



# The Echo

Volume 94

Number 2

Where the Past is Present

Fall/Winter 2021

## Redlining in Altadena

In March of 1940, a man named Thomas Kido wrote to the Altadena Chamber of Commerce. "Assuming there are no racial restrictions (Japanese) in Altadena," he wrote, "I would like to have some information concerning the prospects of my building a home in your city."

His price range was \$6,000 to \$10,000. This was well within range of property in the area; homes east of Lake Avenue were valued anywhere from \$5,500 to \$8,500 in that year. The chamber sent a response a few days later. It said, "I regret to inform you that Altadena has enforced the racial restrictions which you mention."

Kido's letter was one of a few the Chamber received that year. Other chambers of commerce, in Sierra Madre and Monrovia, had written to find out what racial restrictions had been implemented and whether they were successful. The Chamber wrote back that covenants had been put in place by the Altadena Property Owners' League, a new organization that focused on "the most important phases of real estate ownership—taxes and race restrictions." By paying a five dollar fee to add racial covenants to their property, homeowners automatically became members of

### NOTICE!

We, the property owners, citizens, and taxpayers of the Great Northwest Improvement Association, take this means of making our wants known to the public at large.

1st. We want our section of Pasadena and Altadena to be a place for white people only;

2d. As a majority of property owners we are entitled to this request;

3rd. We want to inform Real Estate Agents of Pasadena that our section is now a white section and we intend to keep it so.

4th. We request that all property owners take observance of the above.

**The Great Northwest Improvement Association**

BOUNDARIES OF THE ASSOCIATION

Washington street on the south, Fair Oaks Avenue on the east, east bank of Arroyo on the west, mountains on the north.

the league. Within their first year of operation, 80% of homes in Altadena had restrictive deeds.

Altadena was not alone in this practice. In the 1920s, Los Angeles became the fastest growing city in the United States, and as new communities were built, race restrictions, enacted by real estate brokers backed by the powerful Los Angeles Realty Board established invisible boundaries to control who could live where. In 1922 the National Association of Real Estate Brokers issued materials to train their realtors on core principles. One of them warned that

### What's Inside

*Presidents Message*

*Annexation*

*Telling Altadena's Story*

*continued on page 4*

# President's Letter *by Eric Mulfinger*

**H**ello members and friends! When I became president in January 2020, I could not have imagined what was to come. Two months later, we closed the archives to the public for “two weeks.” Well, those two weeks were extended, and we are still closed. However, our volunteers have still been busy creating new ways to make the archives available to the public.

Our Juneteenth event at the Mountain View Cemetery celebrating the life and legacy of Ellen Garrison Clark was highly

successful and attracted attention from local media, including a front-page article in the Los Angeles Times. On a perfect Saturday afternoon in the Library parking lot, Paul Rollins talked about his book, “Letters from the Sphinx”, about the Allen family, and the Sphinx Ranch. The book is highly recommended for all fans of Altadena history and is available for purchase on our Square site.

I hope you enjoy this issue of The Echo. It features a look at the contentious early history of Altadena’s political landscape. Should Altadena become a city? Should Pasadena annex Altadena? The first half of the 20th century saw these issues arise several times, while in the background, “red lines” were drawn restricting many neighborhoods to



“white only.” We also highlight our research capabilities, including our special collections.

This is my last letter to you as president, though I will remain a Board member and volunteer. It has been a great two years working with such knowledgeable and dedicated people. Our long-time treasurer, Jim Benson, will also be stepping down from his role at the end of 2021. AHS is grateful to him for keeping our books and making them all clear to us.

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**Paul Rollins and AHS Board Member Daria Topousis discuss “Letters from the Sphinx”**

# Ellen Garrison Clark Celebration

An overflow crowd attended the Historical Society's celebration of Civil Rights pioneer Ellen Garrison Clark's life and the dedication of the gravestone marking her resting place. Many more viewed the ceremony as it was live-streamed from Mountain View Cemetery and it's now viewable on our website: [www.altadenahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.altadenahistoricalsociety.org).

Altadena's Black community was instrumental in making it possible and the story was shared by local and national media. We'd like to thank our generous donors and welcome every one of you as Altadena Historical Society members.



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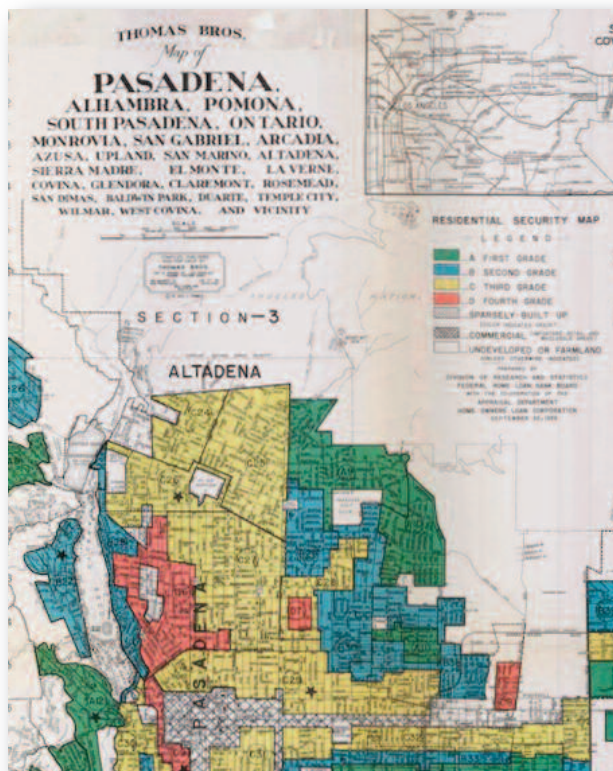
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## Redlining continued from page 1

“the purchase of property by certain racial types is very likely to diminish the value of the property.” This included people of color, as well as Jewish people and recent immigrants from southern Europe.

This systemic discrimination was legitimized in 1933 under a New Deal program called the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). Seeking to protect homeowners from foreclosure and to make home ownership possible for more Americans during the Great Depression, the HOLC assessed the risk of lending money based on various factors such as public transportation, schools in the area, and the racial makeup of the community. They created color-coded maps that lenders could use to determine whether or not to approve a loan. Using four colors, the maps rated neighborhoods from lowest to highest risk where green was “best” and red was “hazardous.” Neighborhoods where people of color lived were ranked in the hazardous or red grade, which led to the term “redlining.”



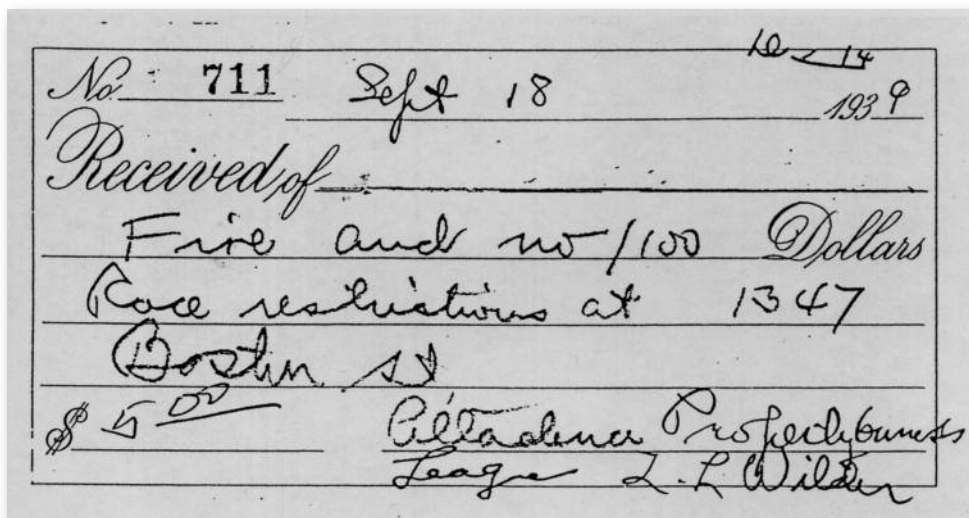
Altadena Redlining Map

because of inadequate transportation, lack of local shopping, and expiring racial covenants. The northeast part of Altadena was the only green, or top grade, neighborhood. It too had expiring covenants but “movement is on foot to cover area with protective racial restrictions,” the report said.

These reports made it very hard for people of color to buy homes. Fewer than \$25,000 of the more than \$1M spent on mortgages by the HOLC and the Federal Housing Administration went to non-white families. This meant that people of color would be barred from owning property, and even if they were allowed

to buy a home, they were forced to do so in communities where property values were not likely to increase, thereby robbing them of any financial stability or ability to move into the middle class.

A 1948 Supreme Court decision called *Shelley v. Kraemer* banned legal enforcement of racial covenants. The Shelleys, a Black



Property owner's league receipt

The HOLC generated a report for every neighborhood. The 1939 maps of Altadena, which are available on the *Mapping Inequality* website, show patches of green, blue, and yellow with a part of northern Pasadena colored red. Neighborhoods in the second or third grade were rated that way

## Nearly 2000 Properties Are Now Restricted

### League's Efforts Establishing Uniform Classifications

◆ PRESSING close to the 2000 mark, Altadena Property Owners' League is continuing to sign properties at a satisfactory rate in their effort to cover Altadena with a new and uniform race restriction. Reports from league office indicate the two-thousandth property should be signed real soon, making a total of over 6400 properties in the restricted classification.

### Most prewar properties had racial covenants

Citizenship, wrote about this decision for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. He noted the ruling still allowed owners and realtors "who enjoyed contriving oppressive and offensive covenants [the] freedom to do [so] without State or Federal interference."

The real estate boards continued the practice of racial restrictions, but now in different ways. They first attempted a constitutional amendment, and when that failed, they turned to other methods. In some cases, they wouldn't show houses to people of color at all and froze out any broker who sold to them. They also told people that houses had already been sold when they hadn't.

It wasn't until the Rumford Fair Housing Act of 1963 that housing discrimination based on race or ethnicity became illegal in the state of California, and 1968 when the Fair Housing Act made discrimination illegal on the national level.

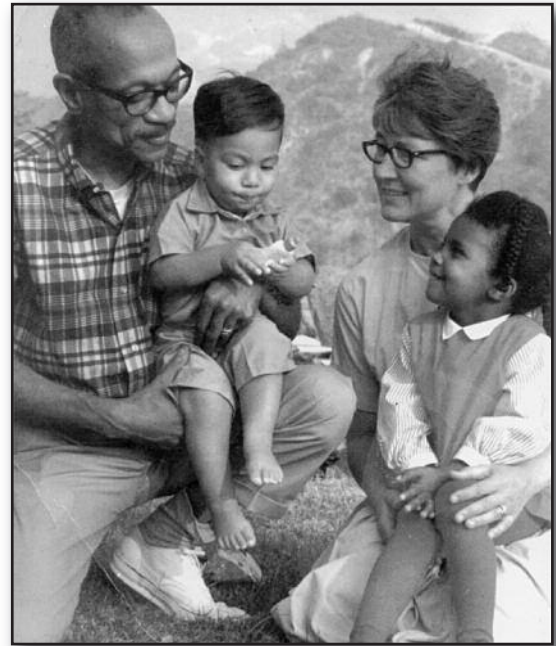
By then people of color were moving into Altadena. In 1960, four percent of the population was Black, up from a fraction of a percent in 1950. A few families moved into The Meadows, the first middle class community in LA County that included Black people. Early residents included artist

family, bought a house in Missouri and a neighboring family took them to court to prevent them from moving in, using racial covenants as their grounds for the case. The decision didn't make these restrictions illegal; it just said that the government could not enforce them. Dr. Mahlon Cooley, president of the Association for Abolition of Second Class

Charles White and Wilfred Duncan, the first African American firefighter in Pasadena.

During this era whole communities, mostly ones that had been rated red by the HOLC, were demolished to make way for the 210 freeway, displacing people of color who moved north. Helped by organizations like Altadena Neighbors, which encouraged integration in the community, more and more people of color moved to the area and reshaped neighborhoods.

Within twenty years, Altadena became one of the most racially diverse communities in LA County. The 1980 census showed that 43% of residents were Black, 44% white, and 10% were Latinx or



**Charles and Frances White with children Ian and Jessica at home in Altadena's foothills**

Asians. That was a far cry from the segregated and racist community it had been in 1940. Since then, the demographics have shifted again, with higher percentages of Latinx and people of mixed race, a category only introduced into the US Census in 2000. Our neighborhoods will continue to change, and with luck, Altadena will continue being the thriving, diverse community it is today.

— By Daria Topousis

# Altadena's Recurring Identity Crisis

For over a century, Altadena regularly entertained ideas of either incorporating as its own city or allowing itself to

independence-loving, if rather unique, character of their community.

Altadena, before it had a name, was often referred to as "North Pasadena" or the "Northern

periodically wrestled with its identity.

There have been a number of attempts by Pasadena to annex all or part of Altadena over the years, often motivated by its ever-increasing need for water

resources. The largest area to be annexed was "North Pasadena," which in 1904, with the permission of its residents, expanded the

western part of the city to its current northerly limits.

According to historian Michele Zack, Pasadena by 1946 had "gobbled up" hundreds of acres of Altadena in "37 separate bites." Especially egregious was the annexation of Florecita Farm in 1936 on the far western edge of Altadena. This pocket gave the city some access to canyon water, but the unspoken rationale was that the mayor of Pasadena lived in the area and needed to be able to say that he lived legally in Pasadena! Additional access to water was achieved by annexing Eaton Canyon (Fox Ridge) in the 1950s.

Often the response of many Altadenans to what they perceived as Pasadena's land-grabbing tendencies was to form associations in

## CONQUEST BY ANNEXATION A History of the Pasadena Plan to Annex Altadena

A STUDY IN THE PROTECTION  
OF PROPERTY IN ALTADENA

Submitted in the Public Interest by ALTADENA PROPERTY OWNERS' LEAGUE

Slope"—land considered anonymous and worthless by the Southern California Orange Grove Association which in 1874 pioneered the settling of what was to become Pasadena.

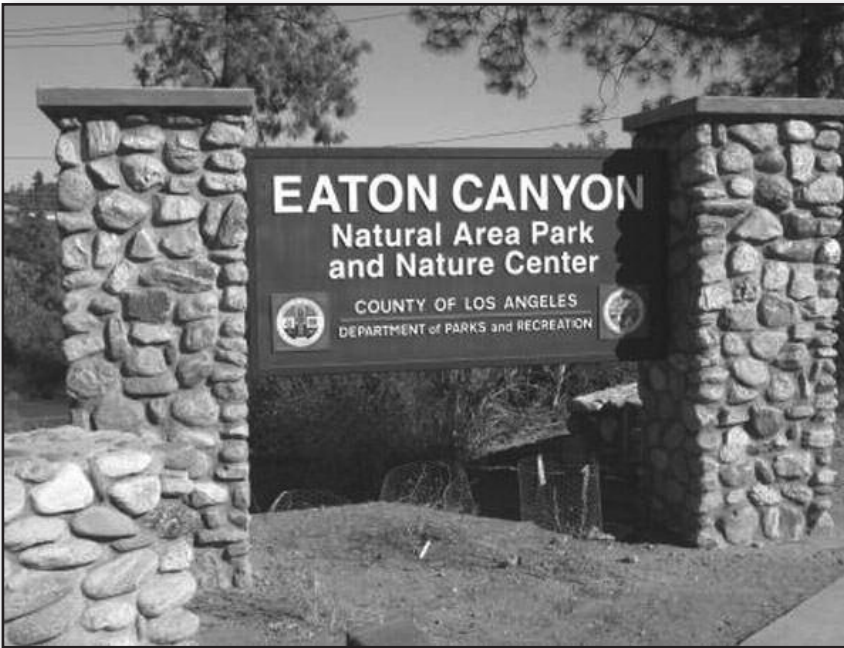
Altadena received a name in 1887 when the Woodbury brothers, who had established their ranch on the "Northern Slope" in 1882, adopted the name

"Altadena" for the community—a title borrowed from Byron O. Clark's Altadena Nursery on Lincoln Avenue. Since that time Altadena has



**Florecita Farm, an island of Pasadena within Altadena**

be annexed to Pasadena. But the majority of residents seemed always to prefer the unincorporated,



### **Pasadena annexed Eaton Canyon for access to water**

opposition, in order to protect their community's resources. One such group was the Property Owners League of the late 1940s. However, Pasadena continued to decrease Altadena's acreage bit by bit, sometimes in a blatant desire to co-opt taxable land. One such annexation occurred in 1975—a seven-acre parcel at the northeast corner of Washington and Allen where a Vons (now Stater Brothers) market was to be built.

As early as 1904, and again in 1914, Altadena citizens met to discuss the desirability of incorporation and brought it to a vote of the small community. The anti-incorporation faction won out at both elections, claiming that if it became a city, Altadena would lose its rustic charm, face higher taxes, and endure another layer of bureaucratic government. Those favoring incorporation had touted the desirability of Altadena's being able to make its own decisions, safe from the uninformed actions of distant County authorities and from the nibbling of its borders by its "big sister" to the south. Interestingly, these basic points

would continue to motivate both arguments for years to come.

The annexation/incorporation debate re-occurred on a regular basis. Newspaper articles in 1925, 1931, 1946, 1957, 1964, and 1971 reported on serious arguments by Altadena's civic and business interests over the pros and cons of cityhood. In fact, incorporation elections held in 1957 and 1965 to make Altadena Los Angeles County's 50th city were defeated two-to-one by citizen vote. Annexation proposals of the late 1970s were especially contentious. Following the passage of Proposition 13, with its property-tax limitations, Altadenans worried whether their services would be

threatened by County cutbacks, increasing the desirability in some people's minds of becoming part of Pasadena and enjoying the benefits of its larger tax base.

Oscar Werner, the late architect, Town Council member, and chair of the Altadena Civic Association, was a vocal advocate of the anti-annexation, pro-cityhood movement in the 1970s. He campaigned



**Reverend Von Jones and Jeanette Huber members of "Altadenans for Altadena" at a 1984 rally**

# LET'S MAKE ALTADENA - "OUR CITY" INCORPORATE

successfully for the areas northwest of the Washington/Allen intersection to escape annexation. In a 1989 oral history (available at the

representation." The group Altadena for Altadenans was formed in opposition to the proposal which subsequently died.

Annexation/incorporation

through the adoption of "overlay zones" and other provisions to protect Altadena's resources. In 1980, the County Board of Supervisors declared that Altadena had its own "sphere of influence," giving it some degree of protection from the aggressive annexation tactics of the city to the south.

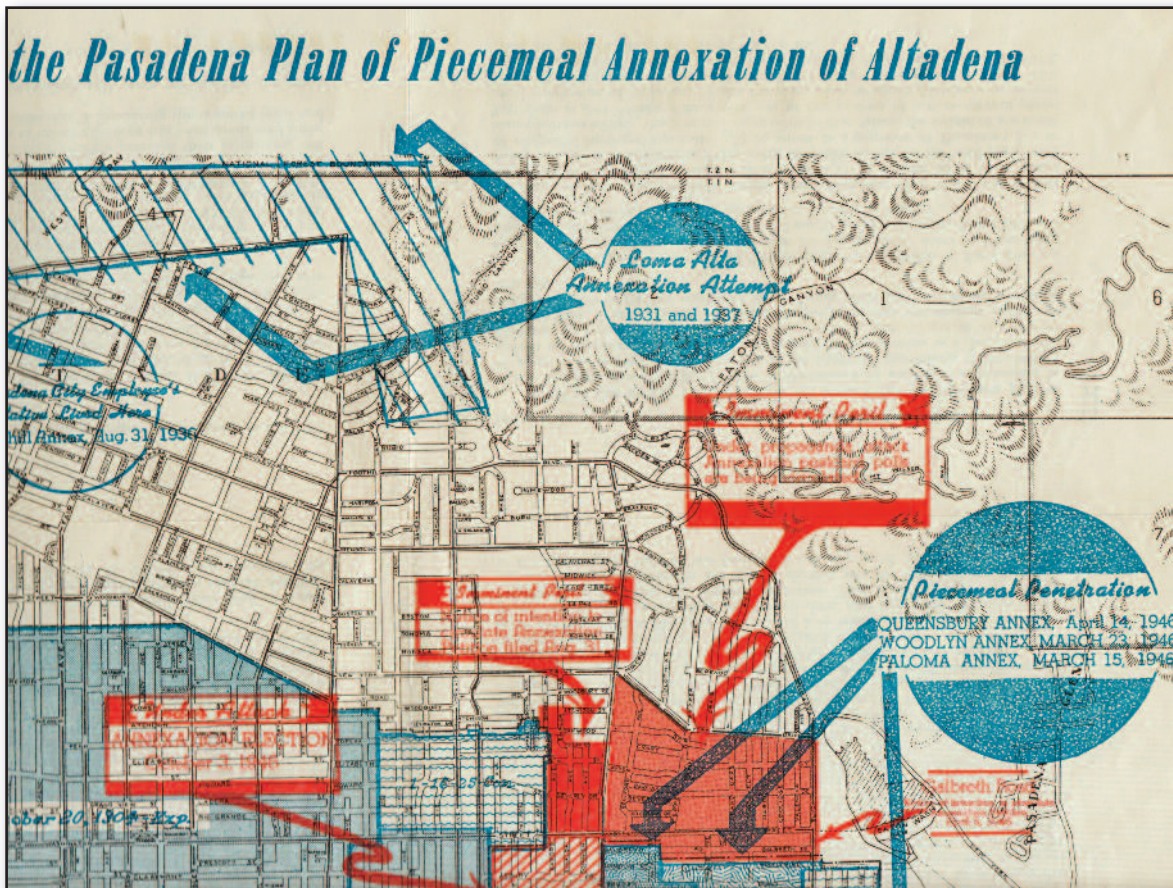
But there is no reason to think that the discussions of

Altadena's political future will not re-occur at some point. Over the years, almost every major proposal for change in the community has stimulated reaction and debate.

For example, some unincorporated Altadena properties in areas bordering Pasadena have been assigned the 91104 ZIP code area (known to the post office as "Pasadena").

What if those property owners should decide they wanted to be annexed into the city? All previous debates on Altadena's identity would pale in comparison to what we could expect if this was ever proposed!

— by Tim Gregory



Partial map of annexation attempts

Altadena Historical Society), Mr. Werner charged that prominent Pasadenans had decided "en masse to make Pasadena bigger."

In 1984, Pasadena proposed annexing Altadena west of Lake, promising better services and the end of "taxation without

debates have almost disappeared in Altadena over the last two decades. Most agree that Altadena does not have a sufficiently large industrial/commercial tax base to afford its own city services. The County has attempted to be more responsive to local needs

# Telling Altadena's Story

**C**ollecting and sharing Altadena's history is our mission. In this issue of *The Echo*, we begin a series focusing on what's in our Archives, how we share the knowledge we've collected, and how you can be part of this mission.

Several months ago, AHS received a large volume of material from Mrs. Elizabeth Edwards of Florida. Mrs. Edwards is a Great-Granddaughter of Albert and Helen Whitaker Brigden and a Great-Grandniece of Mary Agnes Brigden, wife of James Fillmore Crank.

The mainly original material we received contains several hundred items (photos, deeds, letters, documents, diaries, business ledgers, diplomas, etc.) pertaining to the Crank, Brigden, Whitaker and Galbreth Families who built homes and businesses in Altadena (and in what is now Pasadena) starting in the 1870s.

These families, connected by marriage, lived and managed the Fair Oaks Ranch, Brigden Ranch, Lamanda Park and other portions of the San Pasqual and Santa Anita Ranchos they came to own. Their combined businesses included ranching, vineyards, a winery, a railroad, a water company, carriage making and more.

The Elizabeth Edwards collection is just one of the many special collections that reside at the Altadena Historical Society. Here are two more:

**The Mount Lowe Railway** is one of our areas of specialization. We've assembled a significant amount of information on this once-famous railroad and resort and its founder, Thaddeus Lowe. The collection includes documents, images, maps, collectables, books, newspaper clippings and articles, and more.

**The Paul Ayers collection** consists of images, documents, and other information about Mount Lowe, Owen and Jason Brown,



**Agnes Crank**

cabin life in the old Arroyo Seco of a century ago, maps of historic hiking trails above Altadena, restoration efforts at the Rubio Canyon waterfalls in the early 2000s, and more.



**Brigden house**

## Sharing Our Collection

There's much to find in our archives: clippings, photos, maps, documents, books, newspapers, and artifacts donated over the past 85 years – all about or related to Altadena's past. We also collect information on people and current events to tell our story to future generations.

Historians, family researchers, homeowners, teachers and students have used our research facilities. Our volunteers produce newsletter articles (see this issue's articles about annexation and redlining), website content, and museum exhibits from material found in our files. Some examples:

- When AHS engaged historian Michele Zack to write *Altadena – Between Wilderness and City*, Zack found much of the information for her book in our archives.

Unfortunately, the book is no longer in print, but research copies are available at AHS.

- We created the website “Mount Lowe, a Digital History” using material found in our files.

- AHS was one of the sources of information for Los Angeles County’s Altadena African-American Historic Resources Survey, prepared by Sapphos Environmental. The company received a *LA Conservancy 2021 Projects Award* and another from the *Association of Environmental Professionals* for their work. Sapphos



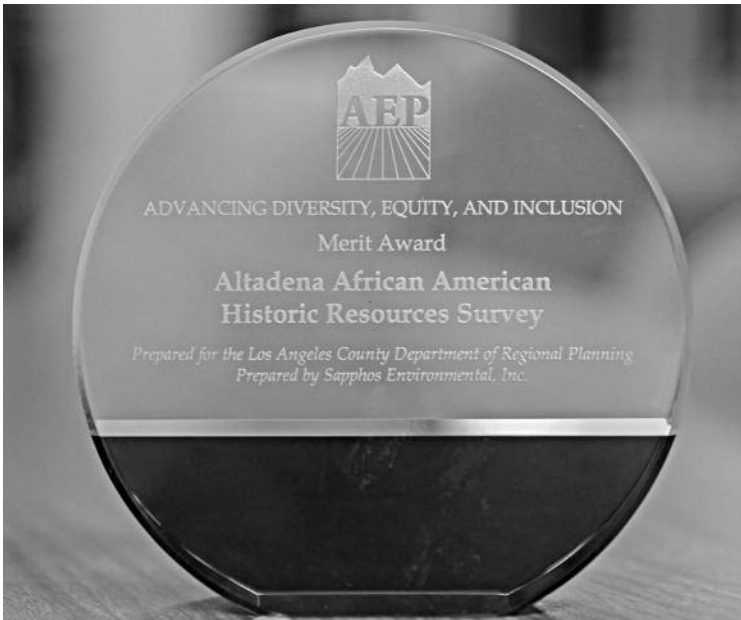
**Billboard advertising the Mount Lowe resort**

queries through e-mail. But even with our doors closed due to L.A. County Covid-19 restrictions, questions continue to come to us and research at AHS has continued as well.

Over the past year and half, we have been able to respond to a significant number of research requests, primarily via email and Facebook. We’ve answered *queries from homeowners about the history of their own house*, and we are usually able to provide at least some information using sources from both our collection and the files of Altadena Heritage.

One query asked for information on *local Tongva settlements and artifacts*. There is unfortunately very little in our archives concerning the Tongva, but we did find a set of 1930's newspaper clippings about the discovery of a pre-1700 burial ground at the Sheldon Reservoir on Arroyo Boulevard now just south of the 210 Freeway. Many of the recovered Tongva remains and artifacts were sent to the Southwest Museum.

We also answered requests for information on the *Trailfinders' School* (which used to stand at the southwest corner of El Molino



**Award shared with AHS by Sapphos Environmental**

generously shared these awards with AHS as thanks for our assistance.

Everyone interested in Altadena’s past is welcome to use our research facilities. Prior to the pandemic, our volunteers would assist visitors in accessing our files and respond to

and Mariposa), *the Loma Alta Park swimming pool*, *Owen Brown's grave*, *Robert Owens' cabin* in El Prieto Canyon, the *Cobb Estate landscaping*, and *Mama Brown's Maternity Hospital*, once located on Acacia Street.

If you have questions about anything Altadenan, or need access to our files, library, or one of our special collections, send us an email and we will follow up! And when we are able to welcome you into the archives, we look forward to helping you search through our files in person.



**Eaton Canyon outing from Flounder's family album**

## You are the Key to our Mission

The Elizabeth Edwards collection is a great example of how family papers and photos can bring past eras to life. Do you have family photos, documents, or memorabilia that can deepen our understanding of Altadena history?

You can help us add to our collection with information about ordinary Altadenans who may have left behind interesting photos or items reflecting what life was like in Altadena during their day – whether they lived in East Altadena, West Altadena or Historic Altadena (now part of Pasadena).

Here are some of the interesting and illuminating donations we've received lately. **Paul Rollins** sent us a photo album created by Marie Flounder with images of family outings at Eaton Canyon, along with his research into the Flounder family.

**Pierre Dupuy** gave us a wonderful 11x14 colored glass negative showing Echo Mountain and the San Gabriel Mountains taken from atop the McNally House. Now we need to decide how best to display it.

**Andrea Escher** sent us two photos of contractor and lighting expert Victor

Falkenau and his family via Facebook (Falkenau built several houses in Altadena and was instrumental in getting street lighting installed), and **Karen Daly** sent us two photographs of early Eaton Canyon.

**Paul Ayers** added to the already significant collection he's brought us with more information on trails near Mount Lowe.

### **Daria Topousis**

contributed several items she found on Ebay – postcards, photos, and a photo of a 1930's movie star and family, along with a Christmas Carol pamphlet from Altadena Savings & Loan. **Jean Phillips** donated the book "The John Carlos Story," written by the former Altadenan and Olympic athlete.

**Paula Wegner** brought us an Altadena Rocks poster, **Chris Jackson** gave us a Mount Lowe souvenir ashtray, and a photo of the Brown brothers came to us from **Taylor Morton**.

— *Deirdre Del Re, Eric Mulfinger, and Jean Phillips contributed to this article.*



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Altadena, CA 91001-2351

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## The Echo

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VISIT OUR BLOG!

altadenahistoricalsociety.blogspot.com

Altadena Historical Society (AHS), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization was founded to gather, preserve, and make available information about the people, places and events that have shaped Altadena's past.

**Please join or renew today!**

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