarter we would like to introduce Jim Cain, an Altadena resident since 1993 with a background in financial services. Married and the father of a sixteen year old son who is a student at Marantha High School, Jim and his wife fell in love with Altadena while driving through the community in a hail storm.

Jim has had a life long interest in geography and maps. He is currently turning that passion into a new career in cartography and geographic information systems, finishing up his final course work required to get a graduate certificate in GIS from Penn State.

As a volunteer at AHS, Jim is going through our extensive map collection, making sure that the documentation in our research database matches the information on the maps. As a result, our map collection will be more accessible to the public.

Jim's experience with computers and technology has made him the answer man for any tech problem in our office. We put the spotlight on Jim this quarter with our thanks and appreciation!

Oral History Project

By Mary Lou Langedyke

History engages us with the power of the personal story. Without it, history is reduced to facts and dates. The best family tree only lives if it is rooted in family stories to give it real meaning and context.

The Altadena Historical Society understands the power of the story and has collected 43 oral histories of Altadena residents, mostly recorded during the 1990's. These audiotapes are an important part of our collection and provide us with a primary source - the personal memories of residents. In July, the family of Clara Johnston, checked our web site and saw that we had her oral history. We were able to duplicate the tape and it has become a cherished part of their family memories.

This summer AHS was given a very generous \$5000 gift from a long time Altadenan with a passion for history and love of community. The donation was designated to preserve and expand our oral history project. The donor appreciates the importance of gathering stories of Altadena

before they are lost and of enabling the public to use these stories.

The first thing we have done is convert the fragile audiotapes to CDs and provide a summary of the content of each interview. In the near future, to make the interviews more accessible, we will add clips to our digitized database.

In the fall, we will be ready to begin collecting new oral histories and we would like your help. Whose story needs to be told? Who, in your opinion, is someone we should contact for a recorded interview? We would appreciate your suggestions. You may nominate someone by email (altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com) or phone - 626-797-8016.

This project would not be possible without the generous contribution of our donor. We are very grateful for the opportunity to preserve our story.

Sample of oral histories currently in our collection. These interviews were conducted between 1994 and 2000 although one is older. The tapes are being converted to CDs. Written summaries and/or transcripts will also be available for interested community members and researchers.

Name	Topic	Interview Date	Interviewer
Virginia Bagnard	Altadena memories	6/19/1997	Ninarose Mayer
Adele Barnes	Altadena memories	3/14/1997	Elizabeth MacDonald
Frank and Jo Dupuy	Owners of McNally house	8/16/2000	Ninrose Mayer
William Scripps Kellogg	Altadena memories	1/20/1977	Unknown
Dorothy and Walter Lepisto	Farnsworth Park	5/19/1998	Ninarose Mayer
Edna Smith	Creation of AHS archives 1991-1997	7/18/1997	Ninarose Mayer
Paul Thomas	Owner Altadena Hardware	2/10/1998	Ninarose Mayer
Oscar Werner	Annexation history	7/30/1994	Tim Gregory
Jirayr Zorthian	Altadena art scene and Zorthian Ranch	9/9/1994	Ninarose Mayer

Snapshot of Altadena in the 1970s

The images below are from a proof sheet made from Leon Ricks' color slides. To see images in better detail and in color, check out our newsletter on-line [LINK](#), click on newsletter.



Left column, top to bottom: Rear view of P & E substation; Bob Stacey Gas Station at north east corner of Altadena Dr. and Lake; Library before it was purchased by private party; Old Fashioned Days in 1970s. Right column, top to bottom: Centennial Quilt sponsored by AHS and Altadena library; retail store The Barber Shop on Lake; P & E Substation before restoration.

(Photos transferred by Rod Holcomb)

Digitizing the Mt. Lowe Collection

By Jean Phillips

There's a great treasure hunt taking place at the archives - the search for images, documents, and stories about Mt. Lowe Railway, Altadena's one-time neighbor to the north. Thanks to a \$5000 grant from Southern California Edison, we are digitizing our collection and creating a virtual tour that can be remotely accessed.

In addition, we're using primary-source first person accounts as much as is possible. For instance, the photo below of the couple standing in front of the searchlight is from a family album donated to AHS by the David B. Magee family. Written below the photo: "Minnie Herald and ? at Echo Mountain".

The Mount Lowe project committee which meets every Tuesday includes Jean Phillips, Kathy Hoskins, Mary Lou Langedyke, Marc Streigal, Marlane Forsberg and our designer Terrence Kratz. As we go through the extensive collection of photographs, books, pamphlets, old newspapers and newspaper clippings, we've been thrilled to find nugget after nugget of information about Mt. Lowe, including recollections of the ride up the mountain by former visitors, family albums depicting trips to the top, and photos and artifacts given to us by historians, archaeologists, railroad enthusiasts and Altadena residents. We're more than half way through the project and right now we're writing a narrative about the history of Thaddeus Lowe's fantastic vision, digitally illustrating each phase of the railroad's history. We'll be putting all of these fascinating facts on an interactive website to be launched spring of 2014.



Altadena Historical Society

Quarterly Meeting and Lecture

**Monday, October 27, 2013
7:30 PM**

It's popcorn and movie night at AHS

We'll be showing two films about the Mt. Lowe:

1912 silent movie, *What the Doctor Ordered*, starring Mabel Normand, Mack Sennett, Jack Pickford and Eddie Dillon, shot on location in a local orange grove and on Mt. Lowe in the snow.

To Mt. Lowe with Love by Phil Callahan and Bill Myers, produced in partnership with Edison Co. This 32-minute movie takes us back in time with black and white motion pictures and stills, to experience the world's greatest trolley adventure.

In addition, we will show excerpts from *The Pacific Electric Northern District in Spectacular Color*, written and researched by Charles Seims, produced by Alan Sishel, released in 1993. The film features the line that went from downtown Los Angeles to Pasadena, Sierra Madre, Monrovia and Glendora (not Altadena), from 1947 to 1951. This video will be available to purchase in VHS format the night of the event for \$7.00.

**Altadena Community Center
730 E. Altadena Drive
Altadena, CA 91001**

All lectures are free and open to the public





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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The Echo

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FIND US ON THE WEB:

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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 photo of north Lake Ave. and Websters, circa 1930, suitable for framing.

You can now join on line <http://www.altadenahistoricalsociety.org/membership.htm>