



Los Angeles City HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, Issue 1 • Winter/Spring 2019

Los Angeles City Historical Society Annual Gala

by Claudine Ajeti and Alyssa Loera

THE LOS ANGELES CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY will host its 2019 annual awards banquet at the Wilson Harding Club House in Griffith Park on Sunday, March 10, with the social hour starting at 12 pm, followed by brunch and the program. The cost to attend is \$55. Parking is free.

We are honored to have two exciting speakers, Mike Eberts, professor of journalism at Glendale Community College and author of the definitive book on Griffith Park, *Griffith Park: A Centennial History* and Carolyn Brucken, PhD, curator of the upcoming year-long exhibit on Griffith Park at the Autry Museum.

In addition, each year at the gala, the Society recognizes a set of exceptional individuals and organizations who have contributed to the greater understanding and awareness of Los Angeles history. This year, the LACHS is presenting six awards to the following individuals and organizations for their noteworthy efforts:

David G. Cameron Preservation Award –

Center for the Study of Political Graphics

J. Thomas Owen History Award –

Thomas Pinney, PhD

Miriam Matthews Ethnic History Award –

Marne L. Campbell, PhD

Honorary Life Member Award – Alan Hess

Archives Education and Advocacy Award –

Xavier Flores Schmied

Los Angeles Community Empowerment Award – Self Help Graphics & Art

For more information about the gala, check out www.lacityhistory.org or call Claudine Ajeti, gala chair at (323) 573-2840. We look forward to seeing you there! ♦



Entrance to Griffith Park • Security Pacific National Bank Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library



Griffith Park Golf Course 1936 • Los Angeles Herald Examiner Photo Collection / Los Angeles Public Library



President’s Message

January 2019

Happy New Year Everyone!

I HOPE YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES ENJOYED THE HOLIDAY SEASON. Our society continues to grow and evolve, and I hope you will appreciate the changes. The first thing you have already noticed is that you are reading this on your computer rather than in the traditional hard copy newsletter format. As we published our last newsletter in the fall of 2017, the society has made a decision to save on mailing and postage costs by moving to a digital distribution of the newsletter. Little did we know at the time that it would take us over a year to publish this, our next edition, and to finally make the transition to digital.

Anna Sklar, our newsletter editor for several years since taking over from Irene Tresun, was unable to publish an edition in 2018. Anna did an outstanding job with the newsletter and brought our organization a great deal of credit through her efforts. Our new editor will have big shoes to fill.

With that said, I would like to welcome our new editor, Maria Siciliano. Maria took on the task of editorship just this year and has really hit the ground running. Maria is a board member, and I am sure you will meet her at many of our events and meetings. Let’s all give her our support and encouragement as we enjoy the newsletter in its new digital format.

I am also excited to announce the return of our annual gala. We are moving the gala from the end of the year during the holiday season to the springtime so that we can celebrate the full year of Los Angeles history that has recently passed. A highlight of our annual gala is always our awards program, and as Angelenos, we should all appreciate that springtime is award season. Our gala this year will be held in the Wilson Harding Clubhouse at the Griffith Park Golf Course on March 10th. There are further details in this newsletter, and announcements will be coming out in the mail shortly.

Our Marie Northrop Lecture Series starts on February 10th, and we have a number of events and programs in the works.

Please look inside this edition for more details, but also please follow us through our e-mail notices, social media posts, and website to stay current with our activities. If you are not already familiar with our blog, please check it out at:

<https://www.lacityhistory.org/blog/>

Board member Geraldine Knatz is a frequent contributor to our blog, and we intend to make greater use of it going forward as a means of presenting and discussing local history.

As always, I thank you for your ongoing support.

Todd Gaydowski, President

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27th Annual Marie Northrop Lecture Series

LACHS Lectures for 2019

THE STORIES WE TELL

Public Television in Southern California

For more than 50 years, public television has been part of the Southern California landscape, sharing important stories with our communities and connecting us not only locally, but nationally and globally as well. **KCET** and **PBS SoCal**, now united to form the Public Media Group of Southern California, continue their public media commitment to inspire, educate, and foster understanding through the important stories they tell.

The 2019 lecture series will showcase some of the best of the KCET and PBS SoCal experience. We will explore the impact public television has on our community through the narratives of three acclaimed series and their creators.

Join us Sunday, February 10 at 2 p.m.
at the Mark Taper Auditorium in the Central Library

Screening and Panel:

VISITING THE CENTRAL LIBRARY WITH HUELL HOWSER

With panelists: Huell Howser Producers **PHIL NOYES** and **HARRY PALLEMBERG**
and Cameraman **LUIS FUERTE**

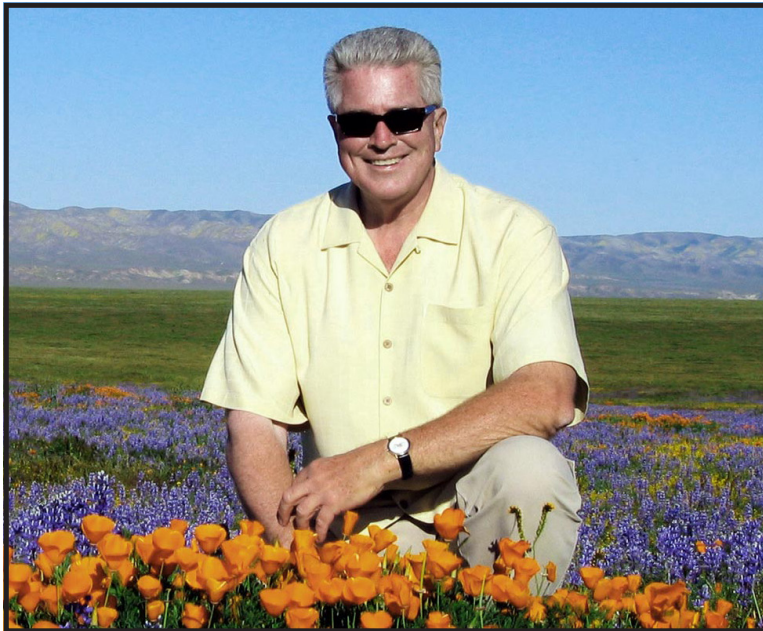


Photo courtesy of Cameron Tucker

In partnership with Chapman University, the television series featuring the beloved and iconic host Huell Howser is dedicated to preserving the culturally diverse and rich history of California.

Coming later this year:

April 14

**CELEBRATING THE PUBLIC
MEDIA TRADITION OF TEACHING
& INSPIRING OUR CHILDREN**

June 9

DISCOVER LOST LA

This lecture series is co-sponsored by Los Angeles City Historical Society and the History Department of the Richard J. Riordan Central Library.

Lectures are held in the Mark Taper Auditorium, on the first floor of the Central Library, 630 W. 5th Street, Los Angeles.

For ADA accommodations, call (213) 228-7430 at least 72 hours prior to event.

ADMITTANCE IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

The library garage is located on the east side of Flower Street, just south of 5th Street. Flower Street is one-way, south.

Parking is \$1 from 1 to 5 p.m. with a library card. (Anyone arriving too early or choosing to stay in the garage past 5 to 5:15 p.m. will be charged \$8 for the day.)

2018 Marie Northrop Lectures in Review

by Michael Holland

THE 2018 MARIE NORTHROP LECTURE SERIES has wrapped. Three presentations took place in the Mark Taper Auditorium in the downtown Los Angeles Central Library focused on the theme, “Faces of Change.” Robert Farrell, Janice Hahn, and Mike Bonin served as our guides through the careers of people who changed the city in transformative ways.

The first presentation during African American History month centered on former Councilman Robert Farrell, who started his activism at UCLA in the early 1960s. Following his time as a Freedom Rider in the summer of 1961, he became a journalist for the *California Eagle*. Farrell then went to work for Councilman Billy Mills, one of the trio of African Americans elected to citywide office in 1963. Farrell himself served the 8th District from 1974 to 1991. Creating jobs and education options for his constituents was part of his legacy. He also moved the city to adopt a policy of divesting from South Africa while racial apartheid was still the law in that country. Farrell shared his story with the LACHS audience, and we were honored to have him.

March was Women’s History month, and we welcomed former councilmember, congresswoman, and current Los Angeles County Supervisor Janice Hahn to the Taper stage to share her family history. There were stories and accomplishments of her father, the former Los Angeles councilman and County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn. We heard about the women in her life, especially her grandmother Hattie who raised her father and six older brothers as a widow. Ms. Hahn’s own mother, Ramona, kept the home, while her father, Kenneth, made changes to the physical landscape of the city, such as Dodger Stadium, and public safety enhancements that affected areas beyond Southern California, such as paramedics and freeway call boxes. Ms. Hahn informed us of her own legislative priorities and what motivates her as she continues in the family business of public service.

We closed the series with the most recent and challenging of changes to the face of Los Angeles: the emergence and contributions of the LGBTQ community at



Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

City Hall. The late Councilmember Bill Rosendahl was our primary subject, but we also brought some of the history of the 11th District as made by Marvin Braude and Cindy Miscikowski, into view as well. Our guests were current Councilmember Mike Bonin who worked with Rosendahl for many years and carries on many of his duties with his predecessor in mind. Dr. Joseph Hawkins of the ONE Archives at USC—the largest archive of LGBTQ material in the world—gave us context about the emergence of gay history and why we know next to nothing about it.

I received an email from someone wondering why I had booked a bunch of politicians for the series this year. I believe that much of our history is reflected in the people and actions of our local government officials and wanted to build upon last year’s series on the legacy of Mayor Tom Bradley in a way that would let us look both back and forward. History is not static, but dynamic and alive. I thank you if you were able to join us at the Taper. If you couldn’t make it, fear not: the lectures are available on our brand new Youtube channel that LACHS board member Louise Smith has set up. ♦

If All Politics Is Local, So Is History

by Abraham Hoffman

IF “ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL,” as a politician famously said, then the same claim can be made about history. On the first day of the semester, some students in my Los Angeles Valley College U.S. history class ask if they have to memorize “lots of dates and names.”

Usually students—and later, adults—understand “history” as what comes from a textbook they were assigned to read in middle and high school and had the dreary task of outlining chapters and studying for quizzes, tests, and the dreaded final exam. It’s as if someone sees only a tree in the winter when it’s bare of leaves and never gets to see the beauty of the tree in full bloom.

Trees and history textbooks have something in common—paper comes from trees. It comes as a surprise to many students to learn (or be told) that textbook authors depend for their information on books—monographs—dealing with specific topics on people and events that make for compelling stories—the leaves on the trees. Monographs in turn rely on well-researched articles which in turn utilize primary sources—newspapers, government reports, diaries, correspondence, and memoirs. The best monographs and articles make good use of those primary sources.

The sources, the bedrock of research, are located in such major repositories as the National Archives, the Library of Congress, state historical societies (e.g., the California Historical Society), and major universities (UCLA, Harvard, Yale, USC, et al.), as well as libraries that generally restrict their access to students rather than the general public (Bancroft Library, the Huntington Library).

However, for southern California residents there are numerous opportunities for learning about the history of the region in which they live. These opportunities include

local historical societies that vary in size and scope to small organizations staffed by volunteers who are happy to assist anyone interested in learning about the history where they live. Some societies offer memberships; most have websites giving free access to useful information sources. Larger organizations have links on their websites to valuable primary sources.

It should be noted that what follows is a sampling of local organizations and makes no attempt to provide a definitive listing. Readers of this article are invited to

submit a description of their organization to the newsletter.

The Historical Society of Southern California (HSSC) (www.thehssc.org) is the oldest historical society in the state, founded in 1883. It publishes a magazine with its title changing over the decades from *Annual Publications* to *Quarterly of the Historical Society of Southern California* to *Southern California Quarterly*, this last version being its title since 1962.

The HSSC organizes annual conferences for teachers as well as the general public with presentations on a variety of topics covering southern California history.

The Los Angeles Corral of Westerners (www.lawesterners.org), founded in 1946, is a chapter of Westerners International, with other chapters throughout the United States and in other nations. Other Westerner chapters in southern California are the Huntington Corral in Pasadena and the San Dimas Corral. The Los Angeles Corral meets on the second Wednesday of the month except for two months where it holds special events. The Corral publishes a quarterly, *Branding Iron*, with articles on southern California and Western history, plus book reviews. Each monthly meeting features a speaker, one of whom is

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On November 5, 1913, some 40,000 people turned out to see water from the Owens River delivered to Los Angeles, initiating a controversy that would last more than a century. Photo courtesy of www.waterandpower.org

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someone funded by the Corral through the Huntington Library. The website contains a file of all the *Branding Iron* issues, news of the Corral, and information on joining the Corral.

Water and Power Associates, Inc. (www.waterandpower.org) is an independent organization specializing in the history of water and power issues. Its website includes an outstanding collection of historical photographs, many with detailed captions. The website also has current and previous issues of its newsletter, offering articles and news.

The Los Angeles Central Library (www.lapl.org) offers a treasure trove of research opportunities on local history, including microfilm records of Los Angeles newspapers, extensive photo collections, and the California biography file, a collection of biographical information of prominent people dating back more than a century.

Other organizations based on specific neighborhoods provide information on meeting times, locations, archival holdings, and events. Space limitations prevent going

further into details, but the websites below will give people an easy introduction to what these organizations have to offer in local history—and they have plenty to offer.

Boyle Heights Historical Society:

www.boyleheightshistoricalsociety.org

San Pedro Historical Society:

www.sanpedrobayhistoricalsociety.com

Chatsworth Historical Society:

<http://www.chatsworthhistory.com>

Southwest Museum/Autry Museum:

www.theautry.org

And, need it be said, the Los Angeles City Historical Society has a website listing many upcoming historical events and field trips. Check out these organizations and societies and prepare to be surprised at the tremendous amount of information to help you understand the history of where it is you live in southern California. ♦

LACHS Board Approves History Student Scholarship Program

by Todd Gaydowski, President

THE LACHS BOARD HAS UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED implementation of a program to award scholarships to outstanding students in history at local universities and colleges. The Board has appropriated \$3,000 in seed money to award six \$500 scholarships in Spring and Summer 2019. It is hoped that LACHS members who wish to support the program will donate additional funds for next year's awards. Please note that 100% of all donations will go to students. Administrative functions and any related costs will be borne by LACHS and its volunteers. Future LACHS dues notices and newsletters will provide the ability to donate directly to the scholarship fund.

Students who receive awards will be asked to submit a school paper or project for presentation or publication in a future LACHS newsletter.

This year's recipients will be selected by their respective schools through the various scholarship selection programs already in place, including the history honorary society local branch of Phi Alpha Theta. Future winners may also be selected by competition through essays or other presentations submitted directly to the Board, or by other means to be determined.

The Board recognizes the critical value of the study and analysis of history to our democracy and seeks to encourage outstanding students in their studies of history. We hope that this new program facilitates the participation of like-minded members who wish to join with us by donating.

Best wishes for the new year, and thank you for your support of our efforts to promote Los Angeles history. Please let us know your thoughts and suggestions for improvement. ♦



Los Angeles's Original "Bridge to Nowhere"

by Geraldine Knatz

LONG BEFORE THE TERM "BRIDGE TO NOWHERE" became an object of national ridicule in the early twenty-first century's fight over congressional earmarking for impractical and unnecessary infrastructure projects, Los Angeles's own Vincent Thomas Bridge was at one time dubbed a "bridge to nowhere." Championed by Assemblyman Vincent Thomas who served 19 terms in California's State Legislature, beginning in 1941, Thomas began his political career by introducing legislation to allow San Pedro to secede from Los Angeles. It would be construction of the bridge that bears his name in San Pedro, however, that would become his lasting legacy.

The fight to build the bridge was not easy. Thomas's detractors mocked his efforts, calling the project the "bridge to nowhere." Thomas, a resident of San Pedro, had campaigned on a promise to replace the ferry that thousands of cannery workers used to commute to and from their jobs on Terminal Island. It took half his legislative career, sixteen pieces of legislation, and three governors before Thomas secured his dream. Ground was broken on the new \$21-million-dollar bridge on May 28, 1960, and the bridge opened in 1963.

Thomas would prove his detractors wrong as bridge traffic exceeded all expectations, raising enough revenue to remove its toll booths after only twenty years instead of the original forecasted forty. At the bridge's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 1988, events were held to raise funds for permanent decorative lights for the bridge's main cables. Thomas had died in 1980 but his wife Mary (née Di Carlo) had a commemorative coin made as a memento.



From left to right, Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown, State Senator Richard Richards, Lieutenant Governor Glenn M. Anderson and Assemblyman Vincent Thomas break ground for construction of the Vincent Thomas Bridge on May 28, 1960.

Later copies of the medal were sold to raise money for the San Pedro Bay Historical Society.

In January 2005, after 17 years of planning and fundraising, 160 Blue LED lamps, powered by solar power, were installed at a cost of over \$1 million. ♦



A Pioneering Los Angeles Business: The Los Angeles Furniture Company

by Geraldine Knatz

LOS ANGELES WAS NOT MUCH MORE THAN A PUEBLO when J. C. Dotter arrived in 1859 from Kansas, via Salt Lake City. He started a furniture business in the 1860's just off the old plaza on Commercial Street. He and his early partners would supply furniture to the surrounding haciendas, their stock coming by ship to San Francisco and then by wagon down to Los Angeles.

In 1870, Dotter hooked up with a new partner, C. H. Bradley, calling their operation the Los Angeles Furniture Company. They moved the business to 259 and 261 Main Street. In January 1884, a candle dripping tallow caused a devastating fire in the upholstery department. Smoke poured from the upper floors of the building owned by I.W. Hellman, but employees escaped unscathed. Losses were estimated at \$150,000 and were not fully insured. Yet, the business survived. Dotter and Bradley incorporated in 1891, installing H.H. Markham as its president. Markham would keep an office at the furniture company during his stint as California governor.

Twelve years after the fire, in 1896, the Los Angeles Police Commission received a report from Fire Chief Walter S. Moore regarding which buildings had not yet installed fire



Los Angeles Furniture Co.

Wardrobe Couches.

Convenient furniture for almost any place, especially the seaside cottage, or where it is desirable to economize space.

Here's one for eight dollars, covered with cretonne or denim, shape and style as shown in the picture. More elaborate ones at \$10.00, \$12.50, \$15.00, and \$17.50.

We have plain couches covered with denim, with 18 steel tempered springs for \$4.50. These are as big as a single bed.

225, 227, 229 SOUTH BROADWAY
OPPOSITE CITY HALL.

escapes as required by city ordinance. One would imagine that the furniture company would be one of the first to comply considering its history and the flammability of its goods. Surprisingly, however, the Los Angeles Furniture Company, now located at 225-227 South Broadway, still had no fire escapes. Chief Moore publicly reported the company's intention to comply.

The company moved many times, to Spring Street and later Hill Street. They were not the only furniture company in downtown Los Angeles. In 1904 the *Furniture Journal* reported that the Los Angeles Furniture Company furnished the California Club while its competitor Barker Bros. did the same for the Jonathan Club. Both organizations would spend more than \$30,000 furnishing their clubhouses. By the mid-1930's, the Los Angeles Furniture Company showroom was located at 724 S. Broadway. Here they would use copper tokens to promote one dollar off a purchase of \$25 or more. Like other early

Los Angeles retailers, the Los Angeles Furniture Company no longer exists, but it retains its status as one of the pioneering retailers of Los Angeles. ♦



How Lebec Got Its Name

by Gerry K. Hoppe

IF YOU COULD TRAVEL BACK IN TIME to the 1830s and ride a horse through *Canada del Tejon* (Badger Canyon), you would see the mountain region looked very much like it does today. Before the area was garrisoned as a U.S. Army outpost in 1854, the main travel route to central California's San Joaquin Valley passed north from Elizabeth Lake (then known as *Laguna de Chico Lopez*), across Antelope Valley, down into Tejon Canyon and west along Tejon Creek into the lands of Rancho Tejon.

As you time-traveled your way along the path of today's Grapevine Pass (Interstate 5) from Los Angeles toward Bakersfield, you would notice the multitude of oak trees in the valleys. Most animals would appear the same as they might seem today—with one notable exception: the California grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos californicus*). Scientists of the day coined a more descriptive name for the bear species: *Ursus arctos horribilis*. Many of these bears were horribly massive, weighing between 1,200 and 2,000 pounds.

According to the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, grizzlies once ranged from Alaska to as far south as Mexico and west from California to the Great Plains. At their peak, around the 1820s and 1830s, an estimated 10,000 grizzlies roamed California, making its grizzly population one of the densest in North America. Today grizzlies are an endangered species found in small pockets of only four U.S. states: Washington, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. A few healthier grizzly populations



TEJON RANCH

have survived in the wilds of Alaska and western Canada. In California, they are considered extinct; no grizzlies have been seen in this state since 1924.

California's *horribilis* bear was a subspecies of grizzly known as the North American brown bear. Similar to Kodiak brown bears of Alaska and to grizzlies that still live in the Rocky Mountains, the California grizzly's habitat during the 1800s was central and southern California. The much smaller black bear (*Ursus americanus*) lived primarily in northern California, but in the Tehachapis region, the ranges of the two bear species overlapped. Oak-studded Tejon Pass was definitely bear country. The trees's acorns were a staple food for bears. Although grizzlies would eat meat when it was available, their usual diet was vegetarian.

At the top of the food chain, grizzlies often stood their ground against human intruders. Most of the written reports of attacks by California grizzlies involved mother bears protecting their cubs or wounded bears defending themselves against hunters who had shot them. The latter may have been the situation in the earliest recorded grizzly attack. A man named Peter Lebeck, who was passing through the Tehachapi region, came to an untimely end on October 17, 1837. Years later, the epitaph his traveling companions carved into a tree was discovered on property that eventually became Fort Tejon, a U.S. Army post established in 1854.

We know all this because Lebeck's friends buried him next to a large oak. They hewed a smooth surface on

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A California grizzly captured in 1889 was named "Monarch" and put on exhibit in San Francisco for 22 years until his death in 1911. Photo courtesy of California Academy of Sciences.

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the tree's bark and took the time to engrave these words on it: "IHS PETER LEBECK KILLED BY A X BEAR OCT. 17 1837." Lebeck's companions continued on their way and possibly never returned.

Over the next few decades, the inscribed words were sighted, reported, and interpreted by numerous individuals.

"IHS" is a common Catholic symbol, an abbreviation of the name Jesus in Greek. As for the "X," the California grizzly was often referred to as an "X bear" because of the X shape of lighter hair found along its back and shoulders.

As early as 1842, the *Kern County Weekly Courier* of Bakersfield printed a news story, dated July 11, 1874, in which a man who was not identified reported seeing the engraved inscription. Five years later, three members of the short-lived Mormon Battalion—a U.S. military unit commissioned during the U.S.-Mexican War and then discharged from the U.S. Army in Los Angeles—reported seeing the tree inscription. Henry Bigler, Elisha Averett, and Daniel Tyler, together with other battalion veterans, were bound for Sutter's Fort in the Sacramento Valley when they passed through the Grapevine canyon.

Bigler wrote in his diary entry for July 31, 1847, that he saw the Lebeck inscription on an oak tree they camped near, adding that "nearby was the skull and bleached bones of a grizzly bear." Daniel Tyler corroborated the discovery in his August 1 journal entry, "we ... encamped in a beautiful valley where we found, cut in the bark of a tree, the name of Peter Lebeck, who was killed by a Grizzly bear on the 17th of October 1837. The skull and other bone of the bear, which was killed by Lebeck's comrades, were still lying on the ground nearby."

In 1853, Lieutenant R.S. Williamson



The California state flag features a grizzly bear—note the distinctive hump on its back that is not seen in black bears.

reported seeing the inscription after camping in the same oak grove while he was on a mapping mission for a practicable railway route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. A geologist in Williamson's party, William P. Blake, also recorded his impressions: "The surface of the valley is covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, and a deep soil supports groves of magnificent oak trees,

some of them eight feet in diameter. ... One of the large oaks bears the following inscription, cut deeply into the hard wood: 'Peter le Beck, killed by a bear, Oct. 17, 1837.' A broad, flat surface was hewed upon the trunk, and well smoothed off before the letters were cut. It is a durable monument."

The spelling of Lebeck's name was subject to interpretation through the years—from Lebeck to LeBeck, Lebecque and finally Lebec, the name adopted years later when a hotel and a post office were established near the site. When a five-franc silver coin dated 1837 was discovered on the Tejon property decades later, it was presumed a link to Lebeck, that he must have been French or French Canadian. The silver piece was on the Southwest Museum's 1921 accessions list in its annual report dated 1922.

In 1954, Fort Tejon was established on the property. That year, Lt. Edward Fitzgerald Beale and *Los Angeles Star* editor William A. Wallace camped together in the valley and both reported seeing the Lebeck inscription. Months later, Dr. William Edgar, a physician assigned to the fort, lived in a tent pitched beneath the marked oak tree. He questioned local residents after noticing the abundance of grizzlies in the area: "I enquired of the Indians living at the mouth of the canada [Grapevine canyon], who were the only inhabitants there at the time." In Wallace's account, he was



Peter Lebeck Tree Bark Epitaph.
Photo taken by Denise Boose.

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told that “many years ago some trappers were passing through the Canada, when seeing so many bears one of the party went off by himself in pursuit of a large grizzly and shot it under that tree, and supposing that he had killed it, went up to it, when it caught and killed him, and his companions buried him under the tree, upon which they cut his epitaph.”

The inscription was reported again in 1856, in Volume V of the *Pacific Railroad Surveys*, under “Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, made under the direction of the Secretary of War, in 1853-4.”

Years passed. The oak tree’s outer layer repaired itself, until the 52-year-old inscription was covered with new growth three inches thick. Nothing more was heard of it until the summer of 1889, when a group of outdoor enthusiasts called the Foxtail Rangers went to Tejon on a two-week camping trip to escape Bakersfield’s heat. According to an account printed in *Bakersfield* magazine dated June 7, 2011, “This group of Bakersfield men, women, and children embarked on an excursion in 1889 to Fort Tejon that would become a part of history. While the Rangers were gathered around a shady oak for a picnic, Ella Houghton, a school teacher, noticed a split in the bark where she could see a distinct letter cut into the tree. They pulled back three big pieces of bark and uncovered the carving; the bark had a mirror image of the letters.”

The Foxtail Rangers had rediscovered the oak tree’s secret. Although the tree’s outer layer had grown over the inscription, a reverse image of the words could be felt—in relief—on the inside of pieces of loose bark. According to an account published in San Francisco’s *The Weekly*

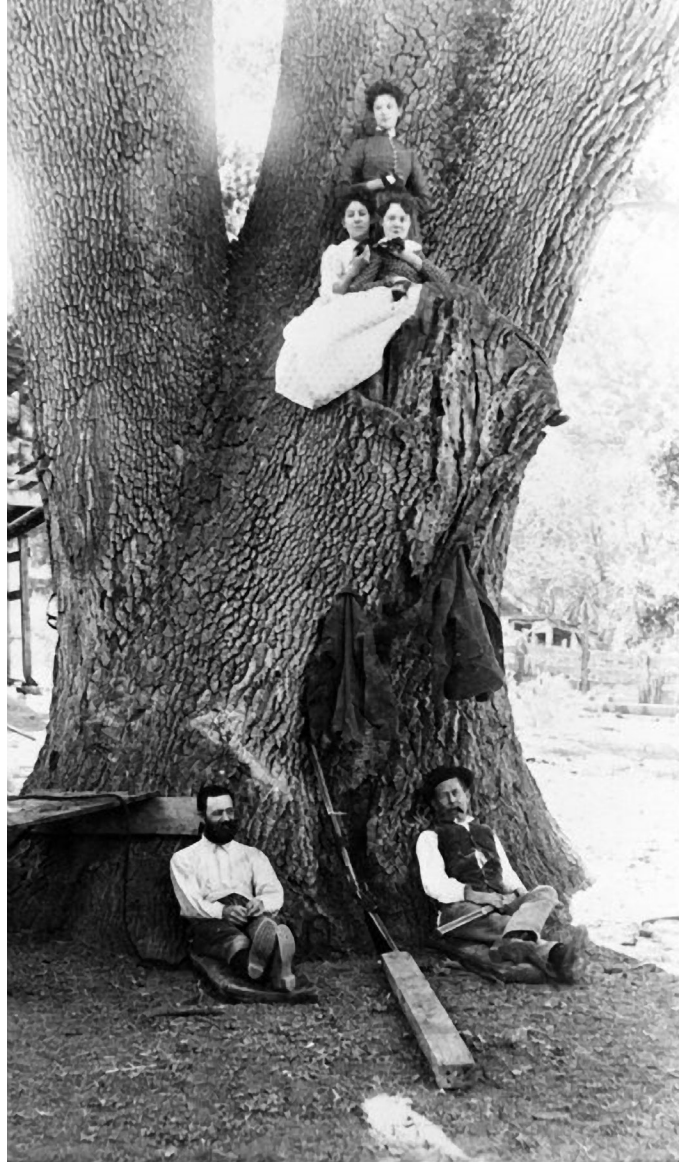


Image from Kern County Local History Photograph Collection. Kern County Library, Bakersfield, California. Photo was taken circa 1890.

Breeder and Sportsman on August 9, 1890, the Foxtail Rangers returned to the scene that summer, armed with permission from the property owners to search for the grave.

A place on the east side of the oak and inscription had been chosen and carefully laid out by compass. Each man took a five-minute turn at digging, using a pick or a shovel. At nearly four feet from the surface, they found a skeleton of a man who must have been wearing buckskin. There was no trace of metal in the burial site.

A report published in the *San Francisco Morning Call* on July 27, 1890, continued the account: “About four feet below the surface the skeleton of Peter Lebeck was found in a remarkable state of preservation. The remains had been carefully laid in the tomb, the left arm crossed

upon his breast. The right fore-arm was missing, also both hands and both feet. Two ribs were broken. Otherwise in its fifty-three years of quiet rest beneath the sod the skeleton was intact. The skull was wide, deep, and with a lofty dome. The man himself must have been of great stature, at least 6 feet high, and broad-shouldered in proportion.”

“Great pains were taken to move the bones as little as possible from their bed of earth. The dirt was carefully scraped away so as to bring out the shape of the skeleton, and when this was done several negatives were taken. After this the remains were recovered, the mound heaped up and covered with flowers by the ladies, and then a temporary paling was erected around the remade grave.”

Because the grave inscription was written in English, it was initially thought Lebeck was a French-Canadian wanderer and trapper who might have been associated with the Hudson Bay Company. This no longer seems likely. The

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The Foxtail Rangers in 1890. • Kern County Local History Photograph Collection. Kern County Library, Bakersfield, California.

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British-owned company operated out of Vancouver (British Columbia) and Fort Astoria (Oregon), and their trappers are not known to have gone any farther south than central California (San Joaquin Valley).

A more probable theory is that Lebeck belonged to a band of mercenaries led by Jean-Baptiste Chalifoux, a French-Canadian renegade who had entered California from New Mexico. His men, known as the Chaguanosos, were reported to be in San Joaquin Valley—possibly as far south as Grapevine Canyon—in 1837. These were mainly French-Canadians, with some Indians and Americans from New Mexico among them. When they were not fur trapping, they were stealing horses. Soldiers of fortune were not uncommon in that period. Chalifoux had been recruited by Mexico's governor to protect the central region from Alta California troops in the north. In exchange, they were promised all the beavers they could hunt.

The Chaguanosos became known as one of the

strongest forces in California. In October 1837, the month of Peter Lebeck's death, the group is known to have raided Mission Santa Ynez, taking horses. This is the only record of who would have been in the Tejon area in October of 1837. If Peter Lebeck were indeed a member of Chalifoux's gang, he probably encountered the grizzly bear that killed him either as he was going to or coming from one of the Chaguanoso raids.

Apparently, his loss was significant to those who traveled with him. They carefully prepared his grave at the foot of a sturdy oak and spent a sizable length of time carving his epitaph on the tree. Whoever wrote the inscription used English words rather than French, and possibly misspelled his name when sounding it out phonetically. Peter Lebeck's friends did everything in their power to make his final resting place known to future generations, and they succeeded. He is Kern County's most famous mountain man. ♦

The City's First Road

by John E. Fisher

TODAY, LOS ANGELES HAS 160 miles of freeways and 6,500 miles of streets, which includes nearly 1,500 miles of multi-lane thoroughfares. These are the vital arteries that serve the nation's second largest city.

While you might think that the city's road system had very humble beginnings, it may be surprising to learn that it was commissioned by royalty, specifically, the king of Spain. The city's first road would link the presidios, missions, and pueblos of California.

Spanish control of Alta California began in 1769 when Gaspar de Pórtola was ordered by King Carlos III to explore and occupy new territory and establish presidios for protection. These presidios would represent Spain's claim

In 1777, Felipe de Neve recommended the formation of two agricultural settlements to support the presidios. The settlements were to be known as pueblos. By order of King Carlos III, the first was established in San Jose in 1777. The second was established on the banks of the Porciuncula (Los Angeles River) when 44 settlers from Baja California arrived in groups from the nearby San Gabriel Mission. On September 4, 1781, planting fields and house lots were distributed to the settlers, officially beginning the new El Pueblo de la Reyna de los Angeles.

The dirt road connecting the presidios, missions, and pueblos would become known as El Camino Real, which literally translates to The Royal Road, more popularly

known as The King's Highway. Today, the exact path they followed is uncertain. However, their diaries suggest that they overlooked the Arroyo Seco in present day South Pasadena, crossed the Porciuncula (Los Angeles River) near today's North Broadway Bridge, noted the tar near today's La Brea Tar Pits near Wilshire Boulevard, hiked through Sepulveda Pass, and walked near present-day Ventura Boulevard. Over time, the original El Camino Real would be replaced by new paths, dirt roads, a network of paved streets, and modern freeways. The route that most closely approximates historic El Camino Real is Interstate 5 between San Diego and Los Angeles and US 101 between



El Camino Real linking the California missions.

to Alta California if challenged by England or Russia. By 1782, four presidios were established in San Diego, Santa Barbara, Monterey, and San Francisco.

Traveling with Pórtola was Father Junípero Serra, who established the first mission. He would establish nine missions, and by 1823, there would be 21 missions in all. Eventually, each mission was about 30 miles apart or a one-day journey.

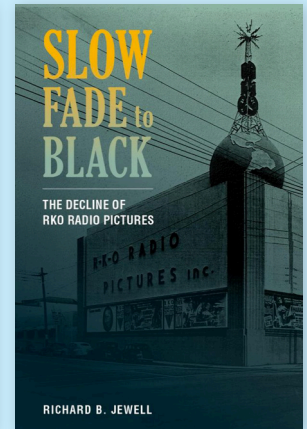
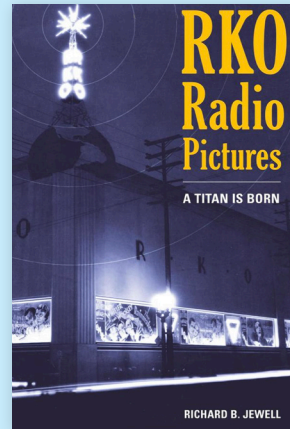
Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Several sites of the 21 missions, four presidios, and two pueblos have become major coastal cities of California, including Los Angeles and San Francisco. They can all trace their origins to California's first, best known, and most regal of highways, El Camino Real. ♦

BOOK
REVIEWS

RKO RADIO PICTURES: *A Titan is Born*, by Richard B. Jewell. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012. 330 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index. Paper, \$26.28.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK: *The Decline of RKO Radio Pictures*, by Richard B. Jewell. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016. 265 pp. Illustrations, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index. Paper, \$34.95. 252 pp. Illustrations, Hardbound, \$27.00.



by Abraham Hoffman

TAKEN TOGETHER (and they should be to get the full story), Richard B. Jewell's books trace the history of RKO from its beginnings in 1928 to its demise in 1957, the studio property ironically bought by Lucille Ball who had been a minor actress at the studio in the 1930s. Along with husband Desi Arnaz, they created Desilu, a sort of Phoenix from the ashes of a studio that in many ways brought about its own end.

Unlike other studios—Louis B. Mayer at MGM, the Warner Brothers, and Harry Cohn at Columbia who held long tenures as production heads—RKO operated under a rapid succession of executives. “RKO” was the acronym for Radio-Keith-Orpheum, bringing under one roof David Sarnoff of RCA and leaders from film and vaudeville circuits. Over the years, the studio's biggest headaches involved the impatience of the New York business office to show shareholders a profit, the frequent replacement of one studio head by another who most of the time had little or no experience in film production, and the inconsistent successes and failures of the studio's pictures. Those that failed at the box office caused huge deficits that in the 1930s placed the studio into receivership.

Despite its problems, RKO produced some of the motion picture industry's greatest films, among them *Citizen Kane*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, the series of musicals starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, *Gunga Din*, and many others. Unfortunately, RKO never managed to establish a stable of A-level stars, with some of its best pictures starring actors and actresses on loan from other studios. *Citizen Kane*, rated by many critics as one of the

best films ever made (some even argue *the* best film), didn't make a profit. The studio chopped up Welles's *Magnificent Ambersons* and allowed Welles to run up enormous bills on an ill-fated documentary, *It's All True*, in Latin America, while other studios made successful pictures during World War II.

The first volume carries RKO from its beginning until 1942. Jewell examines RKO in chronological order, the chapter titles containing the names of the executives taking on the thankless task of running the studio, none lasting more than two years. Howard Hughes dominates the second volume. Between 1948 and 1955, Hughes ran the studio into the ground. RKO also had to deal with the House Un-American Activities Committee investigation into communist subversion in the film industry, as did other studios. When Hughes sold the studio (for a profit), the buyers had no idea how to run a studio with all its complexities of screenplay writers, behind-the-scenes camera technicians, necessity to groom potential stars, film distribution, et cetera. By 1957, RKO's property proved more valuable than its continuation as a studio; Desilu would utilize it mainly for television production.

Besides Sarnoff and Hughes, Jewell provides an interesting cast of characters that include Joseph Kennedy, Nelson Rockefeller, David O. Selznick, Pandro S. Berman, and a succession of lesser known executives who tried to make RKO a consistently reliable studio that could make quality films. Jewell stresses the point that his books present a business history of RKO, but this focus doesn't prevent him from writing a fascinating study that readers will find difficult to pause between finishing one chapter and starting the next one. ♦

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**Volume 39, Issue 1
Winter/Spring 2019**

Los Angeles City Historical Society

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