



# The Echo

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Number 1

Spring/Summer 2016

## Cobb Estate — The Real Story

When human leg bones and clothing tatters were found along a hiking trail at the top of Lake Avenue in late February, another chapter was added to the long and colorful story of a property known as the Cobb Estate—but called “The Haunted Forest” by others.

The hillside property has been:

- The site of an unsuccessful gold mine;
- The grand estate and mansion of a Northwest timber baron;
- A Masonic retirement home;
- The retreat house for an order of Roman Catholic nuns;
- An investment for Hollywood comics the Marx Brothers, who tried to have it zoned and developed as a cemetery;



Left: Charles H. Cobb, Above: Cobb mansion at top of Lake Ave. Built about 1918, photo ca.1956.

### What's Inside:

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*Spring Program*

- The prize in a hard-fought bidding war between real-estate developers and student environmentalists;

- And the supposed site of nocturnal ghost appearances and UFO sightings.

In a heart-stopping auction at the estate on Oct. 1, 1971, the John Muir High School Conservation Club, in league with the Pasadena

Area Audubon Society and citizens who didn't want to see the mountainsides covered with tract houses, triumphed over developers and saved the property for a nature preserve.

The students' efforts had captured the attention of newspapers and television stations, and as cameras rolled over a crowd estimated at 800, with a few on horseback, the bids quickly skyrocketed beyond the student environmentalists' limit.

As the students scurried among the onlookers to raise more cash, even the auctioneer gave the students a \$1,000 donation to keep them in the race, and finally the developers' bidder capitulated, saying "I am with the people--I will bid no more!"

*continued on page 6*

# President's Letter *by Jane Brackman, Ph.D.*



Thanks to all of you who've renewed your 2016 membership. If you haven't, please consider joining now.

Regular memberships are still \$25, and this year our \$50 premium membership includes a hardback copy of "Altadena's Golden Years." (See page three for more about the book and its author.) I recommend it as an enjoyable read and excellent reference; you might consider making one a gift to a new neighbor.

Here's what your memberships help us do:

Most of that income goes to expanding the collection and maintaining the archives at the Altadena Community Center. This includes digitizing our collection, researching exhibits, and creating website content.

AHS also publishes a newsletter twice a year, provides services to researchers, and makes available quarterly lectures on a variety of topics related to Altadena history.

Last year more than 600 people attended our programs, visited archives and toured the new Altadena History Museum. We also assisted up to a hundred people with research requests—personally, by phone and via email—from inquiries

about homes and neighborhoods, to relatives who grew up in Altadena to wildlife species that inhabited Eaton Canyon, and the history of the Cobb Estate in the past.

In 2015 our volunteers put in about 1,600 hours of work, doing everything from indexing our people files of mostly newspaper clippings, to reviewing books in our collection, to beginning the creation of a much-needed index for our oral history tapes.

Thanks to those of you who brought in family treasures, we processed 117 new donated records and items to the collection.

Our volunteers also presented several slide presentations and programs off-site on topics including: Altadena's Millionaires, general history, and Altadena's participation in the Rose Parade.

Please let us know if you would like to schedule something for your organization. We can coordinate

programs based on your specific interests. We look forward to new and exciting projects and programs this year.

And finally, I am saddened to report the sudden death of AHS Board Member Jerry Sutton at his home on March 29th. A longtime member, Jerry was our stalwart and faithful Membership Chairman, keeping the society's membership and mailing-list records scrupulously up to date. He also enjoyed personally delivering premium-membership gifts to members' homes--always with a smile and often with one of the corny jokes he always had at hand. He will be greatly missed.



**Jerry Sutton 1930—2016**

## **Board of Directors**

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# The Man Who Wrote “Altadena’s Golden Years”

## Robert H. Peterson

Robert Peterson called his wife Louise and Altadena “the two great loves of my life.” After his retirement, Peterson spent many hours compiling information and writing the book that is still a reference volume vital to people interested in Altadena history.

Mr. Peterson was a mechanical engineer who discovered a way of making faux gas logs that burned and looked like real ones. The story goes that a local restaurant owner was having trouble keeping the fire alight in his log-burning fireplace. Peterson set out to solve the problem.

Peterson rolled some wire into a log shape and covered it with asbestos plaster. He scratched some grain lines into it and hung it on the clothesline to dry. It looked like a real log! By using a special vent that changed the blue flames to orange, Peterson revolutionized the fireplace industry.

He established the Robert H. Peterson

Company in 1950 and made the gas logs as well as gas grills and kitchen hoods. The RH Peterson Company still exists today and is located in the City of Industry (RHPeterson.com). In 1952 he

and his wife purchased property in Altadena and built the home that they lived in until his death in 1984.

Peterson sold his company in 1966 so that he could devote more time to his hobbies: photography and history. He realized that there was a treasure trove of history right here in Altadena. So he wrote about Altadena in a straightforward and factual style, spending



**Robert and Louise Peterson**  
**Looking over the “Altadena’s Golden Years”.**

hours condensing and simplifying the text, and allowing pictures to tell a great deal of the story.

Published in 1976, after many hours of research (without the internet!), “Altadena’s Golden Years” is much appreciated by all who wish to learn more about Altadena’s past.

— *Kathy Hoskins*

### Donate With Your Ralphs Card

Did you know you can contribute to the Altadena Historical Society just by shopping at Ralphs? We’re part of Ralph’s Community Contribution Program and if you register your rewards card online and select AHS as your chosen organization, we will receive a small donation from Ralphs every time you shop. Here’s how it works:

#### **IF YOU HAVE NOT REGISTERED YOUR REWARDS CARD ONLINE**

Log in to [www.ralphs.com](http://www.ralphs.com), click on “No Account? Register” (top right hand corner), and follow the easy steps to create an online account, and enroll in Community Awards.

#### **IF YOU ARE ALREADY AN ONLINE CUSTOMER**

Log in to [www.ralphs.com](http://www.ralphs.com), click “Sign In,” and Enter your e-mail address, and password, click on your name (In the top right hand corner under “Welcome Back”). Follow the instructions to enroll in Community Rewards. If you are already participating in the Community Rewards program you’ll need to re-enroll for 2016.



# What's Up at AHS?



PHOTO BY ANNA-MARIE HUGHES

The 2016 Rose Queen and her Court joined AHS for the grand opening of our new Altadena Historical Museum.

of the Altadena Library for their donation toward the framing of their bicentennial quilt, and an enthusiastic crowd enjoyed a fascinating lecture on the life of Altadena author Zane Grey by Grey expert Steve Lund. In February we were

## Happenings

2015 came to an exciting close at AHS, with the grand opening of our new Altadena Historical Museum. Occupying approximately one third of our archives, the museum features one wall that tells the Altadena story, plus an exhibit that will change every six months. Our current exhibit highlights Altadena's participation in the Rose Parade, from its beginnings to the late 1970s.

2016 promises to be another busy year. In January, we hosted a tea to honor the Friends



**Michael Antonovich presents special certificate to Jane Brackman - Altadena Citizen of the Year.**

delighted when our president, Jane Brackman, was named Citizen of the Year by the Altadena Chamber of Commerce. And in March, we presented a program on our exhibit to our new neighbors at MonteCedro.

## Donations

We continue to receive interesting and important additions to our collection. **Michel Choban** added to



PHOTO BY BEVERLY LUND

**Special presentation by Steve Lund on Zane Grey**

our extensive Zane Grey collection with four new books. **Ben McGinty** and **Dale La Casella** both donated maps, clippings and other documents originally from the Frank and Mary Crunk estate.

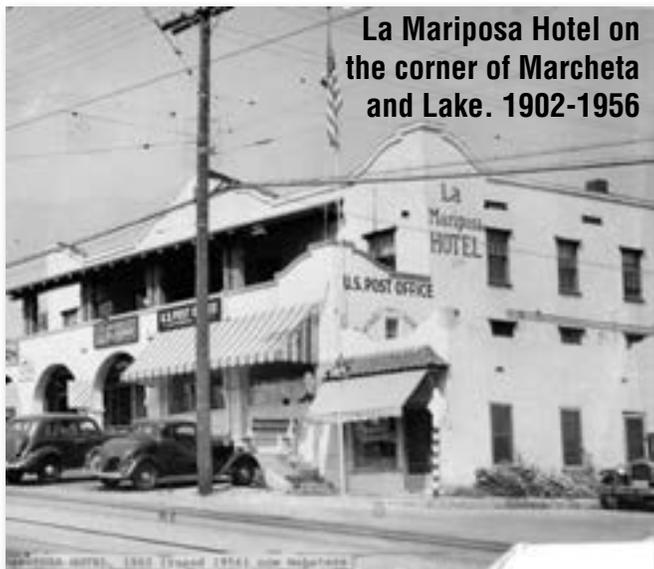
We gained insight into Altadena's Rose Parade participation thanks to memorabilia donated by 1965 Altadena Rose Queen **Florine Hudkins Sutherland**, 1978 Altadena princess **Debbie Heap**, and **Joe and Sue Goddard**.

**John Snyder** brought us a beautiful brochure advertising the Altadena Woodlands subdivision, located in east Altadena and volunteers contributed a definitive book on Greene and Greene homes and a mystery by a former Altadena author Naomi Hirahara. Read more about her book on page 11.

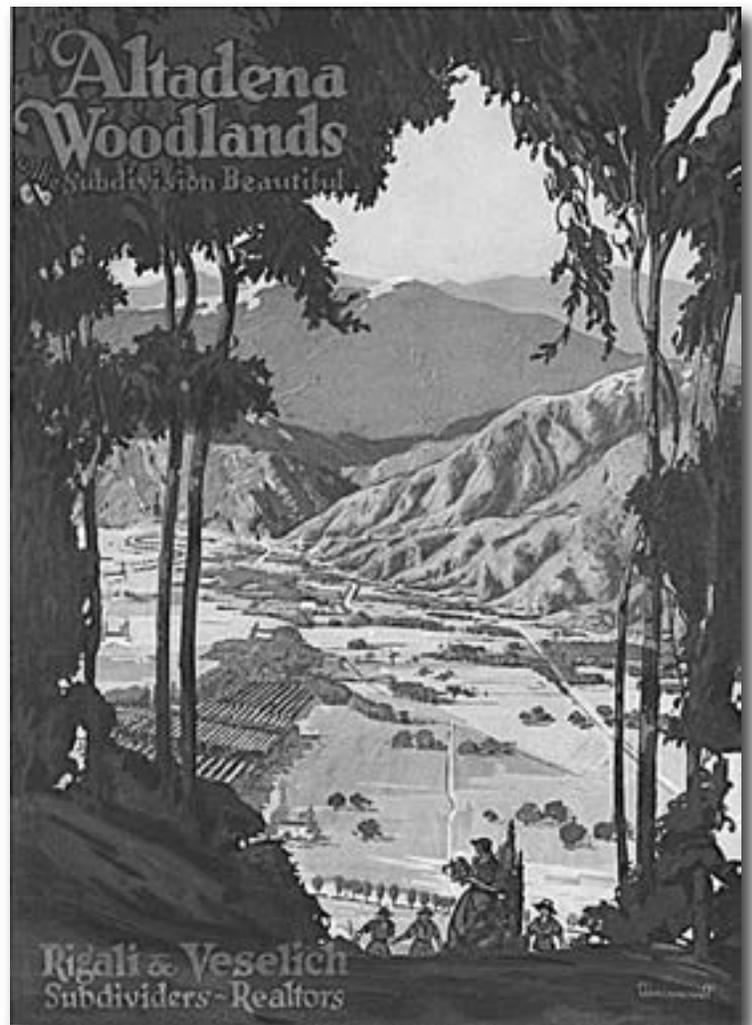


### Medicated salve manufactured in Altadena

We need help with **Patti La Mar's** contribution – a package from a medication called “Nonat,” a medicated salve, manufactured by R.C. Miller & Co. of Altadena. Ingredients were camphor, lead oleate, and pure gum turpentine. So far we've



**La Mariposa Hotel on the corner of Marcheta and Lake. 1902-1956**



been unable to find any information about this company. If you know anything about R.C. Miller & Co., please let us know.

And finally, many thanks to all our members and volunteers who have contributed to our collection and helped us continue our mission.

## New from AHS

Would you like to own a beautiful piece of Altadena's past? We're offering 8 high resolution black and white photographs, each representative of Altadena's history and for only \$20 per photo. Make your selection and we'll provide you with a digital copy you can print and frame. Right now these photographs are available at our archives, but you will soon be able to purchase them on our website as well.

*continued from page 1*

He later said he had been prepared to bid almost twice the winning price of \$170,000. Most of that had come from a \$150,000 check written just the night before by Pasadena heiress Virginia Steele Scott (her father had manufactured water pumps for mining



operations).

John Muir teacher and Conservation Club advisor Bob Barnes said the eleventh-hour miracle had literally come at 11 p.m.; club president Maggie Stratton's mother had been at a dinner party with Scott earlier in the evening, and when she told Scott of the students' dilemma, Scott said "Send them over."

Barnes recalled that when he and Maggie went to Scott's Pasadena mansion Scott talked on and on about every topic but the point of the visit, giving them a guided tour of her artworks and even showing them three bedrooms—or a wing—reserved solely for her cats.

Finally, at 2 a.m., Scott said, "How much do you need?"

Today, the gated entrance to the 107-acre National Forest Service property at Lake Avenue and Loma Alta Drive is a popular embarkation point for daytime hikes up to Echo Mountain, where once the Mt. Lowe incline railroad brought tourists to a hotel, dance hall, zoo and rustic tavern.

The twin, arroyo-rock pylons and the wrought-iron gates stretched between them were once the entrance to the grand estate of Charles H. Cobb, a Seattle timber tycoon who, with his wife, Carrie, purchased the property in 1915.

The property had been the Las Flores Ranch, where early settlers had done some gold-mining in Las Flores Canyon, and had built a 200,000-gallon water reservoir that saved the Cobb mansion from sweeping forest fires on at least one occasion, and is now a property of the Las Flores Water Company.

Not far from the gates, in 1917 the Cobbs

built an impressive two-story, stucco-clad house with a red-tiled roof, a massive porte cochere, and views to the sea. The home, befitting a lumber baron, featured beautiful floors and paneling of rare hardwoods, and even featured an air-conditioning system that was featured in publicity by Southern California Edison.



**The entrance gates at the Cobb Estate**

Originally used as an escape from the harsh Northwest winters, the Cobbs later moved in permanently. Charles Cobb, a dedicated devotee and benefactor of the organization of Free Masonry, was a 32nd Degree Mason and Knight Commander of the Court of Honor at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Pasadena, according to obituaries.

Altadena Historian Robert H. Peterson says in his book "Altadena's Golden Years" that Mrs. Cobb managed the estate, having her chauffeur pick fruit in their orchard for sale in



**Interior view of the Cobb Estate**

local stores, while Cobb spent time at his office in Pasadena.

Their son, Clarence, persuaded his father to finance construction of an auto-repair garage at the southeast corner of Lake and Marcheta Street. The business may have faltered, Peterson says, as part of the building was leased to the county as a fire station in 1924; today it is the home of the Theosophical Society Library and, while plastered over, the arched garage doors can still be seen on the exterior.

Carrie Cobb died in 1934 and Cobb died in 1939 at age 87, leaving the property to Pasadena’s Scottish Rite Cathedral. The mansion became a

Masonic retirement home, and after the Masons deeded the property to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange in 1942, it was a retreat house for the nuns serving at St. Luke Hospital on East Washington Boulevard at Altadena’s southeast border.

Peterson recounts that the nuns sold the

property to a construction company about 1955, and in 1956 it was sold to vaudeville and film comedians Groucho, Harpo and Gummo Marx (apparently Chico and Zeppo weren’t involved).

The mansion, six-car garage and several outbuildings, ravaged by vandals, were razed shortly thereafter. Some graffitied concrete stairways are all that remain of the house.

Although the Forest Service property closes at sundown, it has been a magnet for youthful—and often

drunken—after-dark thrill-seekers and vandals. The wrought-iron gates have been smashed in at least once, but repaired and rehung. The large, Historical Society bronze plaque at the entrance was stolen and never recovered.



**Cobb mansion in Altadena in midst of zone change controversy, 1958**

One of the Cobb Estate’s illegal, after-dark attractions is the urban legend that the property is haunted. Websites such as “Los Angeles’ Most Haunted” (a project of the “Supernatural Investigation Unit”) and “Los Angeles Ghost Patrol” feature reports of being followed through the woods by unseen persons or malevolent forces; brief appearances by a transparent little girl and a man; and strange blue lights that the trespasser

later decided must have been a UFO.

In a posted comment to an October 2014 Historical Society blog-post stating “As far as AHS knows, there are no ghosts haunting the property,” someone replied, “That’s what you think...Boo!”

— Rob Hallwachs

# The History of The Altadena Golf Course

The Altadena Golf Course traces its beginnings to a meeting on the evening of March 31, 1911, at the Altadena home of A.F. Gartz, a plumbing magnate from Chicago. Gartz brought together several Pasadena-area hotel owners, industrialists and local bankers to discuss building a country club and 18 holes of golf on two adjacent five-acre lots below Mendocino Avenue.

The demand for golf exceeded its supply in turn-of-the century

Pasadena. Membership was full at the private Annandale club in the San Rafael area of northwest Pasadena, and only guests of the Hotel Raymond could play its nine-hole course on the hill above Fair Oaks Avenue and Columbia Place in South Pasadena.

Gartz, John Coulston, G.G. Green of the Green Hotel, and D.M. Linnard of the Raymond (and later Huntington) hotels, were among the men who envisioned world-class golf on the alluvial fan below the San Gabriel Mountains known as the Rubio Wash. The fast-percolating soil of the centuries-old riverbed provided a perfect base for future golf course fairways and greens to drain quickly, but at risk of periodic flooding from the 5,000-foot mountain range.

Henry Huntington's Pacific

Electric rail line promised to build a spur off its main track running up Lake Avenue to bring people east across Mendocino Avenue, providing easy access to the course. So the group decided to create a club with 200 members, each with equal ownership, and purchase

several adjacent properties for a total of 134 acres. By April, 1911, the land was theirs to move and shape. Scotsman William Watson was selected to design and construct the original 18 holes which would become the Altadena Country Club and Golf Course.

Watson was a respected designer with a track record of top-end courses in Scotland and the U.S. In addition, he was familiar to the club founders for overseeing the maintenance and care of the nine holes of golf available below the Raymond



PHOTO FROM "ALTADENA TOWN & COUNTRY CLUB" BY KATHLEEN TUTTLE

**Altadena Country Club, east elevation after the 1916 addition.**

the land, hoping to bring the biggest names in professional and amateur golf to the community of Altadena.

The planned course spread from Mendocino Avenue to New York Avenue and from Allen Street to Hill Street. The group optioned the land for \$36,000. The final purchase price was \$110,000 and included

Hotel. He was given eight months and a promise of "enough money to make it one of the best courses in the country," according to the LA Times, April 13, 1911.

Watson took the reins, literally, and began moving soil with plows and the Morgan horses that pulled them. The greens he designed were a

combination of oil and smoothed sand, and tee boxes were just that, wooden boxes with sand in them waiting to be scooped, packed and placed in a cone beneath a ball for play off the tee. By November, Watson and his team had nine holes ready for play with a complete 18 christened in late 1911.

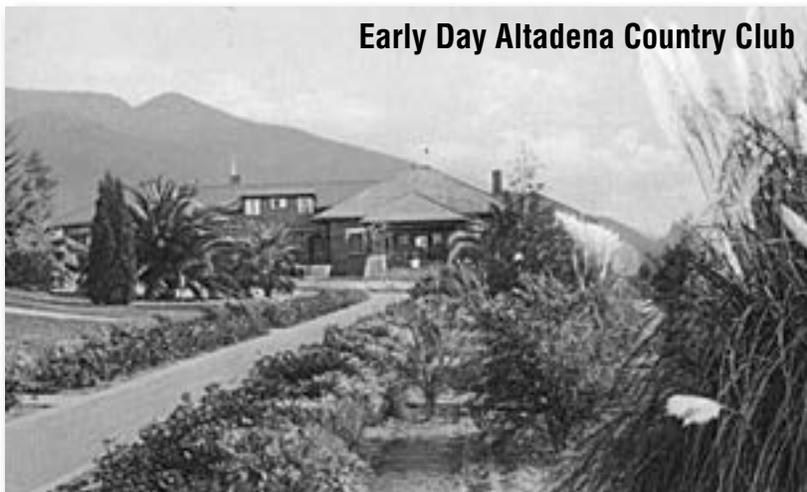
Plans for a \$25,000 clubhouse were completed by architect J. Blick and a beautiful craftsman-style building grew on a plateau on the high northeastern corner of the property. Opening day festivities showcased the completed clubhouse and greens, with a guest list covering the elite of Pasadena and Altadena.

But Mother Nature had a few tricks up her sleeve: in 1912 the clubhouse roof blew off in a windstorm as club members gathered to play cards, and 1913-14 brought floods to the property. After the 1914 flood the oil and sand greens were replaced with Bermuda grass which allowed for better drainage, and the Altadena Golf Club got ready for its first invitational. Teams from Los Angeles, Victoria, San Gabriel, Midwick, Annandale and Redlands country clubs all competed in the 1916 tournament.

During the First World War many of the club members were off fighting or involved in the

war effort, and the club's finances began to suffer. To keep the club afloat members opened the course to the public, initially charging a fee of 50 cents.

In 1920, the club reorganized under the name Pasadena Golf Club and in March of that year,



**Early Day Altadena Country Club**

William P. Bell Sr. was hired to re-design the course. Bell, who had worked with Watson on the original layout, incorporated his revolutionary "traveling sprinkler" which allowed for more precise irrigation. The course was at its peak nationally until the mid-twenties, with top professional and amateur golfers from all over playing sanctioned tournaments.

After Cecil B. DeMille built his airport on the property just below the golf course, Charlie Chaplin and Gloria Swanson, among other Hollywood celebrities, would fly out to ride horses in the foothills or play a round or two of golf. They could retreat from the city, play golf, and spend the night in the club's bungalows below the towering San Gabriels to the north.

Unfortunately, the Great

Depression dealt a crippling blow to the membership of the club, leading to bankruptcy and receivership. By 1944 the bank was ready to unload the property and canning jar heiress Mrs. Alexander (Ruth) Kerr purchased it for \$175,000 with

hopes to relocate Los Angeles's Westmont College to the site.

But her proposal was overwhelmingly rejected at a three-hour public meeting at Eliot Junior High School attended by an estimated 800 Altadena residents.

An angry Mrs.

Kerr stripped the clubhouse of all of its furnishings—down to the last plate, according to club historian Michael R. Manning—and “sold the eastern portion of the golf course to developers for a small fortune, sold the five-acre lot and clubhouse...for \$50,000, and the remaining 60 acres of the golf course to the county for \$125,000.”

The former golf-course clubhouse has evolved and grown into the Altadena Town and County Club, a private membership club that focuses on tennis and swimming but also rents its ballrooms for non-member events.

The nine-holes remaining of the original golf course today are a Los Angeles County facility open to the public.

— Marc Striegel

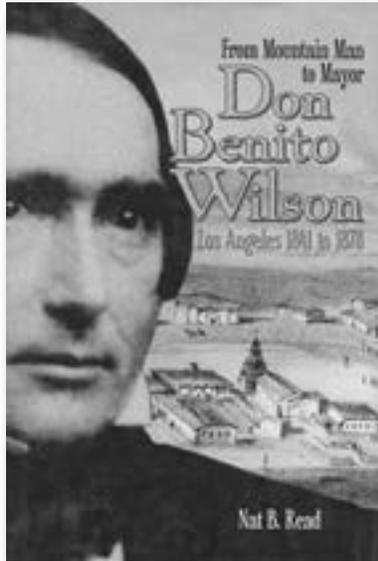
# Book Notes

**A**ltadena Historical Society has a reference library (non-lending) available for your browsing, research and entertainment. You're welcome to visit, read, ask questions and seek help from our expert volunteer staff. Stop in and take a look.

Here are reviews of two books on our shelves.

## **"From Mountain Man to Mayor-Don Benito Wilson"— by Nat B. Read**

Born in Tennessee in 1811, Benjamin Davis Wilson lived a life of nearly mythic adventure, struggle, accomplishment and early California history. His friends are known to us in street names and other landmarks, while his name is found on schools, streets and yes, even a mountain.



Largely uneducated, his adventures began at age 15, when he left Tennessee to begin trading with Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes. Joining with trappers, he became one of the legendary "mountain men." The author describes these men as "Army Rangers, Hell's Angels, Vikings and pirates." Survival depended on self-reliance, resourcefulness and determination. These qualities were to provide skills for the remainder of an amazing life.

A self-admitted "interloper and smuggler," he traveled to the Gila River area of what was then Mexico, nearly dying from thirst and hunger. Captured by hostile Apaches,

he escaped naked, with only a buffalo robe and primitive shoes to cross the desert. He joined a group traveling to California, hoping to travel to China. This was one of the first two overland settlers' parties and, after an arduous journey, they arrived at San Gabriel mission on Nov. 5, 1841.

Within a short time, China was forgotten. Opportunity seemed endless, and he began buying land, became a "ranchero" and was named "Don Benito" by his neighbors. It seems he knew everyone who was anyone and the remainder of this book has a surprise on nearly every page—familiar place names, people and areas we know well (and wish we could have seen as "Don Benito" saw them.)

At one point, he led a group of 80 well-armed men into the San Bernardino mountains to subdue renegade Native-Americans. (Along the way, he named Big Bear Lake.) Seriously wounded by a poisoned arrow, he carried the scar for the rest of his life and would not have survived without the help of an Indian friend.

By 1850, he was one of the four wealthiest men in Los Angeles County, listing assets at \$50,000...quite an achievement for a former convict, gunfighter and trapper! He was elected County Clerk, with responsibility for forming American government in California. "In that sense" (says the author) "he invented

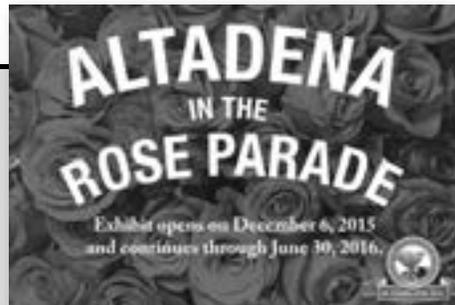
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SEE IT NOW!**

***"Altadena in the Rose Parade"  
Exhibit Runs Through June.***

This extensive and fascinating collection of photographs, parade programs, correspondence, newspaper articles and memorabilia covers Altadena's 70-year history of participation in the world-renowned parade.

9-1 P.M. Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays; Docent-Led Tours by Appointment for Groups (626) 798-8016

Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive, 91001



Los Angeles.”

Wilson and his friends soon began looking for other lands to acquire. They bought, sold, consolidated and divided what are now Pasadena, South Pasadena, San Marino and parts of Beverly Hills, Culver City, Wilmington and even San Gabriel. (Interestingly, a large parcel of land was considered “worthless” and actually given away in one transaction. This was later known as Altadena.)

Although uneducated, but a natural leader, Wilson was (among other things,) a banker, freight-forwarding agent, Indian agent, fruit grower, furniture manufacturer, mining executive, founder of L.A.’s first oil company, founder of several churches and Wilson College, predecessor of University of Southern California. He served in the state Senate, was county clerk, city councilman and was elected as the second mayor of Los Angeles.

What captures our imagination about “Don Benito” is his endurance, his brilliance and his daring. This is a life deserving of attention.

— Pam Wright

## “Summer of the Big Bachi” – by Naomi Hirahara

Altadena is such a special place. As Zane Grey famously

said, “In Altadena I have found those qualities that make life worth living.” He made his home here for the last decades of his life and did most of his writing here, at a time when he was the best-selling novelist in the world.

Other authors have lived in Altadena – and have written about it as well. One such writer is Naomi Hirahara, author of numerous works of both fiction and non-fiction. She is so accomplished as a mystery novelist that she was awarded the prestigious “Edgar” award for the third volume of her five volume series featuring Mas Arai, a gardener of Japanese descent. Ms. Hirahara lived in Altadena as a child, and still lives in the surrounding area. Mas Arai also lives in Altadena and the reader will recognize the many places that Mas visits as he unravels the mystery before him.

The first volume of the series, “Summer of the Big Bachi,” is set in 1999. References are made to the ever-increasing smog in Altadena, a problem that has

since been greatly improved upon, and the 1992 LA riots. Mas immigrated to the United States shortly after the 1946 Hiroshima nuclear bombing, which he experienced first-hand.

The plot revolves around Mas and his two teenaged friends who were with him when the bomb struck, and what happened to them in the intervening years. And being a murder mystery, the novel has dead bodies and multimillion dollar land deals for the protagonist to deal with.

This novel is a glimpse into a little-known population of Altadena, the Japanese-Americans, and it is a fascinating story of some of the aftermath of our decision to bomb Hiroshima. And it is a fast-paced, absorbing mystery novel to boot! Come and take a look at our Altadena Historical Society archives and see what else we have that may surprise you.

— Nancy Lambrecht



Naomi Hirahara is our featured speaker on Monday, April 25, 7:30 at the Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive. She will speak on her childhood years in Altadena and the experiences of Japanese-Americans in 20th century Los Angeles.

She will bring several of her books to the program for sale and autographing. Her sixth book in the Mas Arai series – “Sayonara Slam” – is due out in May.



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## The Echo

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VISIT OUR BLOG!  
altadenahistoricalsociety.blogspot.com

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!**

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\_\_\_\_\_ \$25 Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 Premium Membership (includes hard-back copy of  
"Altadena's Golden Years")

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