



Los Angeles City HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, Issue 2 • Summer 2019

The 2019 Marie Northrop Lecture Series

by Michael Holland

THE MARIE NORTHROP LECTURE SERIES for 2019 took place at the Mark Taper Auditorium in the Los Angeles Central Library this spring. LACHS partnered with KCET/PBS SoCal (now known as Public Media Group of Southern California) for this series of events focused on the influence of public television in Los Angeles.

On February 10, Huell Howser producers Phil Noyes and Harry Pallenberg and cameraman Luis Fuerte participated in a panel discussion and screening of the work of iconic TV host Huell Howser who was dedicated to preserving the culturally diverse and rich history of California. On April 14, audiences were treated to an interview of producer Caryn Capotosto followed by a screening of *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* about the life and work of beloved children's TV host Fred Rogers.

The concluding presentation on June 9 focused on a special local show, *Lost LA*, and featured an exciting new history curriculum being introduced to California educators. An episode of *Lost LA* called "Borderlands" was screened, followed by a discussion of the show with executive producer Matthew Crotty. A new history curriculum developed by the California Historical Society, UCLA, and USC was introduced by Daniel Diaz of UCLA and demonstrated by El Rancho High School history teacher Emily Waldron, who is involved in the rollout. Waldron led a lively Q&A with audience members that included other educators and historians. ♦

Top: *Lost LA* program panel (left to right): El Rancho High School teacher Emily Waldron, UCLA History-Geography Project director Daniel Diaz, moderator Michael Holland, and *Lost LA* executive producer Matthew Crotty. Photo: Maria Siciliano

Middle: *Won't You Be My Neighbor?* producer Caryn Capotosto. Photo: Amanda Martin/KCET/PBS SoCal

Bottom: Huell Howser producers Harry Pallenberg & Philip Noyes; Huell Howser cameraman Luis Fuerte; LA City Archivist Michael Holland. Photo: Amanda Martin/KCET/PBS SoCal





President's Message

July 2019

Greetings Everyone!

SUMMER IS HERE, and I hope you and your families are making fun vacation plans. I feel that LACHS has much to be proud of this year. We returned to hosting our annual gala and to publication of our newsletter, now in its second electronic edition! Additionally, we initiated our scholarship program in 2019, and I am pleased to announce that we made six awards to worthy university students at the California State Universities of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Northridge. There is an article about the awardees below, and we hope to share further information on their research in the future.

We wrapped up our Marie Northrop Lecture series

for 2019 on June 9 with a presentation on *Lost LA*, which culminated our series on the theme of KCET programming relating to Los Angeles. I would like to recognize the efforts of board member Michael Holland for coordinating the Marie Northrop Lecture Series over the past four years. Michael has done an excellent job of incorporating discussion panels and enhanced use of audio and video materials during his time with the series. As Michael takes a break from coordinating the series to pursue further academic studies, we will have quite a job to fill his position.

As always, I thank you for your ongoing support, and let us continue to make 2019 a great year for LACHS!

Todd Gaydowski, President

Congratulations History Student Scholarship Recipients

THIS SPRING, the Los Angeles City Historical Society awarded scholarships to six worthy students for their interesting historical research:

Cal State University Los Angeles

Robert Bates *The Progressive Legacies from the 1948 Progressive Party and the 1968 Peace and Freedom Party Presidential Campaigns*

Ian Spik *Fear of a Black Picket: Anxieties about Racial Equality at Cal State Los Angeles in the 1960s*

Cal State University Long Beach

Taylor Stack *(Sub)Urban Struggle: Youth Culture and the Search for Meaning and Space in Suburban Southern California, 1980-1986*

Matthew Lindsay *Life was Once a Picnic in Long Beach: Hawkeye Traditions and Their Cultural Assimilation to Southern California*

Cal State University Northridge

Daniel Aburto *From "Unfit for Human Consumption" to Taco Tuesday: Mexican Food in Los Angeles from the Early 1900s*

Arnoldo Toral, Jr. *They Have Always Existed: The Recent Success of Black Filmmakers in the Contemporary Era*

To read the papers on the LACHS website, go to: www.lacityhistory.org/scholarship. In addition to their scholarships, students were awarded a one-year membership to LACHS. ♦

A Los Angeles Landslide Everyone Knew Would Happen

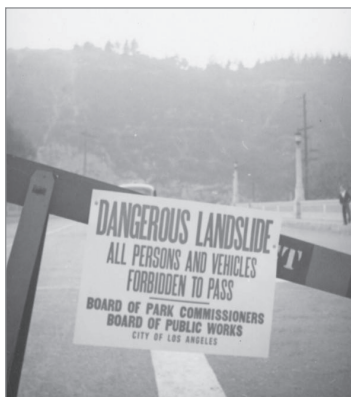
by Abraham Hoffman

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCED the biggest landslide in its history in November 1937. But the landslide was not caused by an earthquake, and everyone knew it was going to happen. It was a few days earlier, on October 29, when scenic Elysian Park Drive, north of downtown Los Angeles, mysteriously dropped three inches. While park authorities roped off the area and stopped motorists from driving in the vicinity, city officials pondered the problem.

The earth shift was atop the bluff overlooking Riverside Drive and the Los Angeles River, only a few hundred yards from where the Arroyo Seco Parkway fed traffic into downtown Los Angeles through the Figueroa tunnels. The president of the Board of City Park Commissioners played down the event at first, “From indications it appears that it is nothing but a settling of the earth, which has been occurring at frequent intervals, over many sections of the various mountain parks.”

It soon became obvious that the settling of the earth was anything but routine. By November 15, Elysian Park Drive dropped another three inches, jagged cracks almost a foot wide had appeared, and the sinking was continuing at the rate of a quarter inch each day. When the rate of slippage increased to an inch a day, the “walking mountain” became daily front-page news.

Everyone had a theory about the cause of the earth movement. Old-timers recalled that subterranean channels had been bored into the hills many years earlier to divert water from the Los Angeles River. Some park officials blamed recent excavations in the construction of Riverside



Drive. Most fantastic of all were stories of secret tunnels dug by Californians who hid their gold under the mountain when California became a U.S. state!

The city drained the Elysian Reservoir to ease pressure on the mountain, but new cracks appeared anyway. On November 21, an estimated seven tons of muddy earth slid down onto Riverside Drive, but the real landslide was still to come.

It happened five days later. More than 300 feet at the crest of the hill gave way, sending an estimated million tons of dirt, power lines, boulders, and debris tumbling down onto Riverside Drive. All that was left was a semi-circular arc on the side of the mountain where the earth had slipped. The avalanche relocated Riverside Drive, where it had not been buried, to the river bed.

Though the worst was over, smaller slides continued over the next few days. Besides immediate repair, the city ultimately redesigned the entire area. The Arroyo Seco Parkway became the Pasadena Freeway with three inbound lanes next to the Figueroa tunnels that were converted to outbound traffic. A new road was cut for inbound traffic. Millions of tons of earth were removed to stop possible future landslides.

Today, thousands of motorists drive into the downtown area on the Golden State and Pasadena Freeways, many likely heading for Dodger Stadium. In doing so, they are passing unknowingly by the corner of Elysian Park—where the earth really moved. ♦

Above: Warning sign on the Riverside Drive–Dayton Avenue Bridge.

Left: Watching the landslide from the Riverside Drive–Dayton Avenue Bridge. • *Right:* Riverside Drive in pieces after the landslide.
Photos: Herman Schultheis/Los Angeles Photographers Collection/Los Angeles Public Library



Angels' Flight Story

by John E. Fisher

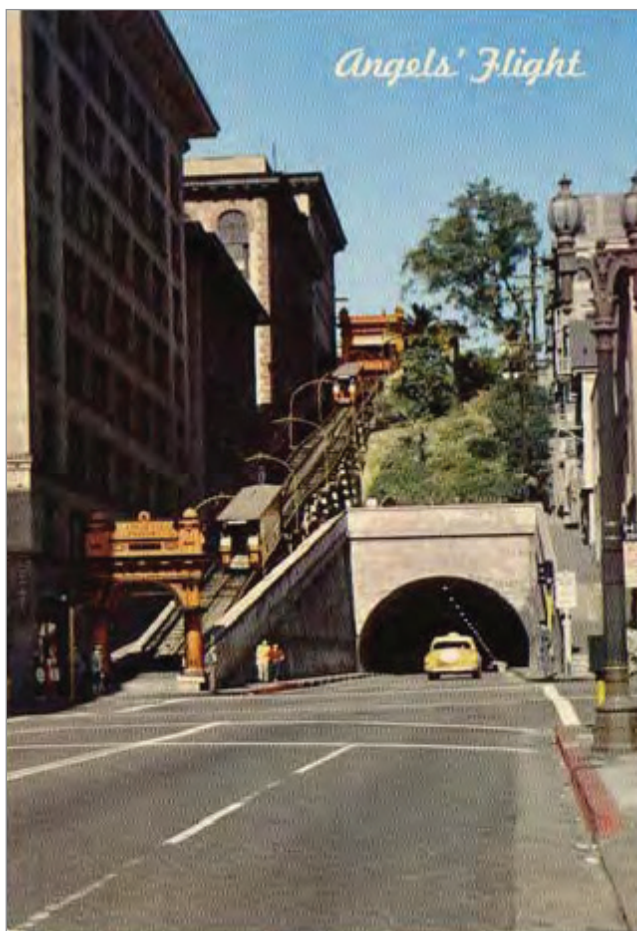
IT IS ONE OF LOS ANGELES'S true landmarks, a link to the past and a vintage form of railroad known as Angels' Flight.

At the turn of the 19th century, the area south of 1st Street and east of Hill Street was changing from residential to commercial development. A new city hall was being built on Broadway between 2nd Street and 3rd Street, making this area the business center of the city. Just to the west, there were magnificent Victorian mansions on Bunker Hill, owned by the socially prominent families of Bradbury, Coulter, Crocker, Larronde, and Widney. Because of the steep incline, however, many other families relocated elsewhere.

In 1901, the boring of the 3rd Street tunnel was completed, which provided quicker access to the area west of Bunker Hill. It did not, however, link up with Bunker Hill itself. It was at this time that Colonel J. W. Eddy considered the possibility of a funicular to Millionaire's Row at the top of Bunker Hill.

James Ward Eddy practiced law in Chicago, became a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, and campaigned for him. When the Civil War erupted, Eddy enlisted in a battalion recruited to protect the nation's capital. He would later serve in the Illinois state legislature, then as a construction engineer for the Mineral Belt Railroad in Arizona, and as a surveyor for the Kern River and Los Angeles Electric Power Company. At age 69, he took the risk of financing and building Angels' Flight.

The city granted him a franchise to run an electric cable railway along the 3rd Street right-of-way between Hill Street and Olive Street. Fearing, however, that the new railway might be considered a monopoly, the city



The setting of Angels' Flight in the 1950's.

required Eddy to construct a free stairway on the north side of the 3rd Street right-of-way. The stairway consisted of 123 steps and ten ramps and landings. On December 31, 1901, the new railway was officially opened.

In the manner of fine railway cars, the Angels' Flight cars were named "Olivet" and "Sinai" and were painted a "saintly" white. An archway greeted passengers at the Hill Street entrance while a canopy covered the plaza at the Olive Street summit. It was fancifully called Angels' Rest and featured a 100-foot observation tower equipped with a camera obscura.

The grand homes on Bunker Hill eventually fell out of fashion, then into disrepair, and finally became rooming homes. The Community Redevelopment Agency

(CRA), created to redevelop Bunker Hill into a high-rise office center, proceeded to buy and demolish homes as they became vacant. In 1962, they took title to Angels' Flight and by 1966, owned virtually all properties on Bunker Hill.

As a result of the regrading of the Hill that occurred with redevelopment, it was necessary to close Angels' Flight on May 18, 1969. The CRA promised to someday rebuild Angels' Flight, and that promise was fulfilled 27 years later on February 24, 1996, one-half block to the south.

It would run five more years, just shy of its centennial, when a malfunction resulted in the death of a passenger on February 1, 2001. It remained closed for nine years. During the closure, the braking and mechanical systems were redesigned to reflect the original design. Finally, on March 15, 2010, the icon of transportation nostalgia, Angels' Flight, resumed operation. ♦

Edendale: The First “Hollywood”

by Richard Ross

MOST PEOPLE THINK MOTION PICTURES were born in Hollywood. After all, it has long been part of movie lore that the first movie made in Hollywood was Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Squaw Man*, produced in 1914. But before DeMille had set foot in Hollywood, there was already a thriving movie industry several miles to the east in Edendale.

Edendale is the old name for the neighborhood northwest of downtown Los Angeles that encompasses Los Feliz, Silver Lake, and parts of Echo Park and Elysian Park. During the early days of the silent movie era, Edendale

shoot non-Edison cameras . . . and sometimes, cameramen. Independent filmmakers who wanted to avoid the wrath of Edison flocked to the West Coast. Selig and Boggs set up shop at the northeast corner of Clifford and Allesandro Streets, later renamed Glendale Boulevard.

Selig was responsible for many film firsts, including the first two-reel movie, the first two-hour movie, the first horror movie, and the cliffhanger. He signed and featured some of the earliest stars of the time. Tom Mix, the most famous cowboy movie star of the silent era (think John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, without sound), made his first movie at the studio.

Tom Mix would later establish his own movie studio about a mile north of the Selig studio in what is now the shopping center on Glendale Boulevard between Silver Lake Boulevard and Fletcher where the Whole Foods 365 is located. The studio, known as “Mixville,” had just about everything you would need to make a Western, featuring a frontier town, complete with dusty streets, a saloon, a bank, a jail, an Indian village, and even a fake desert.

Shortly after Selig-Polyscope began productions in Edendale, other motion picture producers arrived on the scene. Before long, several film studios were operating on Allesandro Street, including an early incarnation of Fox studios and the

Norbig Film Company. Director Hal Roach, later to gain fame with the “Our Gang”/“Little Rascals” shorts, honed his craft at Norbig, working with stars such as Harold Lloyd. Other studios based in Edendale included French & Forman, Bronx, Reaguer Productions, Western Arts, Westwood Productions, and Harry Keaton.

The New York Motion Picture Company established a studio at 1712 Allesandro Street between Aaron Street and Effie Street. Operating under the name Bison Pictures, the studio churned out one-reel Westerns. Famed director and producer Thomas R. Ince worked there for a short time.

In 1912, the Bison Pictures lot was bought by the king of slapstick comedy, Mack Sennett, a recent transplant

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Selig Studio in Edendale.

Photo: Security Pacific National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library

was the center for film production, home to the Keystone Cops and the site of many movie firsts, including Charlie Chaplin’s first movie, the first feature-length comedy, and the first movie pie fight.

The first movie studio in Edendale—Selig Polyscope—was established in 1910 by “Colonel” William Selig and Francis Boggs. They had come from Chicago in search of a sunny climate—so crucial in those early days when even movie interiors were lit by sunlight—and a diverse terrain, not to mention that Los Angeles was a continent away from Thomas Edison’s Motion Picture Patents Company. Edison’s company owned the patents to much of the technology used in movies, and he could be ruthless in protecting his property. It was rumored that Edison’s enforcers would

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from New Jersey. Sennett was the comic genius behind *The Keystone Cops*. His farces were a huge hit with audiences, and his lot soon grew to cover five acres on both sides of the street.

Sennett's studio was the birthplace of perhaps the most enduring tradition in slapstick: the pie fight. According to movie lore, Sennett's star and girlfriend, Mable Normand, lobbed the first missile, a custard pie from the bakery across the street.

One notable feature of the Keystone Studios was the "cyclorama," a huge cylinder on which a background scene was painted. The cylinder would rotate while actors in front of the background ran in place, creating the illusion that they were moving across the landscape.

Edendale served as a backlot for the wild chases and stunts in the *Keystone Cops* comedies. When prepping for a chase scene, Sennett's crews were known to slather soap on the streets so that the cars would skid and careen wildly as they came around the corner. One assumes that they notified regular motorists of the slippery road hazard.

In addition to the *Keystone Cops*, Sennett was known for his *Sennett Bathing Beauties*, who included Gloria Swanson and Carole Lombard, and comic stars such as Fatty Arbuckle and Charlie Chaplin, who made his screen debut in Keystone's 1914 film, *Making A Living*.

Edendale soon became a victim of its own success. The burgeoning studios quickly outgrew the neighborhood, and the producers soon started branching out to other parts of town.

In 1911, William Selig's partner Francis Boggs was shot and killed by a disgruntled gardener who had been fired from the studio for drunkenness. Selig himself was wounded and recovered, but the shooting seemed to be a harbinger of the end of Edendale as a center of film production. In 1913, Selig acquired 32 acres of land in Lincoln Heights and began shifting operations to the new location.

By the 1920s, more than a dozen film companies had moved elsewhere, mostly to Hollywood, as well as Culver City and the San Fernando Valley. Sennett held out for

several more years and continued making films at his Edendale lot until 1928, when he moved to Studio City.

There is little left of the bustling studios that once lined Allesandro Street, but the original 35,000 square-foot sound stage of the old Mack Sennett studio still exists. It is now a commercial storage facility.

In 1954, an historical plaque commemorating Mack Sennett was installed on Glendale Boulevard. For some reason, however, the marker was placed on the site of the former Selig Studio. Sennett's studio was actually two blocks south. The plaque was removed in 2007.



Keystone Studios in Edendale.

Photo: Security Pacific National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library

Today, Edendale is largely forgotten, but the name lives on with the local post office (officially called Edendale Station), local public library, and Edendale Grill on Rowena Avenue, a restaurant built on the site of a former fire station. Tom Mix is immortalized in Edendale's Mixville bar. Most patrons probably think the name refers to the "mixologists" who fashion the cocktails, but it is actually homage to the greatest Western star of the silent era. ♦

BOOK
REVIEWS

LOREN MILLER: *Civil Rights Attorney and Journalist*, by Amina Hassan. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. 294 pp. Illustrations, notes, references, index. Hardbound, \$26.95.

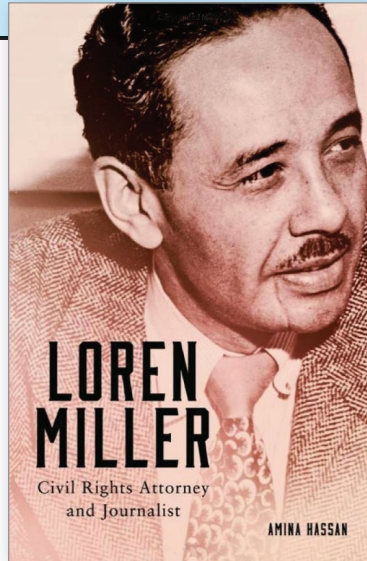
by **Abraham Hoffman**

THE HISTORICAL RECORD can be very selective in public memory. Martin Luther King Jr. and Thurgood Marshall are well regarded as champions of civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s. Less well known is the career of fellow African American Loren Miller, possibly because Miller was more active in California than on the national scene despite his work on the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case. Amina Hassan provides a well-researched biography of this major figure who dedicated his life to fighting social injustice.

Born in rural Nebraska to a white mother and black father in 1903, Loren Miller grew up in an environment of terrible poverty and prejudice. Hassan describes just how deep that poverty was in stark terms: Loren's father suggested during a cold winter that their house be banked with manure to protect the shack from cold winds and frost, a suggestion his mother successfully opposed. The family, however, recognized Loren's intellectual ability and supported his educational efforts.

Miller combined the careers of journalist and attorney, writing numerous articles for newspapers and magazines and taking cases involving divorces and probates. Faced with ongoing instances of discrimination and racist laws, he became politically radical. Although he was never a member of the Communist party, he wrote many articles for Communist publications and accepted Marxist economic theories. In the early 1930s, he went with long-time friend and poet Langston Hughes and other African Americans on a trip to the Soviet Union to make a Soviet-sponsored film about blacks in America, a venture that turned out to be a bureaucratic nightmare.

In Los Angeles, Miller wrote for the *California Eagle*, an African American community newspaper, and his cousin Leon Washington founded the *Los Angeles Sentinel*. These newspapers and the *Los Angeles Tribune* provided Miller with forums through which he crusaded against segregation



in public accommodations, housing, and schools. He opposed the removal of Japanese Americans from their homes to concentration camps during World War II. After the war, Miller joined Thurgood Marshall in the important *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) case in which the U.S. Supreme Court declared restrictive racial covenants unenforceable. This case, though significant, did not mark the end of covenants that became a long-standing battle over the rights of African Americans to buy homes in neighborhoods where

they wished to live. This was evidenced in the case of *Barrows v. Jackson* (1957) in which Miller defended the right of a white homeowner to sell his property to an African American.

Miller was also on the team that took *Brown v. Board of Education* to the Supreme Court. This case actually included several cases involving segregated schools. Although the Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional in its 1954 decision, the decision had enough loopholes to continue the battle for equal rights for many years. Miller also contributed to fighting injustice in Los Angeles in lawsuits to desegregate the Los Angeles Fire Department and in his purchase of the *California Eagle* as an outlet for his advocacy.

Miller never quite escaped his connection to Communists early in his career, but he nevertheless became a highly respected attorney and journalist. In 1964, Governor Edmund G. Brown appointed Miller to the Los Angeles Municipal Court. Miller died in 1967 at age 64. Had he lived longer it is likely he would have been a possible candidate for the State Court of Appeal or the State Supreme Court. In any event, he left a legacy of remarkable accomplishments in his campaign for civil rights and social justice, as is well recorded in this important biography. ♦

ABRAHAM HOFFMAN teaches history at Los Angeles Valley College.

100 Years Ago

Los Angeles Company Helped WWI Soldiers Keep Close to Loved Ones

by Geraldine Knatz

IN WWI, SOLDIERS WERE FORBIDDEN to carry personal information with them into battle, particularly photos or letters that might have addresses on them. Fortunately, an enterprising Los Angeles business figured out a way



to satisfy a soldier's longing to be near to his loved ones and not get in trouble with the military—using specially designed buttons made by the Liberty Manufacturing Company of Los Angeles. Surprise! These seemingly standard uniform buttons were actually lockets that opened to reveal a place for photos. Known as “liberty buttons,” these buttons were indistinguishable from the standard issue military uniform buttons, allowing a soldier to pass inspection while holding a picture of his sweetheart close to his heart. A May 16, 1918 advertisement in the *Los Angeles Times* during WWI urged everyone to “send your Sammy . . . a Button with your picture in it.”

This past year has been one of remembrance of the sacrifice made by the soldiers during the Great War a hundred years ago. How many of them wore liberty buttons is not known. Nor how many made it home. Now, just over 100 years old, the buttons today are quite rare, and very expensive if you can find them. Many old uniforms could have been discarded without anyone being aware the buttons were liberty buttons. Many too could still be buried on the battlefields of France. Los Angeles's Liberty Manufacturing Company continued to make locket buttons for WWII. ♦

Send Your Sammy
A Liberty Locket Button
with your picture in

An exact duplicate of the regulation soldier's button, to be used by officers and privates alike.

This button when sewed upon the uniform, has every appearance of a regulation soldier's button, and in fact it is just that, except that the LIBERTY BUTTON is made in locket form and on the inside there is ample space for two photographs. Every mother, wife, sister and sweetheart should send her beloved soldier one of these priceless tokens of love.

For sale at Department Stores, Photo Supply Houses, Jewelers, Military Supply Stores and Druggists.

If your dealer cannot supply you, we will mail button postpaid upon receipt of 75c in postage stamps, or otherwise.

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Enjoy summer,
and we look forward to seeing you at the LACHS annual board and membership meeting on September 14! (Location to be announced)



Volume 39, Issue 2, Summer 2019
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Founded 1976

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