

# The Echo

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Spring/Summer 2017

## The Flood that Floated the El Dorado Inn Significant Altadena Floods, 1900 – 1969

**T**he Arroyo Seco watershed begins at Red Box Saddle in the Angeles National Forest near Mount Wilson. In rainy years water crashes through the Altadena area on its way to the Los Angeles River.

Floods in the first decade of the 20th century sent dozens of homes down arroyos lifting topsoil off the new Altadena Country Club golf course, and discharging debris downstream into Pasadena living rooms.

As the population grew and more houses were built in high-risk flood plains, flood-control projects were put on the fast track.

To protect Pasadena, the first flood-control dam traversed the narrowest gap in the Arroyo Seco, Devil's Gate Gorge,

named after the natural granite rock formation that's located about two miles north of where the Colorado Street Bridge is today. The road across the top of the dam was a major artery connecting Altadena to towns west of the arroyo.

The dam was

completed in 1920. Protected from future flooding, the Rose Bowl Stadium was built a year later.

Although Altadena was mostly spared, the



**Water debris from Rubio Canyon covered cars as far south as Brigdon and Sinaloa**

1934 flood took out large swathes of La Crescenta and Montrose. As a consequence of late-fall fires that swept across the foothills, small inadequate check dams gave way and released boulders, mud and dead trees. The 20-foot-high mud wall destroyed a large part of Montrose and killed 45 people.

This flood prompted the engineering of much

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



**A**fter serving many years as president of AHS I'll be stepping down July 1, 2017. I'm proud to say I've worked hard for the Society as both board member and president, beginning in 2001.

During that time, we raised more than \$70,000 to underwrite the cost of the Altadena history book, greatly increased our membership, and, in 2015, we opened the Altadena History Museum.

In 2016 alone AHS installed a new exhibit, "Interesting Altadenans;" indexed, summarized and

added to our oral histories; created a library card file; created digital records of photos and donations; and indexed the clipping file (that goes back to the 1800s), to name just a few of the year's accomplishments.

We kicked off a solid educational and outreach program last year, conducting several programs for scouts, seniors, schools, and clubs. Your donations and memberships meant we were able to welcome 232 visitors and fulfill 61 research requests.

I couldn't have done any of this without incredibly talented and dedicated volunteers.

My thanks is also extended to you, our members, for all the support you've given over these years of progress and change. Our appreciation goes out to all of you who gave us Altadena-related artifacts, photos, journals and other precious family memorabilia that we've added to the collection.

And finally, thank you to all who responded to our end of year fund-raising drive. You helped us reach our income goal of a little more than

\$17,000, part of which was added to our overall reserve of \$25,772.

I will continue to serve on the board. I hope some of you who love Altadena will consider joining the board as well. We are looking for people who are interested in joining us in the development of areas such as community outreach, project planning and review, budget creation and fund-raising. (See page 3 for one board member's story).

## **Board of Directors**

*Jane Brackman – president*

*Kathy Hoskins - VP*

*Minna Adams – Secretary*

*Marlane Forsberg – Treasurer*

*Jim Benson – Membership*

*Rob Hallwachs – Publicity*

*Mary Smeritschnig*

*Bruce Spears*

*Paula Wegner*

## **Volunteers**

*Beth Cassioli*

*Ruth Dawson*

*Ann Elias*

*Mary Gandsey*

*Jean Phillips*

*Pam Wright*

*Dina Zanrosso*

## **Special Thanks**

Our thanks go to all of you who renewed your membership for 2017. We couldn't keep our doors open without your support. We are especially appreciative of everyone who added an additional donation to their annual dues. We would also like to acknowledge \$500 donations from both MonteCedro senior living community and Altadena Community Chest, affiliated with the Home Shoots Home film-location registry. We thank them both very much. If you haven't had time to renew, you can renew on our website or use the membership form on the back page of the newsletter.

# Meet Our Newest Board Member – Jim Benson

**M**y wife, Kathy, and I moved here from Maryland just over 40 years ago. We were attracted by the majestic mountains (I love to hike) and the Eaton Canyon horse-riding stables (Kathy's passion). We both appreciated the small-town feel of Altadena and its community spirit.

You might ask, why am I a volunteer and why a Board member? I've been given sage advice from my father – inspired by Teddy Roosevelt's speech, "The Man in the Arena." He gives credit to those who participate and calls those critics who stand by the sidelines "cold and timid souls."

industry gave me skills I can use to help AHS fulfill its mission.

Our local history is so rich we even have a Millionaires Row. The early auto



**Jim and Kathy Benson**

## Support AHS When You Shop

Register your rewards card at [Ralphs.com](http://Ralphs.com) and choose AHS as the community organization you want to support. A percentage of your purchases will be donated to AHS.

AHS earned \$73 in three months with only four people registered. Just imagine how we would benefit if more of our members participated. It's easy, costs you nothing other than what you have already spent, and you'll have the satisfaction of supporting an organization you believe in.

I now have both time and energy to become a useful part of AHS and thereby a part of Altadena. My 30 years' experience in the mortgage finance

industry gave me skills I can use to help AHS fulfill its mission. races up Santa Rosa are a kick to read about....and there are many, many more stories I can help AHS share with other Altadenans.

If you, too, have time, energy, and an interest in history, you might be interested in joining our Board. Collecting and sharing Altadena's past is a rewarding experience.

And, it is fun.

## From Our Readers

In January we got an e-mail from Yvonne Savio, who had forwarded the AHS Blog about Altadena grocery stores down through the years to her friend, Mary Molitor Casaburi. See Mary's letter plus more recollections of bygone Altadena on our blog: [altadenahistoricalsociety.blogspot.org](http://altadenahistoricalsociety.blogspot.org).

Please keep sending us your comments, recollections and corrections – they deepen our knowledge and understanding of Altadena's history. You can reach us at [altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com](mailto:altadenahistorical.society@yahoo.com).

# What's Up at AHS?

## Volunteers

You will see some new faces at our Archives these days: **Ruth Dawson**, who has a background in travel and volunteering, and **Beth Cassioli**, who brings much-needed administrative skills from her 30 years as a legal secretary. We're delighted to have them both on our team. And an Aveson School 7th grader, **Asher Nee**, is interning with us, helping to photocopy and preserve some of our older newspaper clippings.

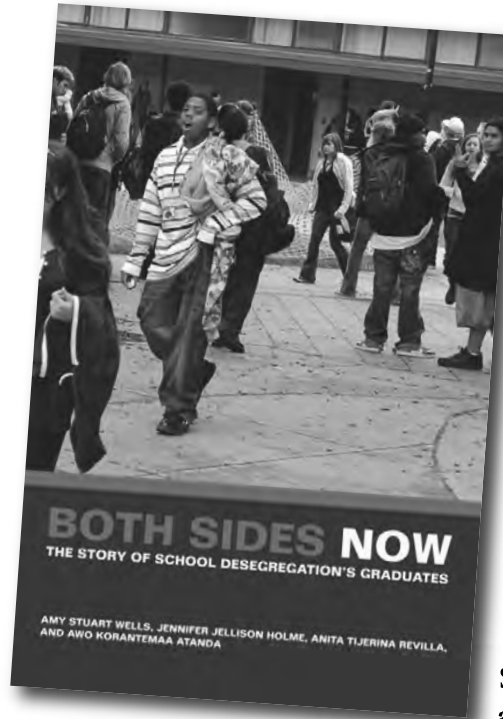
## Our Collection

Our collection has grown with some new and interesting donations: Woodbury family photos from descendant **Joseph Brown; Ron Longo** sent us a photo of the El Dorado Inn before it was destroyed; and information on the family of Daniel R. Cameron, owner of the



**El Dorado Inn - (see page 5 for view after 1969 flood)**

Cameron House (now the Theosophical Society) from his descendent **Patricia McNichols**. **Jane Brackman** donated a scrapbook from the 1940s with photos of former Altadenan Richard Olin Brown, from



early childhood to his WWII enlistment in the Navy. And **Cynthia Theil** gave us a handmade Eliot cheerleader outfit from the 1960s along with a photograph of herself wearing it.

Our library has grown with a selection of books from **Louise Sutton. George and Cynthia Null**

brought us a copy of "Both Sides Now," a look at the results of integration in five different high schools, including John Muir; and toys once played with by Winifred Bowring, a granddaughter of Sphinx Ranch owner William Allen, came to us from **Eldrid Allen**.

## Like Us on Facebook

We are moving into 21st Century mode with a revamped Facebook page. Volunteer **Dina Zanrossa** is posting regularly for us, so check in every few days to see what's new. Photos posted on Facebook also appear on Instagram.

From our Facebook post on February 28, you can link to two new oral histories now available on Archive.org: Em Matthews talks about the late lamented Theatre Americana, and Altadenan DL Lyons discusses his interesting life so far.

— by Jean Phillips

## ***The Flood...***

*continued from page 1*

larger flood prevention structures including elaborate catch basins in and around Altadena. The Civilian Conservation Corps, a Depression-era work relief program that operated from 1933 through 1942, built most of LA County's flood control infrastructure.

Eaton Canyon debris catch basins and the dam south of where New York Drive now runs



**El Dorado Inn - lashed by the 1969 flood for several days before it was washed downstream**

The same flood roared down Rubio Canyon, sending boulders crashing through homes on Mariposa, pushing mud and trees across the Altadena golf course, most of it ending up in yards of new homes on Sinaloa and New York.

In the early 1940s, the Army Corps of Engineers submitted plans to divert water from Rubio Canyon east and west to Eaton Canyon and Devil's Gate reservoir.

Those floods were pretty big gully-washers, but the 1969 flood may have been the most dramatic.

From January 18 through January 22, 1969, twenty-two and a quarter inches of rain fell in local areas. But the deluge wasn't over. A Saturday morning downpour overwhelmed already saturated foothills and mountain gorges. Boulders, mud and rushing water headed for Altadena.

The El Dorado Inn, a popular local restaurant, located at the mouth of Eaton Canyon, was lifted off its foundation and floated downstream. Rumor has it that the restaurant's safe was never recovered and remains buried in sediment collected at Eaton Dam.

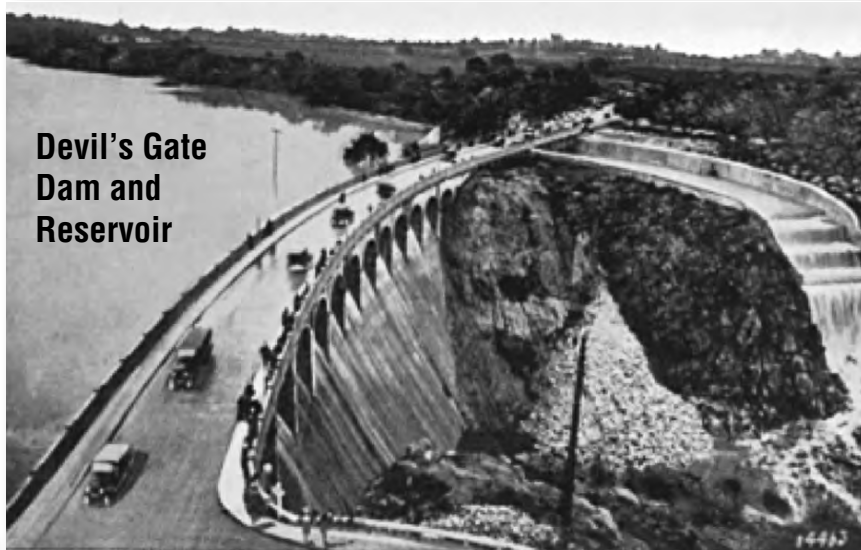


**Devil's Gate Dam Face**

sediment collected at Eaton Dam.

The U.S. Weather Bureau reported that the January storm dropped 21.17 inches of rain in Eaton Canyon, 22.63 inches at Devil's Gate Dam, and 35.38 inches at Mt. Wilson. The Cogswell Dam on the west fork of the San Gabriel River (that flows to Eaton Canyon) received a whopping 36.69 inches, a record that still holds today.

— *by Jane Brackman*



**Devil's Gate Dam and Reservoir**

were completed in 1937.

In early 1934, Eaton Canyon's New York Drive extension bridge, connecting Altadena to Sierra Madre, was celebrated as state-of-the-art engineering. Four years later torrential rains roared through Eaton Canyon, leaving only the concrete abutments (still visible today.)



**Bridge remains after 1938 flood crashed through Eaton Canyon**

# It Started With a Carriage House - The History of Altadena Elementary School

**D**id you know that the gleaming white stucco building on the corner of El Molino Avenue and Calaveras Street was once a small, one-room schoolhouse?

Today's Altadena Elementary School has an interesting past.

## The Early Years

In 1902 Mr. and Mrs. Lewis W. Schumann bought an acre on the northwest corner of Calaveras Street and Lake Avenue, where the Mt. Lowe Railroad barn and carriage house were still standing. The Schumanns remodeled the carriage house into a two-story home. Where once Professor Lowe's Tally Ho coaches had been kept, Mrs. Schumann began holding classes in her home.

Within a year, Col. G.G. Green was persuaded to donate an acre at the corner of Calaveras and El Molino and, in 1903, a one-room school house was completed. It opened with grades one through three and had 16 pupils. At first, the little building also served as a church. The school cost \$2,305.85 and Miss Gertrude Hinman, acting as principal and teacher, taught grades one through four at a salary of \$675 per year.

An undated clipping in our files tells us the school was also originally proposed as a community center. Unfortunately, as the article stated, the school was not equipped with electric lights. "Visions of civic center enthusiasts plodding to the school house in evenings, bearing lanterns to be suspended along the sides of the room, furnishing a flickering light to guide the intellectual development of the civic center do not appeal and another location was chosen."

By 1912, the school housed grades one through eight. In 1915, an 18-room building was constructed at the cost of \$76,560.69 and patrons donated shrubbery, art and a Victrola.

A new eight-room primary building was completed in 1923 at a cost of \$41,560.69, a new cafeteria provided hot foods for students, and in 1935, a new earthquake-proof (steel-reinforced) addition was built.

## School Days

Imagine going to school in Altadena during the early years. You might have built and decorated floats for the Rose Parade, winning a prize in 1909. You could learn from a set of encyclopedias donated by the Child Study Group (soon to become the PTA). This little shelf of books soon led to the establishment

of Altadena's town library at the school.

Classwork, of course, predominated, but you could take part in many other activities – PTA-sponsored field trips, a community garden, cooking lessons, and basket weaving, among others. You could join the school band, or the Glee Club. You could take part in theatrical performances such

as "Alice in Wonderland", or play baseball on the school's large playground. And you might be featured in the newspaper! Several local newspapers regularly carried stories of victory on the field at Altadena School. Academic prowess was saluted in the press, too.

Scouting was popular – Campfire Girls, Bluebirds, Brownies and Cub Scouts were



**First Teacher - Miss Gertrude Hinman c. 1903**



sponsored by the PTA and led by parents and PTA members.

During the Cold War years, you would have practiced drop-and-cover exercises, in case of nuclear war. AHS researcher Kathy Hoskins remembers being terrified as a kindergarten student because they were told that if nuclear bombs fell, they'd have to spend three days in a storage room.

## Change

The beginning of integration in the '60s affected all PUSD schools (class photos from this era show increasing diversity) and plans for shifting children, busing, etc., caused many parents to either leave Altadena or send their children to private schools. Proposition 13's passage in 1979 also impacted the school district, resulting in budget cuts, eliminating music, art, drama, after-school activities and other less-essential programs.

Not all enrichment activities were eliminated. In the '90s, the Scripps Home partnered with Altadena School through an Adopt a School Program, bringing two generations together. Career Day helped students to look to the future, and fifth grade students cooked with chef Marion Cunningham at Twin Palms

restaurant. The PTA and students raised money to take a field trip to Valley Forge. And, in 1996, computers were installed to prepare students for the information age.

Altadena Elementary has changed with the

times. In 2009, it became an inclusion school, serving both typical and special needs students. Many special programs, some sponsored by the PTA, provided music, art, literature and special education services. Today the school, dedicated, as always, to educating Altadena's



**Early Altadena School Classroom**

children, offers a K-1 French immersion program and is making full use of their expanded building.

And, perhaps we should mention that the auditorium in today's school is ample for community events! It took a while but...not a lantern in sight! Mrs. Schumann would be proud.

— by Pam Wright



**Altadena School Orchestra**

# Book Notes

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

## ***Picturesque Pasadena – A Community Expression***

**Published by the Chamber of Commerce and Civic Association of Pasadena California**

The book contains 54 pages of beautiful photos, including homes and views of Altadena. Sadly, the book is undated, but best estimates put the photos in the 1920s. Most of the photos are without people or cars. The focus is simply on the home designs, peaceful garden views, local landmarks (Pasadena Playhouse, Altadena's "Mile of Deodars," churches, etc.) and concludes with some lovely images of riders on shady bridal paths. They evoke a quiet look back into time.

Students of architecture may identify the homes, but anyone who simply admires their beauty will enjoy this book.



**Popular Bridle Path**

**L.W. Gentry house, East Altadena**







**East on Palm near  
Holliston. Built 1915**



**Home of Architect Kenneth A. Gordon on  
Altadena Drive**



**Wheeler  
Residence**



**Andrew Jackson Public School - Woodbury Avenue**

# AHS Outreach

**A**HS is committed to providing resources for schools, youth groups, clubs and other organizations. Sharing Altadena's rich history is part of our mission.

- We were glad to welcome a class from Aveson Upper School who stopped in on their tour of Altadena; present a short program on Altadena history to a young Cub Scout troop; and help two younger students from Aveson research specific decades in Altadena's history,
- Programs for other organizations included presentations at MonteCedro, a book club at the Arcadia Retirement Hotel, and Little Landers Historical Society's Bolton Hall.
- We also participated in the opening of the Full Circle Thrift Shop, located in the old Mount Lowe Railway Substation, and provided several photographs that decorate the interior of the shop.

If your organization would like us to speak about Altadena's history at one of your meetings, please give us a call.

## Architect Program Reviewed

Our January Program on Altadena architects was a great success. Here's a portion of Star-News Public Editor Larry Wilson's column about the lecture, reprinted by permission:

"That some 120 locals would turn out in a standing-room-only crowd at the Altadena

Community Center on a cold and wet Monday night to hear architectural historian Tim Gregory give an illustrated talk on celebrated Altadena architects and the homes they designed for their families is a testament to

Altadenans' ongoing fascination with this legacy.

"Tim's funniest story regarded a house on West Calaveras that

Pioneer Andrew McNally, the mapmaker. When prominent Altadena architect Adolfo



Miralles and his family later moved into the rambling pile of a place, they noticed the lines in pencil going up a wall that

long ago marked the increasing height of young Dorothy Buffum, later Dorothy Chandler, wife of one Los Angeles Times publisher and mother of another, and the philanthropic force behind the Music Center. Adolfo once met Buff at a party, and mentioned to her that he now owned the house. 'I never lived in West Altadena,' she

replied, disdainfully. The line speaks volumes about an old geographical class divide in the town, pretty much erased in today's real estate market."

— by Jean Phillips



**Cub Scouts and Parents from Altadena Pack 1's Wolf Den at a Campout**

the Buffum family, of department store riches, used as their country home (their main pad being in Long Beach) designed by the great Wallace Neff, grandson of Altadena

**FREE**

# Writer-Artist Presents Program On American Abolitionists For Altadena Historical Society

**Hope Demetriades Speaks and Displays Artwork at  
7:30 p.m. Monday April 24 at Community Center**

Abolitionist-insurrectionist John Brown, whose sons Jason and Owen came to live in the hills of Altadena after their father's raid on Harper's Ferry, will be the focus of writer-artist Hope Demetriades in a program sponsored by the Altadena Historical Society.



**"John Brown" by Hope  
Demetriades**

total equality among African-Americans and Caucasians inspired deep resentment in the mostly pro-slavery South, but profound

Demetriades also will display some of her artistic assemblages that memorialize and canonize the abolitionists. A showing of her work was recently displayed in the Boswell Gallery at Polytechnic School in Pasadena.

"Brown's passionate devotion not only to ending slavery, but to bringing about

gratitude and respect among slaves, free African-Americans and abolitionists," Demetriades said.

She will discuss events in Brown's life that led up to his raid on the Harper's Ferry, and his ties to other abolitionists including Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas and Elijah Lovejoy.

Two of Brown's sons were killed in the Harper's Ferry attack (Brown was captured, tried and hung). His surviving sons, Owen and Jason, along with other family members, moved to California, where they built a cabin in the Altadena foothills.

Jason worked on the Mount Lowe Railway before returning home to Ohio, where he died in 1884. When Owen died in 1889, he was buried on a foothill above the Las Casitas tract in Altadena.

The program will be at 7:30 p.m. Monday, April 24, at the Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena Drive, 91001. The program is free and open to the public. The Community Center is immediately west of the Sheriff's Station and across Altadena Drive from Rite-Aid.



## Other Upcoming Events

**May 13** – Our annual sale will be held this year at the old Substation, now Full Circle Thrift Shop. We're selling lots of books, artifacts and other items of interest that don't belong in our collection. Come to shop and see what the Substation looks like today.

**July 24** – Our quarterly program at the Community Center will feature Altadena's Mountain Rescue Team. From early rescues to today's Eaton Canyon accidents, we look forward to a fascinating talk.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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VISIT OUR BLOG!  
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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 original 1920's  
developer's brochure for Altadena Woodlands)

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